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Everything That Glitters

by

Zichen Liang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Art in Film Production

School of Film and Animation

College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology Rochester

Rochester, NY

May 14, 2021

Committee Approval:

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Date

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Abstract

This paper discusses the preparation and creative process of my thesis feature screenplay *Everything That Glitters*, including the inspiration, proposal, re-proposal, shooting, and revising of the script. It also documents the background story from aspects of Chinese culture and tradition. The script revolves around a young Chinese woman's journey to America. Unable to accept the marriage her parents have arranged for her, she comes to the United States as an international student to live her life on her own terms. It doesn't work out well. This story is largely based on my own life experiences, except the part about the arranged marriage. It aims to depict the drastic differences between Chinese and American culture, and how much influence culture and tradition have on people's life choices.

ORIGINS

The creative process of my thesis script *Everything That Glitters* has been a journey of mental struggling and self-doubt. Different from most other film scripts I wrote, it is a story that set in the world that I have lived in, and resembles many of my personal life experiences. Therefore, it requires a high level of authenticity. However, it is still a fictional story which includes exaggerative depiction of the characters. I thought my thesis script would be easy for me to write because how close the story is to my real life. But it only turned out way more difficult than I had imagined. There were moments where I just hoped that I could write a different story. Nevertheless, I pulled through when I thought about the reason why I wanted to write the story in the first place, and why I thought it was necessary to bring this story to life.

Belonging to a small town in central China, Sichuan province, I grew up in an environment which celebrates the Confucian ethos: Male honorable, female inferior (Nan Zun Nv Bei). Although women seemingly to have the same legal rights as men do, the unspoken social rules which have existed for thousands of years have created an oppressive and taxing environment for women of China. I was, in fact, the second child that my parents had had. Unfortunately, the first child, which was a boy, was aborted. The abortion was not carried out by my parents' own will. My mother's mother forced it to happen because my parents were not officially married by then, and my mother's mother considered it a huge shame. Therefore, she forced her own daughter to have an abortion. Soon my parents were married and they had me, and gave me the name that was supposed to belong to the first child. My own birth was a result of the feudal belief of "male honorable, female inferior." Life of a Chinese woman is a constant struggle of being shamed. Pregnancy outside of marriage is a shame; dating under 18 is a shame;

unmarried by the age of 25 is a shame. This absurd social pressure leaves Chinese women only 7 years to get to know men, start dating, having a relationship and marrying herself out. Once you have passed age of 25, you would be called “leftover woman” by people.

On the other hand, men are usually raised by believing that they are inherently superior to women. When I was a child in primary school, girls usually have better scores than boys. However, the adults, including parents and teachers, would constantly say that boys will have outshine girls academically once they get into high school. The well-behaved girls didn't get the compliments they deserved; the poorly-behaved boys were being praised for their possible good grades in the future. This is how the society treats women and men. Unfortunately, even the older female generation are part of the patriarchal system. I had a female professor in college, who was a well-respected senior professor. One of her favorite things was bragging about her son and talking about how proud she was of herself for giving birth to a boy.

This is why I spent a lot of energy writing “rude Chinese men” in my script. These types of men are overconfident about their charm in a ridiculous way, which drives me to turn them into comical antagonist characters in my story. They play a critical role in the reason why my protagonist (the young and romantic Chinese woman) wants to escape to America to avoid getting married. Another reason, also the most stressful one, is the pressure from the parents.

There is a popular topic on China's internet, which talks about how young people are scared to go back home during Chinese New Year in fear of pressure from parents and other older relatives. In China, family always includes relatives, some of whom you probably only talked once or twice in your life time. But you have to behave obedient in front of them if they are older than you. Therefore, to the young people in China, the new year visit often equals

interrogation and humiliation from people you don't know well. Usually, these people only care about one thing: Are you married? If the answer is no, they would give you a long lecture on how old and unwanted you are by the opposite sex, and you should hurry up and get married before you are too old to the point where nobody wants you anymore. These people are very good at driving people mad.

Above is the basic background of my story. Luckily, I am able to avoid experiencing most of the torture as a young woman. Because, actually, I am lucky enough to have parents who are not bound by the societal traditional beliefs. They hardly tell me to get married or have kids. I assume the fact that they have divorced plays a role in them not caring so much about what other people say anymore. Because in their generation, divorce is still seen as a shame. I can't imagine the pressure my parents had when they decided to divorce. My mother kept it a secret for a long time, even to her mother. Therefore, they probably gained a new perspective on marriage and personal happiness. Even my father told me to never get married unless I meet my true love. I don't have to meet the relatives as well because my parents let me do whatever I want. That's why I actually have never experienced the annoying reality that faces most of the young women in China first-hand. I kind of knew about it, but I didn't really empathize with the women who were experiencing it.

When I came to RIT, I didn't think of making films about modern women's struggle against arranged marriage, of course. Because by then, it was not my problem at all. That's why my first couple of films had nothing to do with the theme of Chinese marriage or whatsoever. My first film, which was an unsuccessful experience, touched the topic of overly confident men though. It was because although I could escape the pressure from family, I couldn't escape the male creatures in China. The second year in RIT, I made a film about a kid looking for his

mother. It was inspired by my own volunteering experience, and turned out pretty well. I slowly get to know what kind of story that I want to tell and are able to tell. I have always loved kids, and this was part of my actual experience. Turning my genuine loving feelings into my story seems like the only way that can make it work. When I was preparing for my thesis, however, I decided to write a story about authentic China. Because I realized that I couldn't write a story about people that I didn't know well or places that I actually didn't care much about. Around that time, I learned from many girl friends around me about how they parents were pressuring them into marriage. I was shocked. Because some girls are from well-off families with well-educated parents. I couldn't believe that their parents would behave in such a foolish way. The Chinese girls here in U.S. are living their life like rich American girls, despite the fact that their parents are actually asking their friends to introduce men to marry their daughters. The bizarre contrast of the double-life intrigued me. At that time, I watched the film *Crazy Rich Asians*, which left me feel inspired and also unsatisfied. I felt like this movie didn't cover enough crazy and rich side of Asians. So, I made the decision to base my thesis script on my friends' experiences, hoping to tell the story that has hardly been told on screen before.

THE PROPOSAL

When I first started thinking about my thesis idea in 2018, I immediately knew that I wanted to make a Chinese story, and Chinese female story. Because for the past two years in RIT, I had been making “American stories” only. I realized how hard it is to make stories that set in a foreign background, no matter how “simple” that story is. I had to write those foreign stories because I had to film it with local actors and settings, which limited my ability to tell a story that could allow me to fully express myself. Therefore, I couldn’t wait to write a story that set in China when I first started preparing for my thesis. I hoped to tell a story that set in a world in which my thoughts could run freely. I could show my world to the audience without worrying if this conversation or behavior makes sense or not in American culture.

The first thesis idea I proposed to the thesis preparation committee is a story set in 30s of China. It is a story inspired by the famous Chinese writer Eileen Chang. As one of the most controversial and rebellious women in the history of China, Eileen Chang is still a hot topic in today’s China. Her works are being adapted into films nonstop. I read her biography and became fascinated with her childhood, especially her relationship with her mother. They were both rebellious, daring and brilliant women who lived in the repressed old China. I thought their story could break the stereotype of submissive and meek Chinese female images. However, after I successfully made the proposal, I found myself struggling putting the story into words, due to my lack of knowledge of the historical background. I tried to image walking into the same door and speaking the same words as Eileen Chang did but I failed. She was living in Shanghai and HongKong, both of which are places where the spoken dialects are drastically different from the dialect that I speak. The huge difference in the time and place that we live in made me feel like

that I had so much research to do before I could write down the first word. I became less and less confident in writing the story.

In the summer of 2018, while I was struggling to write the script, I went to the theater and saw the film *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), which was an all-Asian Hollywood production. It follows a Chinese-American professor who travels to meet her boyfriend's family and is surprised to discover they are among the richest in Singapore. I had never seen a film produced by a major Hollywood studio featuring a majority cast of Asian descent in a modern setting. While I was excited about the Asian story in America, I was left unsatisfied by the film because the story was still a little bit cliché except talking about how rich the Asian characters are. The main character was literally a white person in a Chinese female body. The story didn't tell the real modern Asians or break any stereotypes. Therefore, I felt very urgent to write down the modern Chinese that I know very well and the west know very little. From there I started to plan the new idea for my thesis, which is the final thesis script *Everything That Glitters*.

THE SECOND PROPOSAL

From late August, 2018, I started to focus on my new idea instead of the original Eileen Chang inspired story. Unlike the struggle I had when I was writing the first proposal, ideas and images just flowed to me like water. There were simply too many stories about modern young Chinese women that I could tell. Due to the influence from *Crazy Rich Asians*. I decided to write a story about young Chinese women that sets in United States. Inevitably this story will resemble my own life journey since my main characters are Chinese students in the U.S. Although I was not raised in a super wealthy family, my mother always had high hopes for me so she made every effort to send me to the private boarding schools since I was ten years old. Therefore, I had the chance to be surrounded by the well-off kids of my age as I grew up. These people are not rich as people in *Crazy Rich Asians*, but they are exactly the kind of Chinese people who storm all the luxury stores in Europe and shop like they are in a supermarket. They are the strongest consumers of the expanding China's economic growth. Therefore, I am fortunate enough to have a deep understanding of the life of the second-generation of the most hard-working and maybe the luckiest generation of Chinese people.

The first boarding I attended was full of student with poor grades and poor-educated parents. Their parents made a fortune through the China's economic reform policy, and they hoped that their kids could further glorify their family by entering reputable colleges. Unfortunately, back in the days when I was a child, most children in boarding schools had poor grades. The reasons are complicated. Mostly because the boarding schools advertise themselves as unorthodox and international institutions, and made the classrooms more entertaining and less stressful, which was a big problem back then. The education competition in China is beyond

people's wildest imagination. First of all, we are all expected to go to college, no exception. People who can't make it to college would be deemed as the lowest of the lowlife. Colleges are categorized as first-levelled colleges; second-levelled colleges, and the third-levelled colleges. Usually, only 5 to 10 percent of students can make it to the first-levelled colleges. In China, we compare the college entrance exam to a stampede of "thousands of soldiers and tens of thousands of horses across a single log bridge." Therefore, it is common to give up all the entertainment or extracurricular activities at the first year in middle school and devote all of the time to studying. That is one of the reasons why students in my school tend to behave poorly at studying, because our curriculum was more relaxing than public schools. However, schools are very smart and soon come up with new ideas for those students, they offer international programs. Therefore, lots of children from nice families with poor grades will start preparing to study abroad when they enter high school, and successfully avoid the fierce competition of college entrance exam. Which is why in my script, there are many characters who act like spoiled rats instead of the stereotypical hard-working Asian students. They did not participate the most vigorous competition in China. Usually, the younger the children are when they parents send them abroad, the richer the family is, for they have to be able to afford a huge expense. My main character Haomeng does not go to study overseas until she is an adult, which is the reason why she is new to this oversea Chinese students' circle. It also explains that her family is not always affluent, and they didn't send her overseas when she was younger. This is also a reason why they are not secure with their affluence and wanted their daughter to surround herself with people from "higher social status".

After I thought out the main character and the plot, I scheduled a second thesis proposal. This time I feel much more confident and comfortable with my story. With the help from my

thesis proposal committee, my new thesis idea successfully passed. I finally can embark on my journey of completing my thesis.

THE SCRIPT

It took a long time for me to finish the final draft of my script. It is very difficult to finish a feature script due to the length and information in it. It is inevitable for me to draw inspiration from people around since my story is about the life I am living. I based the main character Haomeng partially on my own background. She comes from Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province; she just graduates from college and she has pretty dominating parents. However, unlike her, I have never had any blind dates. So, in the beginning, I didn't plan to have Haomeng sit down with a dozen of annoying men and have unpleasant conversations. My advisor Frank suggested blind dates, which is a very Chinese thing. That is when I realized even though I thought I knew the world that I was writing, I might get lost in it because of how much I focused on my perspective. A fresh perspective from Frank helped me look outside of the box of my own little world. I started doing research on how twenty something young girls in China would do with their life. It turned out that most of them are forced to have blind dates and pressured to get married before 30. I thought this kind of tradition has died out, but it turned out that I was wrong. Most girls I talked to had been asked to have blind dates if they were still single by the age of 25. Some of their parents expressed how desperate they were if she was still single in their early 20s. I was shocked by how the old-fashioned and poisonous beliefs are still impacting people today. Although the young generation have grown up in a modern society, received westernized education and have all the information at their hand, they still have to live with the old rules in the society. So, I thought it was a perfect example that could convey my main idea of my story: the modern young people versus the old social traditions. I immediately wrote a series of quick blind dates scenes to show the protagonist's struggle as a young woman who yearns for true love instead of arranged marriage; who longs for respect and recognition

from her future husband instead of money and house. This also works as a strong motive for the protagonist to escape China to the United States and start a new chapter of her life.

I initially did not write too much about the process of how the protagonist comes to the United States, but with the suggestion from Frank, I realized that process was also a very unique and fun part of the journey. Like everything else in China, education is already commercialized and monetized to the fullest. The studying-abroad agencies are everywhere and they can work wonders when it comes to helping local students to study abroad. I know how it works pretty well not only because I am studying abroad right now, I also have many friends who have worked with multiple studying-abroad agencies, and my family once worked with a small agency in the past as well. Some big agencies will help you from the scratch: teach students English and help them pass the language exams, work out the application documents, coach the students about the interviews, help students build their professional and academical background so they can look good on their resume, etc. A large number of those agencies would go so far as to fake the test results or lie on the resume, because the foreign schools wouldn't find out anyway. I didn't want my protagonist to look too irresponsible or unreliable, so I only wrote two segments that were common among Chinese study abroad agencies without making my protagonist look too dumb or clueless. The first segment was she writing her own recommendation letters and asking her professors to sign on it; the second one was she being coached by the people from the agency for the college interview. The first scene was really common and almost the fact about Chinese students' recommendation letters, at least it was true when I was still in China. The second scene was something that I heard from my friend, which amazed me. The student would be like a puppet sitting in front of the computer while the agency staff listened and secretly

wrote down the answers for them. Usually these agencies cost a lot, but they have many methods to make sure the students get in one of foreign schools.

The Chinese-American young man Chris is the protagonist Haomeng's romantic encounter in America. He is also the only real American main character in the script, who is also experiencing cultural hock by mingling with Haomeng and her friends. He represents the freedom that Haomeng has been looking for: Freedom to choose whom to marry, whom to befriend and what to do with her life. Chris also brings new values to Haomeng by being a respectful, down-to-earth and hardworking young man who doesn't value money or status as life's purpose. Haomeng, born and raised in Western China, has been surrounded by the culture of Mianzi, which refers to the ideas of honor, dignity, self-worth and prestige that people feel in the society. One of the things that Chinese people fear the most is to "lose" face. A Chinese idiom goes: "Men can't live without face, trees can't live without bark." Therefore, it is natural for them to be anxious about their conspicuous assets, which are wealth, social status and even personal appearance. However, Chris does not care about Mianzi at all since he was raised in the United States. Instead, he more values hard-work, honesty and an appreciation of self-worth. All these qualities pose a drastic contrast to the people Haomeng has met before, which is the reason why she is attracted to him.

Apart from the main characters, the supporting characters play a huge part in the script too. I had great fun writing the supporting characters, for I have limitless inspirations of interesting Chinese characters. Since it's a romantic comedy, I immediately thought about a few female supporting characters, Jiajia, Momo, Shuya and Cassie. Some of them are inspired by real people I know, and some are just a reflection of a type of Chinese girls in America. For instance,

the live-streaming girl Shuya is a typical type of Chinese girls these days. When she is talking to people who are watching her live-streaming, she is also making money. Some companies would sign off young women to do live-streaming, and the viewers are free to give “gifts” to the live-streamers when they are watching it. Those “gifts” are actually real money pretended as emojis, such as rockets, which are 500\$ per one. Therefore, some girls can make a lot of money by streaming for one night. It is not hard to imagine that many people are doing live-streaming these days for the easy money, so some people have to do it for a really long time for more viewers and more money. Shuya is a typical example of the modern young Chinese women who are consumed by the consumerism. They live for the social media and worship luxuries. They are willing to work extra-hard and live in a poor condition when people are not watching, and spend all the hard-earned money on bags, clothes and oversea trips. These types of girls obviously didn’t come to the U.S. to study hard. They usually worked very close with the study-abroad agencies and finally get to study in an American college. Then they will seize every chance to party, travel and meet really rich kids during their stay. It is hard to say if this is right or wrong, because some people are embracing this lifestyle and making a living out of it. Then there are also people like Momo and Cassie, who are from really well-off families, and don’t care about working part-time to make allowances. They came to the U.S. at an early age, and have been living a life like princesses. Cassie, the most important supporting character, is a real socialite and also probably the most mature person in the script. Unlike Haomeng, who has spent almost all her life in a middle-sized town in central China with her family, Cassie is from a powerful family in Beijing. She comes to the U.S. when she was a teenager, which makes her very independent and strong. She wants to have her own business but also longs to be with her boyfriend, the ultimate rich guy in my story, Nick. Nick comes from the economic capital of

China, Shanghai. His family is wealthy and arrogant. Many Shanghainese I know think Shanghai is the economic capital of the world. They would complain like they are in a third-world village when they are in New York City. In my original plan, Nick's family also has a bit political background, because in China, the political power also trumps the rich. The second-generation of the politics are way more powerful than the second-generation of the rich. Therefore, I imagined that Nick's family has to have some political background for them to be so extravagant and arrogant. Normal super rich person would rather remain low-key to not draw attention from the Chinese Communist Party. However, I did not add that part in the script concerning that I do not know what consequences might be by bringing Chinese politics into the script. Therefore, I just made Nick super rich without mentioning his family background.

The roommate Rui of Haomeng is inspired by my own roommates. Rui is also an example of a type of Chinese students in America: socially awkward and game-addicted. I noticed that many Chinese students who came to America at a young age, and against their will, eventually became like this. They surround themselves in loneliness and just wait for the day to go back home. There are a lot of people like that, especially those who major in computer-related fields. So, I think Rui could represent this type of people in the script. After all, not all Chinese kids are outgoing and partying all the time.

As the story evolves, Haomeng's parents. Sumei and Kai, also come the U.S. They play a big part as to the obstacles and incentives to the protagonist, specially Sumei. The older generation of China seems to be always very anxious and sensitive to competition. Part of the reason is because they have been through a lot of difficult times, and they have seized the chance of the economic reform and become successful by surviving the cruel competition. Therefore, they are always aware of the crisis around them and always feel anxious. Contentment does not

exist in Chinese parents' world. They keep pushing their kids since they were born. These types of parents are called "tiger parents" in China. As China progresses, tiger parents have only been growing more and more. Due to the filial piety that has existed in China's culture for thousand years, it is very rare for the children to fight against their parents. Usually, they will have inherent guilt when they do not play by their parents' rules. Therefore, Sumei is basically the antagonist of the story. It takes tremendous courage and mental strength to stand up against their wishes, which is what Haomeng manages to do at the end of the story.

The Production

After I finished the first draft of the script, I needed to shoot a sample film that would demonstrate my story and idea. I picked three scenes to shoot. The first one is the blind dates montage; the second one is the protagonist arguing with her mom and showing her dissatisfaction of the arranged marriage; the third one is when she first arriving the U.S, and meeting the main characters, including her romantic interest, Chris. These three scenes composite a fluent story sequence which people can understand easily. The first scene can show the traditional Chinese side, which happens in Chengdu, China, with characters that speak for the old-fashioned and patriarchal China. For example, Kai, the father of the protagonist, is a typical Chinese father who acts like the boss but never is really around. He does not care to sit down with his daughter and talk about her worries and wishes, instead, he only shows up when he has to and only talks in a commanding way. Therefore, he does not appear in the scenes that happen in China. Sumei, a typical Chinese mother who always worries. She is with Haomeng in the first two scenes, even when she is having blind dates. Sumei hopes to make sure that she oversees every detail of Haomeng's life, because she thinks this is all for Haomeng's wellbeing, which is why she is so anxious all the time, and even flies to the U.S. at the end of the story. The dates Haomeng has during the montage are a short display of the arrogant and disappointing example of the modern Chinese men. This scene can be very fun and fresh to start the short film.

The last scene is when Haomeng first arrives in America and meets many Chinese young people in a club. This scene plays as a direct contrast to the traditional scenes before. Here, in a club, Chinese young people are stylish and open-minded. They are having fun like

free-spirited American young people. They left their parents and the traditions back in China. This is where most of the stories will unfold. The club is also a fun place to introduce the main characters.

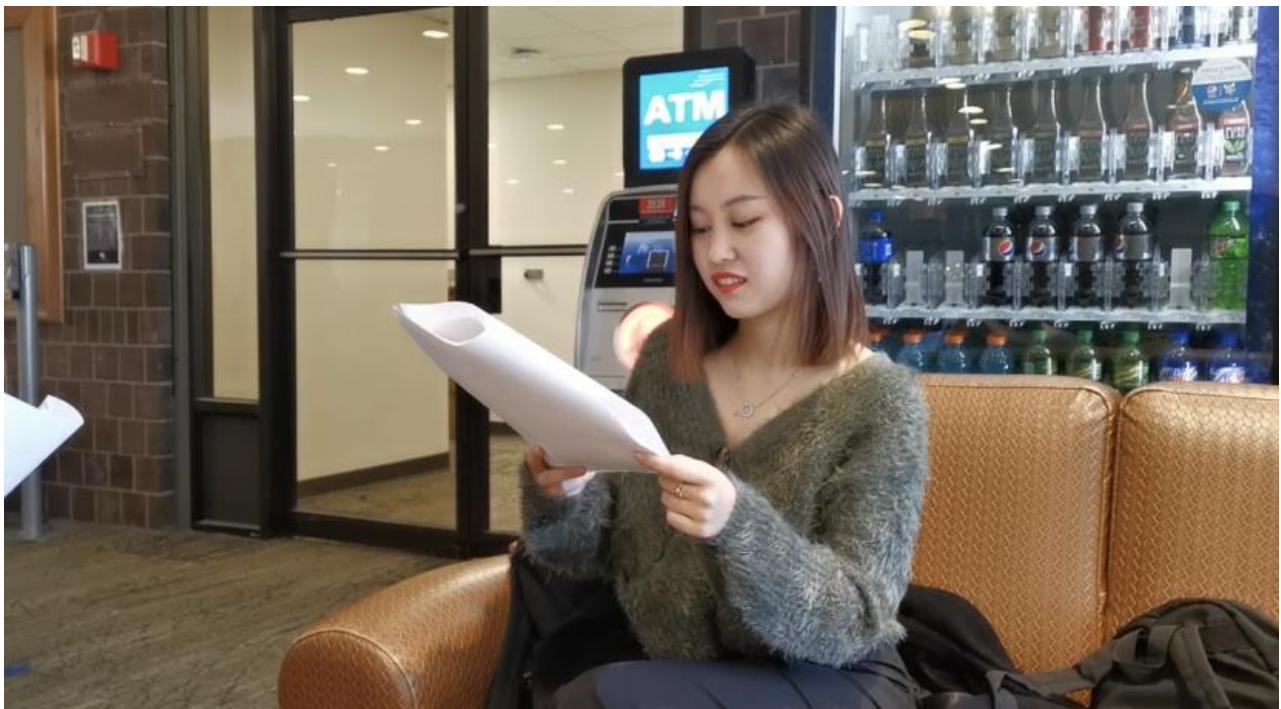


Audition for the protagonist Haomeng

After I finished the shooting script, I started auditioning and location scouting. Since we were in Rochester, there were not many Asian actors available. Although I tried to look up on audition websites such as Backstage, I eventually decided on auditioning Chinese students in Rochester. My producer, Bichen Yang, helped me send out casting calls in Chinese students chat rooms, which have almost 500 people, and many people asked for an audition. I enjoyed the auditions a lot. None of the students who came to the audition had any acting experience in the past, but they are the characters themselves, since the story is literally about them. They also gave me a lot of character and story advice. The leading actress, Xinmingye Zhao (very unique name), was a freshman in RIT, majoring in game design. She is tall, slender, pretty, wears hoodie

and long knit dress and does not have any makeup on. She gives off such a fresh air to the audition room and I decide to cast her as the protagonist out of five girls. Her chubby friend who comes with her has a funny look and character, so I cast him as the first blind date. Zhao's boyfriend was also cast as a guest in bar because he looks pretty nice and can blend in the environment perfectly.

I also auditioned students from University of Rochester. The character Momo's actress,



Audition at University of Rochester

Yuchen Du, was a senior in U of R. She was sort of a chairman of the local Chinese students union, therefore, she already had a confident queen aura when I first met her in the library of University of Rochester. She also already wore all the fancy outfits that my Momo should wear.

The other girls were cast in a pretty similar way. They are all Chinese students in Rochester.



All the main female cast members

The casts of the blind dates are more diverse. As I mentioned above, the first blind date, Frank Luo, is a game design student in RIT. He was only 18 years old, but his image fit the character so well that it was almost my favorite blind date of them all.



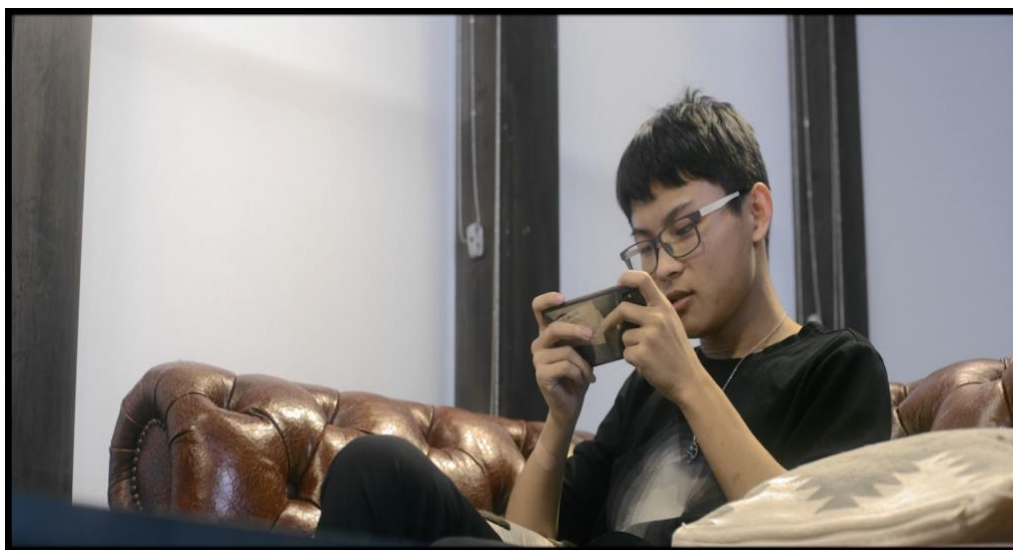
First blind date scene with Frank Luo

The next blind date actor, who goes by Silver, was not a student. He was actually a visiting professor in RIT. He saw my casting call and thought it looked fun. He gave me a lot of advice on the dialogues.



Bo Gao as a blind date

The next blind date actor is our beloved fellow film student Bo Gao. He was also a crew member. He seemed to be happy with his acting.



Full Liu as a blind date

Interestingly, the last blind date actor, Fuli Liu, is not a student in Rochester. As a matter of fact, he is my producer Bichen's cousin, who came to Rochester to visit her from Dallas.

It took me a lot of effort to figure out the actor for Chris, Haomeng's romantic interest. Because unlike other male characters that have appeared so far, I had a lot of requirement for Chris. First of all, he needs to be dreamy so Haomeng can fall in love with him. On top of that, he has to be a Chinese guy who is fluent in English without any accent. Finding a really good-looking Chinese guy in Rochester is not easy. Many who came to the audition thought they were handsome, but not to me. This character has to look attractive to most of the female audience.

Finally, I contacted my friend Xinhang Qi, who was a computer science student in RIT, and cast him as Chris. Qi is also from Chengdu, Sichuan like the main character. He speaks very good English and most importantly, he was somewhat attractive among all the other men I had seen so far.



Xinhang Qi as the interest of the protagonist

As for the two mom characters, I directly contacted two female actors I had interacted before. Since I had produced

many times for others, I knew a few middle-aged Chinese people who are interested in acting in Rochester area.

I had two locations for the shooting. The most important one was the club. I did not want to rent an entire club for a simple shooting, so I was looking for a smaller space that looks like a club. In the end, me and Bichen decided on Revolution Karaoke Cuisine, a Chinese restaurant/bar/karaoke. We contacted the owner but had a long period of negotiation with her. Finally, she agreed to let us use the restaurant for 5 hours on Saturday. So, I had to focus on the five hours and get everything I needed as quickly as possible. Luckily, we finished on time. The space of the restaurant was tiny but we made full use of it. Then we quickly moved on to the next location, the lounge of the Lodge Apartments. Here we were allowed to shoot for as long as we wanted so we took time and finished the first two scenes.

Although the casts had no acting experience whatsoever, we had great fun rehearsing and shooting. Almost 30 people came to the set when we were filming. They were all very cooperative and nice. My producer Bichen helped me a lot with the extras. My crew, which is my classmates were super helpful like always. It was my last set in RIT and I will never forget it.

Since I shot the film in late April, I didn't have much time for postproduction. I stayed up for a couple of nights and finished editing. I purchased music license online for the film. I went to my colorist Yuan's apartment and watch him finish color correcting my film. I did not get hold of a sound designer, unfortunately, so I didn't do much post sound work except I adjusted the sound level myself so it wouldn't hurt anyone's ears when screening. After all that work, the short piece was ready for the final screening.

THE SCREENING

In May, 2019, my proof-of-concept film screened at the new Wegmans theater in the new MAGIC Spell Studios building at RIT. The film screened successfully without any technical problems. I went up to the stage and read my artist's statement as an MFA student. A couple of people in the audience asked questions related to the story of the entire screenplay. (That is because the film was only for demonstration purpose and only showed three scenes from the script.) So, I explained the plot to them. Some in the audience were curious if I had plans to film the entire screenplay, to which I replied that I couldn't do that because I didn't have the funding for it. The film depicts the lives of a lot of wealthy people, so it is easy to imagine that it would cost a lot for the settings and props. Hopefully, my script will be funded one day in the future.

On the screening day, many of the actors involved in the film came to the Wegmans Theater. It was a great relief to see that people were generally happy with the film and screenplay story. Although it did not spark a big conversation at the screening, due to the limited content showed in the film, the actors involved in the film expressed their support and satisfaction at the screening. I was proud of how well it came out considering the limited amount of time and resources I had for production.

THE POST-SCREENING

Since the script is very long, I felt that I could not submit it as it was by the time when it was screening. So, with the help of Professor Frank, I revised it a couple of more times through the following months, during which time I reconsidered the cultural background and messages that the script is sending.

One of the biggest changes is the character Cassie, who is the best friend of Haomeng. She and her boyfriend Nick have their own story line. I realized that Cassie, different from Haomeng, is a matured woman who symbolizes a different type of feminist in China. Haomeng matures as she learns to choose the man that she really wants instead of taking what her parents gave to her; on the other hand, Cassie's character matures because she realizes that she wants be herself more than be with someone else. I love this character more and more because of how strong and wise she is.

I also added more details about the girls' cool attitudes toward the patriarchal and toxic environment in China. They are not like the old generation who likes to look humble and low-key all the time. These girls are rich and confident. They unapologetically show off their lives on social media and shrug off of the toxic comments from the Chinese males.

After working on this script for a long time, I finally feel comfortable to turn it in as my thesis. The journey of making my thesis allowed me to apply all the filmmaking and screenwriting knowledge I have learnt in RIT. The script also accompanied me through the past chaotic year, which made it even more special to me. I feel nostalgia when I look back on the

making of the sample film, because things are completely different now. The real world has changed, but the world in my story still functions as normal. I wish all the characters in my script are enjoying their life in a covid-free world.

APPENDIX

Re-proposal, September 2018

Logline

A bunch of rich Chinese students sent to the U.S. by their parents in the hope of having a better education and socializing with other rich people. Haomeng Zhen is one of them but she struggles to identify herself as one of the rich kids and wants to break away from the control of her family and be independent.

Rationale

Of more than one million international students who enrolled at universities in the United States, about 35 percent are Chinese. According to the Ministry of Education of China, 608,400 Chinese students left the country to pursue advanced studies overseas in 2017. The massive number of young people living freely in America remains not only a mystery to Americans, but also to the rest of the Chinese people who stay at home.

Second generation rich is usually how these kids are called in China. Why rich? Because as we all know, American universities can be costly that most native American students need to take a loan to finish their degree and spend the next ten years to pay back the government. However, most Chinese kids who come to America cannot only easily afford their tuition, but also travel twice or more each year from China to America. They might not be wealthy, but there is no way that they are poor.

Why are they the “second generation”? Because during the Cultural Revolution which took place from 1966 to 1976, all the old money were either killed or driven away from mainland China so the government could split their money with the honorable workers and peasants,

which never happened. With the brutal Cultural Revolution ending in 1977, Deng Xiaoping took office in the following year. He made a famous dictum – “let some people get rich first.” By the grace of this powerful and groundbreaking slogan, some Chinese young people seized the chance of the Chinese economic reform and got richer and richer year by year. Fast forward to 2010s, the “some people” become the backbone of the country and their kids have all grown up as well, who naturally become the second generation of the rich.

Why are there so many wealthy Chinese kids studying abroad? Well, due to the Cultural Revolution and other brutal movements before it, almost none of the first-generation wealthy Chinese had the chance of having a decent education. They were cut off from the rest of the world and had to survive in one of the most horrible massacres and poverty in the history, while all the other young people around the world revealed in the hippie movement. Naturally, when they have made enough money, the first thing they want is to be treated like a rich person. Nowadays, the world is full of awful news about ill-mannered Chinese people shopping here and there. People hate the wealthy Chinese, who seem like they do not deserve their wealth.

Moreover, the wealthy Chinese is aware of it. They know it and hate the fact that they lack the common sense the rest of the world seems to share. Therefore, they will do everything within their power to make sure that their kids get the best education they can — and they usually only have one baby kid due to the one-child policy in the 80s and 90s — so that their kids can have the respect from others. That is why American universities are flooded with rich Chinese kids.

I feel compelled to write a story based on this background because this is the world that I know the best. I spent my entire puberty in private boarding schools and hardly left to the real world. I was surrounded by the well-off kids who were spoiled by their less-educated parents.

Little did I know that the people who could afford to send the kids to boarding school would only become richer and richer, leaving the gap between the rich and the poor bigger and bigger. Later on, I studied in other countries and had the first-hand experiences of what the Chinese students were like in different countries. There are students who take the chance of studying abroad with an unlimited credit card and no-supervisor as going to Disneyland for free and partying every day, and students who just left home because their parents said so and waiting to graduate. At the same time, some kids desperately want the same thing that their parent wants for them — to be a respected person. I want to unveil the somehow infamous second-generation rich Chinese children's lives and show what they have carried with them and where they are heading to.

Treatment

Haomeng Zhen, 7, lives with her parents and grandparents in the southwest China, which is one of the poorest areas in China. But Haomeng is not one of the poor kids. She is spoiled to the maximum as the only daughter in the family of five. Her parents have prepared very fancy clothes for her school performance while other kids all wear a simple home-made outfit, which makes Haomeng stand out and she feels embarrassed. When she goes to the school trip, her lunch box is also way too fancy and over prepared with shiny lunch box and chopsticks which makes her different amongst the kids again. Haomeng goes home crying that she does not want to feel so different and wants what other kids have. Her mom says no problem and then sends Haomeng to the most expensive boarding school in the area, where Haomeng becomes one of the poorest kids and she feels happy that way. Time flies, in 2018, Haomeng is 22, and about to become a first-year finance grad student in a university which is located in a small town in the U.S. She is greeted by **Kathy Wang**, 24, who is the daughter of Haomeng's mom's boss. Kathy is a breathtakingly beautiful girl who dresses like a supermodel. Standing with Kathy is another

girl called **Chili Li**, who is also beautiful with delicate makeup and designer dress, but looks more approachable and more like an Instagram celebrity. Both Kathy and Chili have been living in the States for almost ten years. Kathy wants to throw Haomeng a Chinese new student welcome party. They make phone calls to other girls in town and tell them that they will have a party tonight. **Shuya Chu**, who is doing live streaming online, receives the call from Kathy. She hangs up quickly and begs her viewers to help her with the tough semester because the school just raised the tuition. Suddenly, lots of cartoon planes and cruises and shooting over the screen. Shuya smiles happily and throws kisses to the camera. **Jiajia Zhang**, an over-dressed delivery girl who just handed the takeout to a customer, also gets the phone call from Kathy and immediately stops the customer from closing the door and asks for more tips.

Later, Jiajia drives her old Subaru to a renting car store and leaves with a new Mercedes-Benz. A nice nightclub located at the heart of the downtown is rented out by Kathy and surrounded by Asian young people, with everyone dressed up in brand clothes. A curvy young Asian woman with blond hair who looks like a K-pop star is DJ-ing while shouting Annyeonghaseyo to the crowds. Kathy introduces **Fan Sun**, a 23 years old well-built guy who wears high-end hip-pop outfit. Fan is no longer a student. He has started his own business here. Fan shows much interest in Haomeng, who does not seem to fit in but still enjoys her time a lot. Haomeng meets all the girls, and they suggest a bunch of fancy cars and apartments for her since she looks too humble. Haomeng says that she does not care much about that and that she hardly shops anything because she is used to school uniforms and school dorms. Kathy says her father asks her to take care of Haomeng, who comes from a backward, poor area and desperately needs to see the world. The next day, for the first time in her life, Haomeng experiences the dazzling shopping frenzy and has a head-to-toe makeover which transforms her into a chic girl. Her mom, **Sumei Jin**, texts her

through WeChat — the most used and probably the most powerful app in China, if not the world — saying that she is so happy to see that Haomeng has spent \$6,000 just now. Sumei tells her that she has to pay all her attention to the way she dresses and behaves like a nice lady. Haomeng rolls her eyes and stops shopping.

In the new student orientation, Haomeng meets a white American boy **Ewan Paterson**, 23, a quiet guy with messy hair and indifferent attitude. He wears a school's free t-shirt and works to guide the new student. Haomeng, on the other hand, wears like she is going to a music festival thanks to Kathy's advice. She secretly studies Ewan from behind her sunglasses and once again feels ashamed like she was on the school trip when she was seven. Haomeng tries to put on the friendliest smile and volunteers to help the quiet, hard-working Ewan guide other students, but as soon as she gets the students roster, Haomeng realized that she couldn't pronounce any names and stutters. Ewan helps her out quietly. Haomeng has an immediate crush on him and sees him as a shining angel in the loud crowd.

Haomeng goes to Kathy and Chili's apartment to help Kathy, who happens to be a fashion design student, with her school project. Haomeng surprisingly finds out that Shuya Chu, who always puts on a rich royalty air, lives in their basement for lower rents. However, Shuya's basement room is decorated with expensive clothes and limited version handbags which shock Haomeng.

Kathy says they are nothing compared to what Chili has in her room. Chili always spends no less than \$10,000 when she shops in the city. They all call Chili "BaiFu beauty," the network language which means the nice-skinned girls born into the vain family. Haomeng says the American university is way harder than the Chinese ones and she did not expect so much work. Chili says she can hire someone write her paper and it is only 2 dollars a word. Haomeng says

she really enjoys having some real work to do and wants to do even more. The girls pose happily for Kathy's fashion pictures and post them online. The pictures go viral within less than 10 seconds, and 1 minute later, every Chinese in this town is talking about the beautiful girls in the university.

Haomeng deliberately stops Ewan when he is ready to leave school on his bicycle. She thanks him for helping her the other day and asks him to have a coffee. Ewan looks shocked but also says yes. They go to a coffee shop. Ewan, in washed-out jeans and another free school shirt, is quiet and serious as always but also seems to be nervous. Haomeng, on the other hand, is delicately dressed for a date. She explains she only studies finance because her parents want her to, but she does not really know what she wants to do. She asks why Ewan can stay so focused on his work? Ewan says he has to take out a loan to go to school and this is what he has to do for his life. He does not get another chance. He says a lot of Chinese students seem pretty comfortable somehow. Haomeng says she is different from them and she is actually very grounded. Ewan checks his phone for an email from his boss. Haomeng is amazed that he still uses a flip phone. Ewan says smartphones are too expensive. Haomeng looks very confused: Really?

Haomeng excitedly talks about her crush on Ewan to the girls while posing for Chili, who happens to be a jewelry designer and owns a jewelry line herself in China. Shuya says that their photo taken last time went viral and received thousands of comments in China social network. A lot of comments from people in China insult them as cheap whores for white trash with a corrupt party official daddy at home. The girls say it's outrageous because they can also be cheap whores for black people and Latino people. Haomeng ignores the sarcasm and leaves happily for another date with Ewan.

Kathy goes out as well and takes a black Maserati. The driver, **Harris Wu**, who looks like a Calvin Klein model, says he can stay for a little longer this time and won't have to go back to Shanghai in 2 months. Kathy looks very happy and kisses him. Later, in Harris' apartment, Kathy expresses her negative attitude toward Haomeng's relationship because Ewan's too poor. Haomeng doesn't even need her parents to step in to realize how difficult it would be. Harris talks about his parents who agree on Kathy and his marriages on the condition that Kathy goes back to Shanghai with Harris this time. Harris proposes to her. Kathy is over the moon.

As Haomeng drives in her brand-new Mercedes, her father calls her and says he wants to introduce some nice young men to her which pisses off Haomeng. Her father says Haomeng's grandmother is crying all day because Haomeng is still single. Haomeng says you wouldn't allow me to date at all before I was 20, then you push me to get married after I am 20. Does this make sense to you?

Haomeng meets Ewan in a Chinese restaurant with traditional music playing. Ewan is a little surprised by her car. But Haomeng doesn't think it's a big deal. Fan Sun, who happens to be one of the investors of the restaurant, sees Haomeng and chats with her happily in Chinese. Ewan looks at them confused. Fan notices and introduces the Chinese cuisine to Ewan in English.

Haomeng asks to work in the restaurant to make money because she has never worked one day in her life and wants to learn to be independent. Fan happily agrees. Haomeng starts to work with Jijia, who teaches her tons of tricks of living a fancy life in a thrifty way.

Haomeng brings Ewan to the engagement party at Kathy's house. Everyone has a fancy Asian date and Ewan stands out awkwardly. Haomeng doesn't notice this and easily engage in Chinese conversations with them. Ewan feels awkward and finds an excuse and leaves. Later,

when Haomeng is on her way home, **Manjun Hu**, a doctoral student lives next door, rushes out and yells at her in tears because she fails her doctoral defense again, and it's all their fault who make Chinese students' reputation so bad and everyone thinks little of her. But she is studying in scholarship and needs her degree. Haomeng is scared by the ranting and leaves immediately.

Ewan doesn't seem as enthusiastic as before when he sees Haomeng, and looks worried. Haomeng lacks experience in relationships and doesn't know what to do. She sadly sits home and Fan delivers her takeout himself and comforts her. Haomeng decides to focus on her study and show Ewan that she is a useful, down-to-earth person. She spends a lot of effort in her social research while the other girls talking about investing in real estate in America because the land is cheaper than China's.

When the spring festivals approach, Haomeng's mom, Sumei Jin, 47, surprises her by showing up at her door. Sumei gets mad at Haomeng immediately as soon as she lays eyes on her because Haomeng dresses in casual Uniqlo clothes. "I didn't raise you up so you can be a Uniqlo girl." Sumei, along with her assistant **Mei Yang**, 23, drags Haomeng to shop. Haomeng has sold out all her brand clothes because she feels ashamed of possessing expensive stuff. Sumei is angry at her lifestyle and threatens if she doesn't change, Sumei has no choice but takes her back to China.

Haomeng discusses with Kathy. But Kathy also faces the same dilemma. Kathy has already used to the life in the U.S. and wants to establish her fashion career in NYC, instead of taking the easy pass in China. Harris's parents seem very arrogant because Kathy's father is considered insignificant in their eyes because he is not a top party member.

Fan Sun confesses his love for Haomeng with a surprise in the Chinese restaurant, but Haomeng feels sad because this is where she wanted to tell Ewan that she likes him. Sumei

arranges a date for Haomeng as well by flying her childhood friend **Zixuan Xu** to her place, who is now a Cambridge alumnus and practicing lawyer. Zixuan only comes here because his father forces him to. He already has a British girlfriend whom he wants to marry. He looks down on Haomeng and thinks she's too submissive and naive. Under all the pressure, Haomeng rushes to see Ewan but only to find him happy among his American friends and feels like that is the place he belongs to. Haomeng goes back sadly.

While everyone's preparing for the spring festival, Kathy makes her decisions and gives the ring back because she doesn't want to be a submissive wife to Harris family and goes wherever they point to. She likes fashion from the bottom of her heart and doesn't have a plan for kids for at least ten years, which upsets Harris' family because Harris is the only son.

Haomeng finds out that Baifu Beauty Chili's money all comes from her boyfriend in China while she has another billionaire boyfriend here in America. And her boyfriend here actually has three other girlfriends in China, and Chili knows it and takes it like nothing. Haomeng feels disappointed by the people and loses her passion. Sumeri says she will take Haomeng back before Spring Festival and never come back.

Zixuan claims that he will never fall in love with a woman like Haomeng who is just a giant crying baby to Sumei and his father during their meeting. He then drags a white girl who quietly sits next table and says he will marry her tomorrow and leave his father forever.

Haomeng wanders the street in the China town feeling lost and inferior to the courageous Zixuan. She sees Ewan across the street who is buying a dim-sum they had before. They look at each other with intense feelings.

Haomeng returns the flight ticket and the credit card to her mom at the airport and says she will switch her major to social work because she is interested in helping others. She wants to be a

wealthy person spiritually and will never embarrass her mom. Sumei says all she wants is Haomeng to walk in the world with pride and respect. They hug each other and say goodbye.

Vision

This film will be a rom-com about the mysterious Chinese rich kids, and the conflicts between them and their overbearing parents, their seemingly care-free lifestyle and their heavy responsibilities, misunderstandings from both the American societies and the Chinese societies, and so on.

The second rich generation theme can easily slide into a heavy, dark and depressing tone for most people, thanks to the hardship of how their parents acquire their money and how they are treated and seen by the rest of the world. However, I want to present the young generation as a positive and promising people just like any other young people in the world. The second-generation rich Chinese kids have not always had it all. The majority of them were born in the poor, compared to their counterpart in the west. I remember living in a dark, small room with my grandparents in an impoverished village for the first couple of years of my life. Then I moved to a tiny apartment with my parents in a backward town during my kindergarten period. I considered earphones as a luxury when I was 7 and had my own computer set when I was 11. I feel like I have lived many lives already along with the rapid economic growth of China. I want to present to the viewers that the general Chinese rich kids were not born with a silver spoon, and most of them have endured more poverty and poor education than they can imagine. However, most of them strive for a better life and a more decent life, and are very optimistic about the future, because, throughout their lives, all they have experienced is progress. For them, things can only get better, not worse.

That being said, once you are used to a certain lifestyle, it is hard to accept another way of living. The process of breaking away from their wealthy parents is painful and time-consuming. My film will shorten this process to a few months and highlight all the major conflicts almost every Chinese student will face in the U.S. in a light-hearted way. I want to show one of the most daring, positive and luckiest kids who learn to find out what they want in life when it seems like they already have everything.

I want my film to be lively and energetic because that is how young people should be like. I hope the audience can have a fresh perspective on modern China after seeing this film and feel connected as well.

Reference picture for Chinese New Year week.



Timeline

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Refined Treatment									
1st draft									
2nd draft									
Final draft									

Budget

(If I shoot a scene from the script)

Equipment			
Camera Equipment		Kind In	
Sound		Kind In	
Lighting		Kind In	
		0	0
Art			
Costumes		0	

Makeup		0	
Props		1200	
		1200	1200
Talent			
Actors (4)		1000	1000
Crew Costs			
Travel		100	
Food		300	
		400	400
Post-Production			
Adobe Suite		Kind In	
		0	0
Contingency		200	
		200	200
		TOTAL:	2800

Introduction of the Film

This is a conceptual film of my feature script which is called Everything that Glitters. This is a coming-of-age/rom-com which follows the journey of a Chinese girl, named Haomeng. She faces pressure from her family and the patriarchal society that belittles her as a woman and forces her to get married as soon as possible. She cannot bear the insufferable blind dates and lies to her parents that she is looking for better men in New York and moves to the Big Apple as a student. Upon her arrival, she meets Chris, a Chinese-American who works in a bar. He is a hard-working, diligent, generous and down-to-earth man. They fall in love quickly. However, Haomeng is also caught in the toxic and spoiled social circles of other Chinese students, who's lifestyles are favored by her parents. She wants to be with Chris while at the same time fears being out of her comfort zone, and she has to make a choice between the two.

I feel it very necessary to make it clear that this story is NOT based on my own life. I have never had any blind dates, nor have I been forced into any blind dates or marriage to anyone in any form, ever. My parents are super open-minded and I enjoy my life as much as any American girl. That being said, it is not irrelevant to my life at all. The materialistic lifestyle and the discrimination against women in China is something that I personally know very well, whilst it remains unknown to many. I consider it a great opportunity to eliminate the misunderstanding between modern Chinese and the Western world, as many people still think of us as a country that is only a little better than North Korea. Therefore, I feel it would be a great idea to show that world to a Western audience. Although the setting of the story might be new and different, the storytelling behind it shall look familiar. The audience can still be able to relate to the characters and root for them because as humans we all share the same desire for love and freedom.

Artist Statement

Coming to RIT is definitely one of the best choices I have ever made. I spent three wonderful and happy years in Rochester. It is not the knowledge that I learned that made an impact on my life, but the people that I met here who changed my life and made me a better and happier person.

I firstly would like to thank my thesis chair, Frank. I remember the first day when I came to RIT, Frank asked if I have ever heard of a place called Mianyang. I could not believe my ears when I heard the that word come out of his mouth. That was the place where I came from, a place so

small and anonymous that even most Chinese people have never heard of it. Frank told me that almost during the same period when I was coming to the U.S., his son Ben went to China as part of the Peace Corps and was assigned to work in Mianyang, and the local school where my mom graduated from. In China, we have a word called Yuan, which can be roughly translated as fate, a destiny that ties people together, or a predestined relationship. There is no such thing as coincidence. Since that moment, I have believed that RIT is the right path for me. I would like to thank Frank for his help, patience, and kindness during these three years.

I would also like to thank all my classmates, who are not just friends, but more like family to me. As a class full of international students, we have been through so much together. We shared much laughter, and maybe even some tears. Sometimes we fought hard, sometimes we showed the strongest support for each other at the hardest of times. I want to tell you that you guys are the best thing that happened to me in RIT and I wish a bright future for all of you with all my heart.

I want to thank my former professor Brian Coughlin and his partner Linda LoCatro. I truly appreciate your help in my last film, and more importantly, I am thankful for your generous friendship, which made me feel like home in this foreign place. You are one of the best and most kind human beings I have ever met. I am so very honored to be friends with you and I wish all the best for both of you.

Last but not least, I want to thank each and everyone that I have had the pleasure to work with during the amazing three years. There is an old saying in China: A drop of water shall be returned with a burst of spring, which means, even if it was just a little help from others, you should return the favor with all you can when others are in need. I have been helped so much by so many people, and I hope to be of help to others in the future as well.

Thank you very much.

EVERYTHING THAT GLITTERS

Written by

Zichen Liang

Committee Chair

Frank Deese

First Draft

4/26/2019

Final Revised Draft

12/10/2020

FADE IN

EXT. TIANFU SQUARE - CHENGDU - DAY

A Mao Ze Dong marble statue stands at the center of a huge square. This monument is around 98 feet tall. Mao is depicted with one arm stretching high, waving to the Chinese people.

EXT. TAIKOOLI - DAY

A gigantic panda statue sits on top of UNIQLO, a Japanese fast fashion retailer. Zooms out, we see a bustling street full of traditional Chinese-styled buildings selling international brands, such as ARMANI, CHANEL, and CARTIER. Fashionable young people walk around like models on a runway.

EXT. NARROW ALLEY - DAY

A narrow ally built in Chinese style with gray walls and red lanterns everywhere. People come and go with shopping bags in their hands.

INT. TEA HOUSE - DAY

In a traditional styled tea house, HAOMENG, 23, a pretty Chinese young woman, dressed in a plain sweater and has a handbag with logo of GLOBAL SAVING, sipping tea from a small tea cup seriously. She sits with SUMEI, 45, a woman with shrewd eyes and nicely dressed. A mid-aged woman, MOTHER #1 sits with SON #1, a young man who dressed in cartoon shirt in front of Haomeng and Sumei.

MOTHER #1

How old are you?

HAOMENG

22.

MOTHER #1

24!

HAOMENG

No. I said 22.

MOTHER #1 (CONT'D)

Wow! That's almost 24! You have to hurry up to get married! Otherwise you wouldn't be able to give birth before 25! The older you are, the harder it is to have children, you know.

SUMEI

I know! Her father and I are so worried that we can't sleep at night! I reached out to you when heard that Dr. Zhang is still single. Thank you so much for coming to see us!

MOTHER #1

My son has been focused on his career. He never socializes with bad people.

Mother #1 looks at Son #1 with smile. Son #1 adjusts his glasses.

HAOMENG

Does he socialize at all?

SUMEI

Mengmeng is also a really sweet girl!

MOTHER #1

(whispers to Son #1)

Sweetie, what do you think of her?

Son #1 whispers to Mother #1's ear. Mother #1 nods.

MOTHER #1 (CONT'D)

He's happy with you in general. When you're married, you can enjoy life with me at our house.

HAOMENG

I don't work?

Son #1 eats dessert from Haomeng's plate. Mother #1 looks at Son #1 with smile. Son #1 adjusts his glasses.

MOTHER #1

Who needs you to work! Look at my son, so handsome, successful, and strict with himself that you'll never have to worry about him cheating. All you need to do is play Mahjong with me at home.

SUMEI

Oh, My Haomeng is so lucky!

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Inside a small and dimly lit bar, where a band sings ballads at the corner. Haomeng sits at a small table with cocktail on the table. SON #2, a tall guy in his mid 20s with suit and tie, sits across the table and looks at Haomeng's face and breasts while eating peanuts.

SON #2

Have you dated before?

HAOMENG

Yeah. When I was a freshman.

SON #2

Did you sleep with him?

HAOMENG

What?

SON #2

What? Don't be shy. We're going to get married, of course we should know everything about each other. Didn't I send my profile and bank account certificate to you and your mom?

HAOMENG

I just met you five minutes ago. Why are you talking like we are engaged?

SON #2

Wait. You don't plan to marry me? Then why are you here?

INT. CAFE - DAY

Inside a crowded cafe. Haomeng sits on a small chair while holding her handbag on her knees. People pass by her all the time. SON #3, a slim guy in old-fashioned cloth with glasses, sits across the table on a big and comfortable couch. He sits back with legs wide spread.

HAOMENG

Blind dates are not arranged marriage. We should get to know each other first before we move on. What do you think?

SON #3

Well, then, I think there's something terribly wrong with your personality.

HAOMENG

What?

Son #3 touches the surface of Haomeng's phone. The phone lights up and shows a man's picture.

SON #3

You are a girl, and you are using a man's picture as your wallpaper.

HAOMENG

What's wrong with that? I just happen to like this actor.

SON #3

A woman using a strange man's picture. How inappropriate.

HAOMENG

Should I use your picture as my wallpaper?

SON #3

Go ahead.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Inside a delicate western-styled restaurant. Waiters all dress with bow ties and suits. Classic music plays in the background. Haomeng holds her ice coffee in shock.

HAOMENG

Why should I listen to you?

SON #4

I'm a millionaire. Do you have any doubts about my wisdom and decision?

HAOMENG

I can't drink my ice coffee because you're a millionaire?

SON #4

You're a girl. Cold drinks can make your womb cold! How will you bear children in the future.

(MORE)

SON #4 (CONT'D)

Your boobs are small so it might also be difficult for you to breastfeed. I'm thinking for your best interest.

HAOMENG

Thanks.

SON #4

No problem. Don't feel too bad about yourself though. I'm still pretty happy with you. You don't look much different from your picture. The only thing I'm having problem with is that you said you're gonna take bar exam? You're going to grad school? That's not what a good wife should do.

INT. BUBBLE TEA STORE - NIGHT

Inside a chic bubble tea store. Digital screens are all over the wall, showing the orders and people who are waiting. Lots of stylish young people stand in front of the counter, waiting for their drinks.

SON #5, a young, slim man who wears a hoodie, waits in the line with Haomeng.

HAOMENG

I'm so sorry. My dad forced you to have blind date with me, right?

SON #5

It's my honor that Mr. Zhen wanted me to have blind date with his daughter. But I didn't know that you are so young. You don't need any blind date.

HAOMENG

My parents are nagging me about getting too old to marriage everyday. Sometimes, I even doubt if I'm really that old.

SON #5

You, old? No way. You look like a high school kid.

HAOMENG

You look like a high school kid. My dad told me that you're an elite in his company. I thought you're 27 or 28 at least.

SON #5

Age doesn't matter. Even if you're 30 or 40, if you feel like a young girl, you are a young girl. It doesn't matter what others say.

HAOMENG

Thank you. I wish other people were also like you.

Haomeng smiles at Son #5 and bashfully pulls her hair back. Son #5 suddenly pauses with his eyes wide open. Haomeng looks back, and there is a man walking by.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

What's wrong? Do you know him?

SON #5

(puts down his drinks)
We dated.

Haomeng glares at him. She wipes off her lipstick.

INT. CAFE - DAY

SON #6, a young man who holds his smart phone and plays games on it. Haomeng sips her drink which is still almost full. She adjusts her clothes and looks at her phone. Son #6 is still into the games.

Pause.

Haomeng finishes the last drop of her drink. Son #6 is still on his phone. Haomeng looks at her phone again.

HAOMENG

Do you want to eat something?

SON #6

Shhhhhhhh! Don't come over! No! No!

INT. HAOMENG'S ROOM - NIGHT

A messy room packed with books. Haomeng crouches in her swivel chair and has headphones on. Sumei, in her pjs and facial mask, barges in the room and takes off Haomeng's headphone angrily.

SUMEI

What happened? Doctor. Zhang's mom told me that he didn't like you and didn't want to see you!

HAOMENG

Did he? I already deleted his contact information, so ok.

SUMEI

It's not Ok! Why did you behave like that! You know how worried your father and I are?

HAOMENG

About what?

SUMEI

About your marriage! Your kids!

HAOMENG

I don't have kids!

KAI, 52, Haomeng's father, a short man walks slowly in Haomeng's room.

KAI

What's the racket about?

SUMEI

She blew off another blind date! With Doctor. Zhang! The guy who graduated from Yale!

HAOMENG

Why are you mad at me for not liking the guy that you like? I don't even get why I have to have blind dates so much? Do I have to get married right now?

KAI

You do! It is your responsibility to get married and have kids at this age! It's filial piety! It's patriotism!

HAOMENG

Why does it have anything to do with the country? What if I just stay single all my life?

SUMEI

Oh dear! You are trying to kill me!

KAI

Then you're going to have a sad life full of regrets!

HAOMENG

Your life is going to be full of regrets, not mine! I have many things I want to do with my life! Like having a career.

SUMEI

Career or whatsoever can wait! But your golden marriage and reproduction age cannot!

KAI

I'll ask our relatives and friends to introduce more young men to you! I don't believe you will stay this way for long.

(turns to Sumei)

Let's go back to sleep. She will come around.

The couple leaves the room, leaving Haomeng in desperation.

INT. CAR - DAY

Haomeng sits with Sumei in a taxi. She looks at the window morosely. Sumei adjusts her hair.

SUMEI

Why didn't you have a pony tail? You look much better with a pony tail. Mr. Li will like that. By the way, I heard he's a young entrepreneur. Maybe your dad can work with him one day.

The car slowly moves forward. Haomeng accidentally sees a small billboard which says " Do you want to experience life somewhere else?" As the car moves on, she sees another billboard saying " somewhere totally different from what you have known".

The taxi keeps running and Haomeng sees the last billboard. "GAO Agency of Studying Abroad is willing to help."

SUMEI (CONT'D)

You can talk about our family business with him. He might be impressed.

HAOMENG

Stop! Please pull over!

SUMEI

What's wrong?

HAOMENG

(pats the driver's shoulder)

I forgot that I'm having an appointment with my professor! Please pull over!

SUMEI

Well, we can take you to school! Why are you stopping here?

The car pulls over. Haomeng opens the door.

HAOMENG

Um, because we're meeting here. Sorry.

Haomeng runs away.

EXT. OUT SIDE OF IFS BUILDING- DAY

The busy block is filled with young people holding Starbucks and coming in and out of the building. A small but fancy sign outside the building says GAO Studying Abroad Agency. Haomeng runs inside of the building.

INT. GAO STUDYING ABROAD AGENCY - DAY

In an artsy office with modern arts decorations, AMY, 27, a woman with chic outfit, sits behind a artistically designed glass table. Haomeng runs up to her while breathing heavily.

AMY

Hello, Madam! Are you interested in studying abroad?

HAOMENG

Yes!

AMY

Oh. Okay. Are you interested in
fall semester or spring semester?

Haomeng leans over to Amy.

HAOMENG

I am interested to leave. Now!

INT. THE ADMINISTRATION OFFICE OF SICHUAN UNIVERSITY - DAY

We see Haomeng pound on the door of the administration office and walks in with tons of papers without hearing the permission. Moments later, she walks out with the same papers and jumps up happily.

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

In a big theater classroom, students are all packing up their book and laptops and leaving. Haomeng stands at the podium, staring at a bespectacled woman who is signing up papers.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

Thank you so much for signing my
recommendation letter. I wrote it
in your tone one hundred percent.
Not one exaggeration about myself.

INT. A WORKING STUDIO - DAY

Haomeng sits in a small room with glass walls through which we see IKEA-like furniture and young people walking around. Haomeng faces a computer and types seriously. She occasionally looks down at a book by her hand, which says How To Write An Application Letter For American Universities.

INT. A STUDIO INSIDE THE STUDYING ABROAD AGENCY- DAY

Haomeng in a room where a camera is set up. She sits straight on a chair and touches up her makeup with a mirror. Amy adjusts the camera. She looks up at Haomeng.

AMY

You ready for a take?

Haomeng puts away her makeup and nods. Amy pushes the start button on the camera.

AMY (CONT'D)

Action!

Haomeng puts on a smile. Amy gently holds up an iPad behind the camera, on which writes: My name is Haomeng Zhen, a 22-year-old girl from Sichuan.

HAOMENG

My name is Haomeng Zhen, a 22-year-old girl from Sichuan.

Amy taps the iPad, and it turns to another page: It has always been my dream to study intellectual property law in your school.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

It has always been my dream to study in, intell. Intellec..

Pause.

Amy gently mouths: intellectual property!

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

Intellectual property law in your school.

Amy heaves a sign of relief.

INT. HAOMENG'S ROOM - MIDNIGHT

Haomeng lies in her bed in the darkness while refreshing her phone email inbox. A new email pops up. She clicks in immediately, only sees: Dear Ms. Haomeng Zhen, we are sorry to inform you that...

Haomeng shuts off her phone immediately.

EXT. THE GATE OF SICHUAN UNIVERSITY - DAY

Haomeng walks out of school along with tons of other students. She picks up a phone call. Then she jumps up and starts screaming.

INT. SUMEI'S BEDROOM - MIDNIGHT

A big bedroom with huge emerald-colored rotatable door, a wide TV decorated in the wall and a treadmill in the balcony. Sumei and her husband KAI, 55, a chubby mid-aged man, lies on their bed. They both have their glasses on and reading stuff from on an iPad. Haomeng sits on a frog-shaped kid chair.

KAI

It's in New York City! How can you, a decent little girl, go to such a messy place all alone!

SUMEI

Yeah, I heard that the streets are dirty, people are fat, and subway is like an abandoned toilet.

HAOMENG

You know it's one of the biggest cities in the world right?

KAI

Plus it's a two-year program. You'll be an old girl when you come back. Don't say I'm a sexist, but men do not like old condescending smart girls. It's their nature.

HAOMENG

I already booked the one-way ticket. There's no going back!

SUMEI

Oh dear! How dare you do such a thing without talking with us? I can't allow you to leave home to such a hell! No way!

Sumei starts to wipe tears.

KAI

Wait. Isn't Cassie living in the New York City? My friend Dong's daughter?

HAOMENG

Well, yeah. She went to New York all alone when she's only 15! And she hasn't been back ever since. Now she's having her own fashion design studio in Manhattan!

KAI

She was sent there because her parents were planning to have a son! They didn't want government people to know that they already have a daughter.

SUMEI

Yeah, Poor girl.

HAOMENG

You don't need to pity her! I talk to her every week!

(MORE)

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

She's so independent and successful! She's living her best life.

KAI

Oh, yeah! Dong mentioned that Cassie had a super rich boyfriend from a prestigious family in Shanghai.

SUMEI

That's awesome! Maybe she can introduce one of his friends to you!

KAI

Good idea. NYC shall have a much bigger dating pool than here! I'm calling my old buddy Dong and making sure Cassie keeps Haomeng safe from all the dirt, drugs, and promiscuous parties.

SUMEI

And cheese burger, coca-cola and hotdogs!

KAI

(dialing his phone)

That's right. Stay away from fat food. Send us your weight report every week. I don't want to see a fat pig at the airport a year later.

Haomeng inhales deeply.

HAOMENG

No problem.

INT. AIRPORT - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Haomeng, 23, stands at the crowded airport with three big suitcases falling off from the luggage cart. She holds a phone to her ears with one hand and tries to push back the huge suitcase with another.

SUMEI (O.S.)

Did you see Cassie?

HAOMENG

You've asked me three times! Not yet.

SUMEI (O.S.)
I'll call her father again! Don't
move until you see her!

HAOMENG
No! Don't call him! I'm totally
fine! Oh, there she is!

CASSIE DONG, 25, is a breathtakingly beautiful girl who dresses like a fashion model. She stands at the entrance of the airport. Many passengers glance at her. Cassie sees Haomeng and hurries to help Haomeng.

CASSIE
Mengmeng!

HAOMENG
Cassie! I'm so happy to see you!

SUMEI (V.O.)
Is Cassie there already? Put her on
the phone! Let me talk to her!

Cassie and Haomeng both look at the phone awkwardly. Cassie reaches her hand to Haomeng and motions her to hand over her phone. Haomeng gives her phone and a silent sorry.

CASSIE
(talks to the phone)
Hello, Auntie Sumei. Yes. Haomeng
is here with me. No problem! I'll
take very good care of her. She's
like my own sister. Haha.

Cassie puts her arm around Haomeng's shoulder and gently pinches her face. Cassie gives phone back to Haomeng.

HAOMENG
Mom, I'll talk to you later when
I'm settled, ok? I'm super tired.
Bye.

Haomeng hangs up the phone.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)
I'm super excited.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

The apartment is pretty spacious with a big window over head, where sunlight shines right through. The furnitures all looks very new and nicely designed. In a corner filled with clothes, Cassie is helping Haomeng put on makeup.

HAOMENG

Do you live alone?

CASSIE

No, I have a roommate. You'll see her later. She's quite a socialite.

HAOMENG

Where are you taking me first?

CASSIE

Meeting all the my friends of course. We have a little Chinese circle in NYC which meet every weekend.

Cassie takes out her phone and sends out a message in the 1000 people group chat.

HAOMENG

Can you give me a little information on them? I'm a little nervous.

CASSIE

Well, there's some friends more interesting than others.

INT. SHUYA'S ROOM - DAY

SHUYA CHU, 24, a beautiful young Chinese girl with heavy makeup, sexy pinky dress and a floral garland on her head, sitting in front a well-equipped computer with a professional microphone. She stares at the left corner of the screen where real-time comments and cartooned rockets and ships are flying over.

CASSIE (V.O.)

Like Shuya Chu, my roommate. She live-streams all the time. She's kind of an influencer.

SHUYA

Thank you, Shiny Shiny! Thank you, Little Boy! Thank you, Toilet Cover! Let me sing another song for you, Burning Out My Calories!

Her phone rings. Shuya picks up her phone and checks the message. She widens her eyes and puts back the phone. She stares at the screen and looks pitiful.

SHUYA (CONT'D)

I was just notified that my tuition
has risen, again! Please help me
through this tough semester!

Immediately, lots of rockets, planes and ships and shooting
through the entire screen.

SHUYA (CONT'D)

Thank you guys so much! Love you!

EXT. OUTSIDE OF A HOUSE - DAY

Jiajia Zhang, 25, a Chinese girl wearing a long wool coat,
high-heeled boots with sunglasses and red lips. She walks out
of an old Subaru and casually waves her hair like a model.
She walks to the house and pushes the ring bell. The door
opens, Jiajia takes off her sunglasses, and hands over a
brown paper bag.

CASSIE (V.O.)

Jiajia is a hardworking girl who
would do anything to make money.
But never studies in school.

JIAJIA

Here is your food. Have a good day.

Her phone rings, Jiajia looks down on her phone while the
door is about to close. She quickly uses her foot to stop the
door from closing.

JIAJIA (CONT'D)

You forgot to tip.

EXT. CAR RENTAL STORE - DAY

Jiajia's Subaru smoothly drives into the car rental store.
Seconds later, we see a brand new Mercedes-Benz drives out of
the store.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

MOMO DU, 25, a stylish Chinese girl with big sunglasses, high
knee boots and red lips, sitting on the front seat in a
classroom. Her phone rings and she picks it up. Momo
stretches her arms and looks up. Momo adjusts her sunglasses
and goes to the professor.

CASSIE (V.O.)

Momo is my roommate. She is one of the richest girls. Her goal is to enjoy herself as much as possible before her parents ask her to go back home.

MOMO

David, I have an emergency. I need to leave early.

DAVID

Momo, do you understand you how many classes you've missed so far? I'll have to flunk you if you leave again.

Momo takes off her sunglasses.

MOMO

I am here to enjoy my life freely, not to compete with poor Americans.

Momo flips her hair and leaves.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Haomeng is transformed into a charming fashionable girl, with slightly reserved dress. She still adjusts her outfit while Cassie standing next to her. She looks around and everyone is dressed in style.

HAOMENG

(turns to Cassie)

Why does Momo still live with a roommate if she's so rich?

CASSIE

We don't live together to save money. We are forming a social circle around us.

Momo, who has colorful wigs and color contact lens on, with thick makeup, is in an oversized shirt, with a Chanel handbag and high boots, strides into a club. Following her, we see the club is full of young Asian people. A curvy young Asian woman with blond hair who looks like a K-pop star is DJ-ing.

DJ

(shout to the crowd)

Annyeonghaseyo!!

Momo walks toward Cassie and Haomeng.

MOMO
Annyeonghaseyo!

Cassie hugs her.

CASSIE
Momo! Meet my little sister,
Haomeng!

Momo studies Haomeng.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
Mengmeng, Momo is my roommate. She
is also a NYU student.

HAOMENG
Really?
(hugs Momo)
So nice to meet you!

MOMO
(hugs back)
Aw, what a little cutie! I'm so
happy to have a little sister too!

Momo motions to a CHRIS SUN, a 23 years old Chinese-American
well-built guy, wears a casual shirt.

MOMO (CONT'D)
Hey, can you get me a 12-year
bourbon whiskey for my new little
sister?

Haomeng gives a surprising look.

CHRIS
Sure.

Haomeng stops Chris.

HAOMENG
Wait. Thank you, Momo. But that's
too much.

MOMO
You're so sweet! That's nothing! We
party like this every week.

Momo motions to Chris. Chris sneaks a look at Haomeng and
leaves.

HAOMENG
Wow! Really? Is everyone here that
rich?

CASSIE

No, maybe only 30% can spend money like Momo, while at least 60% are just middle-class people who can afford to fly to wherever they want in economy class. But I don't know any poor Chinese kids here.

Shuya, holds the arm of JIMMY, a 19-year-old young man in a 10,000\$ jacket.

SHUYA

Cassie belongs to the top 10% rich kids.

HAOMENG

I always knew Uncle Dong is pretty well-off, but since we live in a small place I never actually understood how rich you really are.

CASSIE

(laughs)

Well, she's exaggerating. I am just a humble working girl. I saw my own clothes.

Haomeng looks around the stylish people and looks back at herself.

HAOMENG

I want to use the restroom. I'll be back in a minute.

Haomeng rushes into the crowd.

INT. CLUB'S CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Shuya, Jiajia and some other girls are smoking in the corridor decorated with cheesy pink walls.

JIAJIA

Haomeng!

Jiajia notices Haomeng. The rest of the girls all move toward Haomeng, including Shuya with her phone in front of her face.

SHUYA

(talks to the phone)

Let's meet our new friend!

(holds Haomeng's arm)

Mengmeng! Isn't she cute? Say hi to my fans, Mengmeng!

Haomeng covers her face immediately when she sees her face in Shuya's phone.

JIAJIA

Enough with your live streaming, Shuya. Haomeng, it must be very hard for you at your first day in NYC.

HAOMENG

Well, it's ok. I haven't seen a lot, but it's fun so far.

SHUYA

How can you be ok? I cried for a week when I first came here. This city is just crap.

HAOMENG

Really?

JIAJIA

When you're used to living in place like Shanghai, shithole like New York City does make you cry.

The girls smoke again.

SHUYA

But don't be too upset. It'll be over one day.

HAOMENG

O, okay.

Chris walks by them with a tray of whiskey. Shuya stops him.

SHUYA

Hey, give us some drink.

CHRIS

But's it's for the other guests.

SHUYA

We're together! It's rented out by us!

JIAJIA

Take a picture for us first.

Chris signs and walks to them and gets the phone from Jiajia. He looks into the phone. The girls push Haomeng to stand in the middle. Haomeng stares at the camera phone and smiles stiffly.

CHRIS

Three, two, one.

Haomeng still manages to keep her smile. But the other girls all put on poker faces and look at different directions the moment when CHRIS counts one. Haomeng feels even more stiff and confused. CHRIS smiles.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Another one. Three, two, one.

The girls put on different poker-faced poses at the count of one again. Haomeng freezes in the center. Chris chuckles and takes several pictures, while the girls change their poses every time like they are doing a slow dance. Jiajia hurries to Chris and snatches the phone from his hands. Chris looks up and meets Haomeng's eyes.

HAOMENG

Thank you.

Jiajia looks at the pictures carefully with other girls.

JIAJIA

(In Chinese)

Is he stupid? Why does my face look so big?

MOMO

Oh my god! What do my eyes look like they just had a failed surgery!

Chris goes back to his work at the bar and not reacting to the girls.

JIAJIA

ShaBi.

HAOMENG

(Chinese)

Don't say that! I think you guys look pretty! It's very nice of him taking pictures for us.

(peers at Chris)

And, I think he's kinda cute.

The girls all look at her with disgust.

Chris smiles.

SHUYA

Eww.

JIAJIA

(Chinese)

A bartender? Seriously? Do you fantasize making drinks with him?

HAOMENG

That's not what I meant.

Chris serves them the drinks.

CHRIS

Enjoy your drinks.

Chris glimpses at Haomeng before he leaves. Haomeng blushes.

HAOMENG

Did he understand me? Why's he smiling?

Shuya walks to Chris.

SHUYA

(In Chinese)

Hey. I want a glass of water.

CHRIS

No problem.

Haomeng almost spits out her drinks. She blushes.

HAOMENG

I, I don't feel well. I need to use the restroom. Bye!

Haomeng runs away.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF THE CLUB - NIGHT

Haomeng opens the entrance of the club and sees Jimmy smoking with a bunch of guys. Haomeng immediately tries to take a step back and close the door, but stopped by Jimmy.

JIMMY

Yo! I'm Jimmy. We just met.

HAOMENG

(reluctantly)

Oh, right. Hi.

JIMMY

What's up? Are you leaving?

HAOMENG

No. I'm just looking for the restroom.

Jimmy throws his cigarette on the ground and steps on it.

JIMMY

This is the wrong direction. Let me take you there.

Jimmy casually puts his arms around Haomeng and tries to lead her back to the club.

HAOMENG

(flustered)

Wait.

JIMMY

I know this place very well. By the way, are we friends on WeChat yet?

Chris sees Haomeng being forcefully dragged by Jimmy when he's on his way to the parking lot. He walks up to them.

CHRIS

Hey. What is going on?

JIMMY

Mind your own business.

Haomeng looks up at CHRIS in surprise.

CHRIS

I don't want you to make a scene in my workplace. Please let her go.

JIMMY

(embarrassed and looks at his friends)

What's wrong with this dick head! I told you we're friends!

CHRIS looks at Haomeng in her eyes.

CHRIS

Is that true?

HAOMENG

Well, I...We just met. I just want to use the restroom.

CHRIS

I know where it is.

Haomeng escapes from Jimmy's grip and jumps over to CHRIS.

HAOMENG

Can you show me the way?

(turns to Jimmy)

I know him. He works here. I'll not bother you. See you around.

INT. CORRIDOR OF THE CLUB - NIGHT

In the pinky shiny corridor, some Asian girls are taking selfies in front the big entrance. CHRIS walks with Haomeng and stops at the entrance.

HAOMENG

Thank you so much for walking me back. I had a terrible sense of direction.

CHRIS

No problem.

HAOMENG

And also thank you for that.

She rolls her eyes.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

He's the boyfriend of one of the girls. What's his problem?

CHRIS

Yeah, I recognize that guy. He's one of the sports car club Chinese dick. These people change their dates a lot.

HAOMENG

Wow! Really? This sounds so American.

CHRIS

(laughs)

What does that mean?

HAOMENG

I watch the Hollywood movies. All the American young people do is sleep around with each other and take drugs. I was worried that he might roofie me. I saw that there's a rape culture in America from news back home.

CHRIS

(Chuckles)

Oh, yeah. It's a new culture.
That's how we Americans date.

HAOMENG

Are you American? Not Chinese?

CHRIS

I was born and raised in Brooklyn.
Which part of China are you from?

HAOMENG

Sichuan. Which part of China are
you from, originally?

CHRIS

My parents are from Guangzhou. They
came here when they were in their
early 20s. How long have you been
here?

HAOMENG

(takes a look at her
phone)

Almost 5 hours.

CHRIS

Wow! That is a long time. No wonder
you have such an in-depth point-of-
view on American culture.

HAOMENG

Yep! I know!

CHRIS

But seriously, I'm not surprised.
You are literally the only person
who doesn't look like she's in a
fashion week or a Halloween party.

HAOMENG

(blushes)

Well, I was actually sneaking to
the restroom to touch on my makeup.
I felt a little dumb among the
beautiful people. But I felt dumber
after I put on the makeup so I
washed them away.

Chris laughs.

CHRIS

We all have struggles in life.

HAOMENG

Why don't you come in and join us?

CHRIS

Isn't it a Chinese exclusive party?

HAOMENG

You're still Chinese, ethnically.

CHRIS

I don't know. I barely know anything about the modern China. When I was a kid, my parents always told me stories of how hard things were for them when they were in China, that hardworking is one of the best virtues of the Chinese, and now I see these Chinese kids squandering their parent's money and doing nothing everyday, and they're proud of it. I guess I prefer to think China the way my parents told me.

HAOMENG

But, isn't it a good thing that people get wealthier than before? Their parents suffered a lot of hardships, and that's why they want their kids to enjoy the life they never had. It might sound weird to you but in China, sometimes, willing to be spoiled by your parents is also a way of fulfilling the filial piety.

CHRIS

That sounds deep.

HAOMENG

It's really not. But it's ok if you don't want to stay. You've worked whole night.

CHRIS

Well, hey, I know a nice place where you can have authentic Sichuan food.

Chris takes out a small notepad and a pen. He writes on and notepad and tears off the paper. He hands over the paper to Haomeng.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
You can call this number to order.

Haomeng takes the paper.

HAOMENG
Thanks. I'll try it tomorrow.

CHRIS
No problem.

Chris turns around and leaves. Then he turns back and looks at Haomeng again.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
By the way, what does Shabi mean?

HAOMENG
Fucking retard.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Haomeng comes back to Cassie and finds Jimmy and Shuya are holding hands again. Shuya stares at her.

SHUYA
I heard you just hooked up with a stranger.

Haomeng blushes.

HAOMENG
No. It's not like that!

JIMMY
Don't lie. It's the guy who brought your liquor.

The crowds burst into laughters.

SHUYA
Wait? Out of all the second-generation rich guys here, you picked the bartender?

HAOMENG
(blushes)
No, I didn't pick anyone. He was just being nice to me.

CASSIE

Give her a break. Haomeng's mom is very strict with her relationships with men. She literally asked me to make sure that Haomeng looks like a decent upper-class lady, so she can attract decent upper-class men.

The crowd laughs again.

SHUYA

What? Your mom is so cute.

JIAJIA

I wish my mom was like that! She's so petty with me. I have to earn money from desperate losers so I can look good for rich and cute guys.

Haomeng stares at her with surprises.

CASSIE

She's talking about streaming. She's quite famous online.

HAOMENG

Oh. That's so impressive, Jiajia. You're making your own money. You can do anything you want. You don't need any rich cute guy.

SHUYA

You're so naive, sweetie! If you ever date a really rich guy,
(holds Jimmy's arm)
like my Jimmy, you can never go back to normal life. That's a whole new world. Needless to say, love fades but money is forever.

HAOMENG

Are you saying you love your boyfriends' money in his face?

JIMMY

Who doesn't love my money? I hate women who come at me for money while pretending to be a virgin.

HAOMENG

Oh, okay.

JIMMY

If you want make your mom's dream come true, you should be honest with us. This is 2019, it's not fucking cultural revolution. We say what we want. There's nothing to be ashamed of.

HAOMENG

I'm definitely not thinking about finding a rich man.

JIMMY

So you want a poor guy? Like the bartender you're flirting with?

HAOMENG

I wasn't flirting with anyone!

SHUYA

Chill out! We're trying to help you. How can you be with someone that your parents don't approve?

HAOMENG

I'm surprised you that would say that. I thought you guys were living in the 2019?

JIAJIA

It doesn't matter it's 2019 or 2090, you can't have a happy ending if you marry someone your parents don't approve.

CASSIE

Cut her some slack. She came here to escape arranged marriage.

(turn to Haomeng)

Take your mind off of marriage or men. C'mon. Let's enjoy the night.

Cassie holds Haomeng's arm and walks away from Jimmy and Shuya.

HAOMENG

(turn to Cassie)

Do you also agree with what they said?

CASSIE

Well, I think you can date whoever you want, but when it comes to marriage, maybe parent's opinions should come first. They are thinking the best for you. If they don't like the guy, there's must be a very solid reason behind it.

Haomeng looks down, quietly drinking.

Cassie's phone rings. She picks it up.

SUMEI (TEXT)

Bring Haomeng to shop some good clothes like you wear! Thx. Love!

Haomeng takes a deep breath.

HAOMENG

I was supposed to come here to be free. But now I feel like I'm being spied by my parents.

CASSIE

Forget about the guys. Let's just have fun of making you an expensive decent lady, shall we?

INT. LOUIS VUITTON STORE - DAY

Haomeng opens the door of Louis Vuitton, following her are Cassie and Momo. The luxury store is surprisingly crowded. Lots of Asian people are wondering around like they are in a supermarket. The girls split to different corners naturally, like it's there own bedroom.

CASSIE

Let's meet there in 30 minutes girls!

A stylish white man in a dandy suit comes up to Haomeng, who stands still.

SALESMAN

(with a little French accent)

Welcome to Louis Vuitton, mademoiselle. How are you?

HAOMENG

(nervously)

Good. I'm doing fine.

SALESMAN
Is this your first time here?

HAOMENG
Yeah.

SALESMAN
(takes out an iPad)
C'est bon, C'est bon. Now, may I
have your name and information?
I'll assist you as soon as
possible.

HAOMENG
My name is Haomeng.

SALESMAN
C'est bon. I'll call you Howl. Ms.
Howl, please wait a moment. I'll be
right back.

The salesman immediately leaves, leaving Haomeng with the iPad.

A dark-skinned saleswoman with beautiful wavy hair notices the confused Haomeng and walks up to her.

SALESWOMAN
Nihao?

Haomeng looks at her in surprise.

HAOMENG
Oh! Nihao!

SALESWOMAN
(speaks in fluent
Mandarin)
Yeah! My name is May. May I help
you?

May points at her nameplate on her chest.

HAOMENG
Wow. Your Chinese is amazing!

May smiles and approaches her.

MAY
I studies in Beijing for three
years so I can communicate with my
costumers. It's backward and almost
suicidal to not know how to talk to
Chinese customers in luxury stores.
(MORE)

MAY (CONT'D)

(May sneaks a look at the
French salesman)
Westerners don't shop in luxury
store anymore. It's Chinese
people's supermarket!

HAOMENG

Wow. Really? No wonder every girl
in my college has a luxury bag.

MAY

Are you interested in anything? I
can give a good discount.

HAOMENG

But the other sales person just
asked me to wait.

MAY

How rude! He just left you hanging
there like this? Typical arrogant
white European who still naively
think they have any superiority in
the world.

May quickly looks around and whispers to Haomeng's ear.

MAY (CONT'D)

These white people have zero work
ethics. Let me help you. You can
trust someone who speak your
tongue.

HAOMENG

But.

May gently puts her arm around Haomeng's shoulder and leads
her inside the store.

MAY

Sweetie, just tell me what you
want. I will help you.

They walk into the inner room, which is a way bigger space
than the entrance room. There is a second floor in this room
as well. Every thing is decorated in classic golden color.
Every bag is carefully placed in a square grid in the wall
with dramatic lighting, as if they are Egyptian antiques
being displayed in a museum. There are more Chinese people
inside, including some middle-aged people who look so casual
as if they are shopping for dinner.

MAY (CONT'D)

What kind of handbag are you using?

HAOMENG

A hobo bag from a random store.

MAY

Oh! So this is your first luxury shopping! We need a good entry level bag, don't we?

May carefully puts on white gloves and picks up a medium-sized leather satchel from one grid and shows it to Haomeng.

MAY (CONT'D)

This is one of the most classic handbags in Louis Vuitton. A perfect city companion for everyday life, with a humble price of 2,100\$.

HAOMENG

Well, yeah, it looks awesome.

Cassie and Momo come to Haomeng. Another Chinese saleswoman follows Momo closely while juggling three bags in her arms.

MOMO

Oh, my, god. Is this Louis Vuitton or Macy's. I can't even. I'm going to Chanel.

SALESWOMAN

Ms. Du! Please wait! Ms. Du!

Momo rushes out of the store. Cassie looks at Haomeng.

CASSIE

Are you interested in this bag?

HAOMENG

It's very pretty, but I won't be comfortable wearing it because it's too expensive. I'd be worried about hurting it or leaving a stain on it all the time.

CASSIE

That's not a healthy mentality. You deserve expensive bags. You are more expensive than these bags! Don't feel like you have to serve the bags, they need to serve you.

Cassie grabs Haomeng's shoulder and direct her to other shopping people.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Look at these people. They are enjoying their beauty and privilege. Don't you feel like you're on top of the world when you hold things that's too expensive to the majority of the population?

Haomeng looks around the Chinese girls who wear beautiful clothes and bags. Her eyes light up.

HAOMENG

Yeah, yeah! You're right! I should change this mindset. I deserve a Louis Vuitton! I can also be beautiful like the instagram influencers!

CASSIE

That's right! You are the rich one! Don't ever forget that!

(Cassie points at the big displaying wall)

There must be something you prefer to others?

Haomeng looks at all the bags in display.

HAOMENG

I think everything is amazing. Like this one.

She casually pointed to a black velvet calfskin handbag.

MAY

This one is the iconic Capucines handbag. But it's one of Holy Grail level bags. You just started your luxury journey. We can take baby steps to Holy Grail.

CASSIE

Let her take a look. She can start off Holy Grail.

MAY

Sure, Ms. Fu. I am not allowed to touch this bag. I'll get one from the storage room.

May carefully puts back the leather satchel and rushes out of the room.

HAOMENG

I don't think it's necessary. This handbag looks so expensive, and arrogant. I don't know. I'd feel sorry for the bag if it belongs to me.

CASSIE

It's just a bag. It's made for people! There's no bag allowed to be arrogant to a girl.

Haomeng gives her a look of gratitude. She looks around the fancy room again. Cassie gently smiles to Haomeng. She puts her hands on Haomeng's shoulder.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Take your time to pick the right one. We have twenty more stores to visit today.

HAOMENG

Do we?

INT. CHANEL STORE - DAY

Haomeng tries on different dresses and cute hats in front of a full-length mirror. Sales assistants dressed in uniforms stand next to her while holding her bag.

INT. FENDI STORE - DAY

Haomeng trying out stockings on a couch. Sales assistant kneels down and helps her pull on the stockings.

INT. SUPREME STORE - DAY

Haomeng plays Supreme money gun.

INT. CHANEL STORE - DAY

Haomeng finally picks a small piece after seeing the price, while Momo packs a mountain of boxes at the cashier.

EXT. ENTRANCE OF THE CHANEL STORE - DAY

Haomeng stands with Cassie and has three shopping bags in her hands. Cassie only has two bags. Haomeng takes in a deep breath with eyes closed.

CASSIE

So is it true that American air is sweeter than Chinese air?

HAOMENG

Hahahaha. Even if it is, it's
because it smells like freedom.

She looks at her phone.

We see TEXT MESSAGE typing onscreen in Chinese:

"Did you just use 21,000\$? I'm so happy that you are taking
care of yourself! Remember! Buy something classy and decent!"

Haomeng rolls her eyes and puts her phone in her bag.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

I was wrong. There's no freedom in
the world.

CASSIE

My mom used to call me 10 times a
day when I just came here. Your mom
is just worried.

HAOMENG

She literally was trying to
manipulate the way I dress.

CASSIE

You know most girls are complaining
about how their parents won't give
them money to spend.

HAOMENG

Well, I'm not proud to spend my
parents' money, but she's trying to
doll me up so I can attract a man
into marrying me. I feel so cheap.

Haomeng swings her shopping bags and tries to throw them on
the ground. But she looks at the dirty floor and pauses.
Cassie shrugs.

CASSIE

These are expensive.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

A taxi slowly parks at an apartment building with around 20
floors. We see lots of young people working out in the gym at
the first floor through the windows. A tough-looking security
person wearing hat and uniform stands at the gate. People
swipe their cards by the door when they enter. Cassie looks
out of the taxi window.

CASSIE
How's your roommate?

HAOMENG
He's fine. I just met him yesterday
when I moved in.

CASSIE
He? Is he cute?

HAOMENG
Ugh. Quite the opposite.

CASSIE
Really? Why did you choose to room
with him?

HAOMENG
My parents insisted that I live
with a roommate because we can look
after each other.
(rolls her eyes)

CASSIE
And they are right. We didn't just
travel all the way to New York to
live a hard life and study like
nerds. We are here to meet people
of our level and enjoy life
together. I would've shared room
with you if I didn't have Momo
already.

HAOMENG
But I kind of want to expand my
world and meet new people, and
maybe even find a new way to live.

CASSIE
Well, you definitely have more
choices than in China. Like me.
Before I came here, I thought I
would never leave my parents, and I
cried my eyeballs out when they
wanted me to study in America. But
look at me now.
(Cassie puts on her
sunglasses)
I'm the New York fashion legend.

HAOMENG
You blend in here so well.

CASSIE

I like it here. I suit the lifestyle. That's why I'm trying to have my own fashion business here without any help from my parents.

HAOMENG

Wow. No wonder my mom always asked me to learn from you. You parents must be so proud of you.

CASSIE

They are waiting for me to fail so I will go home and marry someone they arrange for me.

HAOMENG

No way.

CASSIE

That's why I can not fail. Those people you met in the club are my potential clients.

HAOMENG

Wow. You sound so cool. I want to have a clear goal like you do. But right now all I have is still arranged by my parents. Including the roommate. I met him in the NewYork WeChat group you told me. He said he's quiet and hygienic. What he didn't tell me was that he has anime merch all over the place and screams at the night playing online games.

CASSIE

Whoa. That's annoying. You can move out if you see some nice people are looking for roommates.

HAOMENG

I'll see.

Haomeng gets out of the car.

CASSIE

You can use some earplugs at night.

HAOMENG

I will. Thank you for today.

Haomeng closes the car door and carries six big shopping bags while walking to the apartment building gate.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF HAOMENG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Outside of a house in a quiet neighborhood, Haomeng knocks the door of her apartment. Her hands are full of all the stuff she shopped today. Her roommate RUI, 21, a chubby spectacled guy in a shirt which has an anime girl on it, opens the door and peers from inside.

RUI

Who is it?

Haomeng can hear games noise from inside.

HAOMENG

I am your roommate, Haomeng.

RUI

Is there anyone with you?

HAOMENG

No one. I'm tired. Let me in!

Rui slides open the door. Haomeng stumbles as she steps inside. Her shopping boxes are all over the place. Rui carefully walks around the boxes and runs into his room.

INT. HAOMENG'S ROOM - NIGHT

Haomeng jumps on her bed in her pjs. She looks at the wall next to her bed as she can hear talking voice. She puts her ears to the wall.

RUI'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Your new roommate's picture looks cute! Do you like her?

RUI (O.S)

I am not sure. She came very late every night. Probably not some decent woman. I am still observing though.

RUI'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Oh no! I hope she doesn't bring any bad influence on my baby boy!

Haomeng punches hard on the wall. Suddenly, the doorbell rings.

RUI (O.S.)
I told you no stranger is allowed!

Haomeng walks out of her room to answer the door.

HAOMENG
It's my Chinese delivery. Chill
out!

INT. HAOMENG'S APARTMENT DOOR - NIGHT

Haomeng opens the door, and it's Chris holding the Chinese delivery box.

HAOMENG
Oh! Hi!

CHRIS
Hey! You again!

He hands over the food to her.

HAOMENG
Thank you! Wow! You delivered my
food!

CHRIS
Yep. This is actually my parents
restaurant.

HAOMENG
Oh, well, you are good at business.

CHRIS
Just trying to a good son. But I
didn't lie about anything. The
taste is really good although I
have never eaten authentic Sichuan
food.

HAOMENG
I'll tell you if it's authentic or
not after I have it.

CHRIS
Oh, that'd be great. We love to
have some high quality customer
reviews.

HAOMENG
Ok.

CHRIS

Well, I'm looking forward to your review then.

Chris turns around and leaves. Haomeng waves at him and watches him walking to his car.

Rui suddenly appears from behind his door, holding a phone which is on Facetime with a middle-aged lady. They are both staring at Haomeng.

RUI

Mom, she just flirted with the delivery guy.

RUI'S MOTHER

How promiscuous!

HAOMENG

(startled and turns around)

Shut up, creep!

INT. HAOMENG'S ROOM - NIGHT

Haomeng sits on her chair and gets ready to eat when her phone rings. She sees a text from an unknown number. She opens it.

TEXT MESSAGE typing on screen:

"Hey. It's Chris, the deliver boy from the bar."

Haomeng smiles and jumps on her bed.

TEXT MESSAGE typing on screen:

"Hey! It's Haomeng! The awkward girl who orders food at midnight."

"LoL. How's the food!"

"You mean the duck's blood and beef tripe in spicy soup? Absolute love it. Taste of home. "

"Haha. Glad you like it. It's from my family's restaurant actually."

"Really? I need to visit it some day!"

"You're more than welcome! Hit me up if you feel like going."

"THANK YOU!"

Haomeng smiles happily. Her food is still unpacked on her table.

INT. CASSIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Haomeng walks into a spacious house with Cassie. There are model pictures all over the walls. Cassie throws her Dior bag on the floor. There is a wall of female shoes right next to the door.

HAOMENG

Wow! You guys have so many shoes!

CASSIE

That's because there are three of us. Me, Shuya and Jiajia. Jiajia stays in the basement.

HAOMENG

No way! I saw her room in her live streaming and there were brand clothes everywhere I literally dropped my jaw!

CASSIE

Well, that's her choice. Online image is way more important than her own living condition.

Cassie turns to Haomeng and smiles.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

So you are interested in that ABC?

Haomeng hangs her bag on a hanger which looks like a Christmas tree of brand bags. Haomeng avoids her eyes.

HAOMENG

I don't know. I just want to have casual fun like a regular girl. I don't remember when's the last time that I had feelings for someone without pressure from my parents.

They fall on the couch.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

They forbid me to get close to any guy when I was a teenager, and after I hit 20, they became so anxious to have me married like my womb was dying.

CASSIE

Chinese parents. But you've always been a good girl so your parents are used to you being good. I was a delinquent and I also have a brother so I'm less important. So my dad sent me away. Most girls like me were sent to poor rural areas and I was New York City.

Haomeng holds Cassie's hands.

HAOMENG

I saw your brother before I left. He's such a pampered boy.

CASSIE

I know. So is every modern Chinese man. The emperor of their little kingdom.

Haomeng smiles.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Have fun with that guy if he makes you happy, girl. I won't tip off auntie Sumei.

HAOMENG

But what should I do in the long run? When my school is over?

Haomeng looks around the model pictures. Cassie is in some of the BTS where she seems to be working on the models clothes and hair.

CASSIE

You'll figure it out when the right time comes. I didn't even know how to do makeup when I first came here.

Haomeng still looks at Cassie's works.

HAOMENG

But these pictures are so beautiful. You've come so far.

CASSIE

Do you want to help me with my photoshoot?

HAOMENG

Sure! What can I do?

CASSIE
Be who you are.

EXT. TIME'S SQUARE - DAY

In the flashy and crowded time's square, Haomeng is all dressed up with Shuya and Shuya. They pose together for Cassie to shoot. Cassie finishes and shows the photo to them.

SHUYA
Mengmeng you look amazing today! So ravishing!

HAOMENG
I have a good stylist. Cassie!

CASSIE
She also has the nutrition from a love interest.

Shuya immediately grabs Haomeng's arm.

SHUYA
Who's that? Was he in the party last week?

HAOMENG
Um. Yeah. It's not that serious. I only went out with him once.

Shuya wouldn't let go.

SHUYA
Who?

HAOMENG
It's the bartender.

Shuya lets go of her arm.

SHUYA
Seriously? Bartender?

SHUYA (CONT'D)
Oh. That ABC.

CASSIE
He's quite cute I remember.

SHUYA
Where did he take you? What did you do?

Haomeng blushes.

HAOMENG

I'd like to keep it private. I'm not that kind of girl who loves sharing their love life.

EXT. HAOMENG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT(FLASHBACK)

A pretty old Nissan parks at the front door of Haomeng's apartment. Haomeng wears cute dress and high heels. She opens the car door and jumps in. Chris, sits at the driver's seat, turns to her. The car is pretty clean inside except for many CDs all over the place.

CHRIS

Hi.

HAOMENG

Hi!

EXT. SOHO MANHATTAN - DAY

The four girls walk in the soho area like four Instagram models, drawing a lot of attention to them.

SHUYA

Wait! He drives what? Nissan? Eww.

HAOMENG

What?

SHUYA

Our boyfriends are members of the Chinese Supercar club based in the U.S.

SHUYA (CONT'D)

And even outside of their circle, the average car among our friends is BMW.

HAOMENG

Ok. But his car has a very nice smell to it. Anyway!

EXT. CHRIS' PARENTS' RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A cute restaurant with neon lights says LAO MA.

INT. LAO MA - NIGHT(FLASHBACK)

Chris and Haomeng open the door. There are red lanterns in the restaurant and traditional Chinese landscape paintings. A small south Asian girl GINA in a Chinese suit standing by the register.

GINA

Hey, Chris. You helping out tonight?

CHRIS

No. I'm a guest. Can I have a table for two.

GINA

Sure. This way.

Gina takes them to a small table, puts down the menu and leaves. Haomeng looks around.

HAOMENG

This place is so adorable. It makes me almost miss home.

CHRIS

What? You didn't miss home? Usually the new International students are very home sick.

HAOMENG

Um. Not me. I kinda escaped to here.

CHRIS

How come?

HAOMENG

You know. Chinese parents.

CHRIS

Well, yeah. They can be very possessive of their kids.

HAOMENG

Are you parents also like that? Aren't they in fact Americans?

CHRIS

Well, they actually grew up in Southeast China and only came here 30 years ago. So I guess they are not much different from yours.

HAOMENG

Do they ask you to delete all your pictures with the opposite sex because that might look bad on you?

CHRIS

No!

HAOMENG

They're totally different.

CHRIS

Geez. That's crazy. I'm sorry.

HAOMENG

Don't be. Now I mostly post pictures on apps like Instagram or snapchat where my parents have no access to.

CHRIS

Nice.

Chris' father TONG, wearing an apron, comes over to the table.

TONG

Are you ready to order?

CHRIS

Dad!

INT. AN ANTIQUE CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Inside a glittery antique clothing store, Haomeng leans on the door and looks at the window. The three girls are looking at the clothes. Shuya makes a sudden turn to Haomeng while holding a sweater.

SHUYA

Wait what? His dad is a waiter?

HAOMENG

No. He's messing with him. His parents own the restaurant.

SHUYA

Please tell me it's a chain restaurant.

A pause.

HAOMENG
It is a restaurant.

Shuya turns back.

SHUYA
Poor guy.

Cassie giggles.

INT. LAO MA - NIGHT(FLASHBACK)

Haomeng stands up.

HAOMENG
Uncle. Please take a seat.

TONG
Oh that's ok! You're the guest
today!

CHRIS
Why are you taking orders? Where's
mom?

Chris looks at the kitchen direction. His mother REN is
peaking from behind the curtain.

TONG
I just heard that you took a girl
here, so I was curious.

CHRIS
Oh lord. Now you see her. Can I
have Gina back, please?

Haomeng is still standing. Tong motions to her to sit.

TONG
What's your name?

Haomeng slowly sits down.

HAOMENG
Haomeng.

TONG
Haomeng. Where are you from?

HAOMENG
Sichuan.

TONG
 (imitating Sichuan
 dialect)
 Sichuanese gal! Must be hungry for
 some spicy food!

HAOMENG
 I ordered some Sichuan food
 yesterday from your restaurant. It
 was amazing!

TONG
 I'll ask the kitchen to make
 special Sichuan food for you if you
 like it! It's on the house!

HAOMENG
 No no no!

TONG
 Then make him pay!

Tong pats Chris' shoulder.

TONG (CONT'D)
 Be a man and take the bill.

CHRIS
 That's what I planned to do.

Haomeng smiles to Chris.

TONG
 Good. Good. I'll leave you alone.

Tong goes back to the kitchen. Chris' mom is still peaking at
 them from behind the curtain.

CHRIS
 Yeah. That's my version of Chinese
 parents.

HAOMENG
 Your dad was so nice. He didn't ask
 about my age or my parents jobs.

CHRIS
 Why would he? Never mind. By the
 way, I didn't mean to set you up
 with my parents. Sorry if that
 makes you uncomfortable.

HAOMENG

Oh, it's totally fine! They seem so sweet!

Ren comes to them with a big bowl with boiling fish and red Shuya. Haomeng stands up.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

Thank you, auntie!

REN

Sit, sit!

CHRIS

Thanks, mom. But you don't have to serve us yourself.

REN

Nonsense! This is like our home! You brought your friend of course we have to show hospitality!

Ren turns to Haomeng who just sat down.

REN (CONT'D)

(Chinese)

Look at you! So well-mannered and pretty! Chris used to have a blond girlfriend who talked to me like I was her classmate! I was so pissed! This is the first time my son has ever taken an indigenous Chinese girl to our restaurant. I'm beyond happy!

HAOMENG

(Chinese)

Auntie, I'm not his girlfriend.

REN

(Chinese)

He only takes girls that he really likes here because he knows we're always here.

Haomeng takes a surprise look at Chris, who is staring at them.

CHRIS

Why didn't I take my Chinese classes seriously?

Chris puts his chopsticks in the bowl.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. POSH RESTAURANT IN SOHO - DAY

In a western restaurant with whimsical painted walls, decorated by roses and candles. The girls are sitting around a tiny white table with delicate desserts served on three tiered tray. Cassie sips tea from a flower teacup.

CASSIE

Aww. It's so sweet!

SHUYA

Nissan and Chinese restaurant.

HAOMENG

Why can't you let it go?

SHUYA

Well, it's a shocker! Just think about how you're gonna balance your life with that guy!

HAOMENG

It's not like I'm a 18th century princess and he's a farmer's boy! There's nothing to balance! We're living in 2019! Hello?

Haomeng swings her smartphone in Shuya's face.

SHUYA

Don't do that! I'm an Instagram influencer. I know that thing much better than you do.

Cassie swaps her phone.

CASSIE

Talking about social media. Guys, we just went viral.

SHUYA

The picture we just took? Where did you post it? Let me see!

SHUYA (CONT'D)

Was it because of me? I have 40k followers on Weibo.

They all look down on their phone. We see the phone screen where their picture at the times square has more than 5,000 likes and it's still going up. Haomeng clicks on the comments.

COMMENTER A

Gorgeous!

COMMENTER B

Using your sugar daddy's money in the rotten capitalistic country. Typical whores.

COMMENTER C

One day they will come back when their white dude don't need them to suck his dick, and I for one will not accept these sluts! Ewwww!

COMMENTER D

They left thirty million Chinese men suffering in loneliness. I'll kill them if they dare to come back!

Haomeng rolls her eyes.

HAOMENG

What the hell?

CASSIE

Yeah. What's wrong with these guys? I could be sucking a black dudes' dick, or a brown one.

SHUYA

Yeah. Totally racist.

The girls burst into laughters.

EXT. SHANGHAI - DAY

The picture of the girls fly over the Internet and over the Pacific ocean and reaches the phone of NICK WU, who looks like a model, sits inside of a beautiful Chinese garden with his mother, a graceful middle-aged lady who dressed in a cheongsam.

NICK' MOTHER

(Shanghainese)

Nick, I want more Chinese flowering crabapple in the right wing of my garden. What do you think?

Nick is completely drawn to his phone. He doesn't response.
Nick' mother looks up at him.

NICK' MOTHER (CONT'D)

Nick!

Nick takes a close look at these pictures and he stands up.

NICK

Mom, I'm going to America for two months. I'll be back before Spring Festival.

NICK'S MOTHER

Did that woman seduce you again?
Her parents don't even want her!
That speaks for her character.

NICK

I just got bored playing with flowers with you. Oh, Chinese flowering crabapple is a great choice. Do it.

INT. CASSIE'S STUDIO - DAY

A tiny and tidy studio. Cassie is sewing cloth on her sewing station with glasses. Nick sneaks inside the room. Cassie looks at him. She takes off her glasses and runs to Nick.

CASSIE

Nick!

They hug each other.

INT. CASSIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Cassie and Nick lie on the couch comfortably.

NICK

I saw that picture of those beautiful girls, and immediately recognized that's your design.

CASSIE

Then you just jumped on a plane?
Your mom has already hated me so much.

NICK

I didn't jump on a plane on the spur of the moment. I thought so much after you dumped me.

Nick sits straight.

CASSIE

Oh, Nick.

NICK

I know, I know. You don't want a relationship with me, and it's fine. But, I just felt so bad.

CASSIE

You know how I feel about family like yours. It's not just money. It's about my dignity as a woman. I promised myself that I would never compromise to any patriarchal insult ever.

NICK

It's just a polite gesture! You don't need to take it personal.

CASSIE

I'm not having this conversation again.

NICK

Ok. I'm sorry. I guess I'll just visit some old friends and send myself back to Shanghai.

INT. MOMA - DAY

Inside a bright gallery. The wall is decorated by a series black-and-white pictures of Asian people, including farmers, students and soldiers. Under each picture, there is a plate explaining the story and photographer of the picture. The room is pretty quiet except for occasional whispers.

A few people are slowly walking in the room. Some stops in front of a picture and studies carefully. Chris and Haomeng slowly walk among the crowd. Haomeng wears casual shirt and sneakers.

HAOMENG

Thank you for taking me here. This place is so inspiring.

CHRIS

I can't believe you haven't been here yet. Where do you guys usually go other than night clubs and shopping center.

HAOMENG

Is that what you think of the Chinese people?

CHRIS

Not all Chinese. But I have worked in the club for a while, and the mainlander students are wild. They're like the richest people I have ever seen.

HAOMENG

No. Most of them are just normal people.

CHRIS

Normal people don't go to tropical islands or Milan Fashion week for spring break. Even their socks are Balenciaga. By the way, you look way fancier than I first met you.

Haomeng embarrassingly touches her hair. She is wrapped in nice clothing.

HAOMENG

Of course I need to look good for a date.

CHRIS

Hope you're enjoying the date.

They smile at each other. Haomeng's phone rings. She looks down on her phone. It's from Sumei.

SUMEI (TEXT)

What are you doing?

Haomeng puts back her phone. But it rings again. Sumei pushes a contact information to Haomeng.

SUMEI (TEXT) (CONT'D)

Talk to this young man! He's a lawyer and also living in New York!

Haomeng puts back her phone angrily.

CHRIS

What's wrong?

HAOMENG

My mom. Seems like she wants to talk to a lawyer. Nothing serious.

CHRIS

You sure? A lawyer?

HAOMENG

It's really fine! Hey, what are you up to later?

CHRIS

I don't know.

HAOMENG

What do you usually do for the weekend?

INT. CHRIS' DEPARTMENT - DAY

Haomeng is wearing glasses and sweatshirt. She crouches on the couch and plays video games with Chris, who lies next to her. In front of them are finished pizza boxes.

HAOMENG

This is awesome. We should do this every Friday night.

CHRIS

I agree.

Haomeng's phone rings. She looks down on her phone. It's from a group chat. It says: Nick JOINED THE GROUP CHAT.

SHUYA (TEXT)

(Chinese)

Heyyyyy! Nick! You're back?

JIMMY (TEXT)

Yo man!

NICK (TEXT)

What's up, man?

SHUYA (TEXT)

Let's get together!

NICK (TEXT)

Are you still doing the crazy weekend thing?

JOSHUA (TEXT)
HELL YEAH!

NICK (TEXT)
LET'T STEP UP THE GAME THIS
WEEKEND! IT'S ALL ON ME!

The group chat explodes with emojis.

CHRIS
Your mom's case sounds intense.

HAOMENG
Um, it's these guys. It seems like
Cassie's boyfriend is here and he
wants to do something crazy or
whatever.

CASSIE (TEXT)
Haomeng hasn't met Nick yet. Be
sure to join us!

MOMO (TEXT)
SO EXCITED ABOUT IT! SEE YOU GUYS
TOMORROW!

HAOMENG
Do you want to meet him?

CHRIS
Who? Cassie's boyfriend?

HAOMENG
Maybe not.

CHRIS
If you want me to. Why not?

HAOMENG
I think they're having a kind of
private party tomorrow.

CHRIS
I'm not welcome.

HAOMENG
Of course I welcome you! But I'm
not holding the party.

CHRIS
Why are these people so exclusive?

HAOMENG

It's about the harmony. Chinese people just move together.

CHRIS

What are they gonna do?

HAOMENG

I don't know. Karaoke probably. Many some wine.

CHRIS

Do you still have the pizza game night tomorrow.

HAOMENG

I'll just say hi to them and I'll be back for pizza. I promise.

They kiss each other.

INT. LIMO - EVENING

Haomeng, wearing jeans and shirts, steps into a limo. Cassie, Nick, Jimmy, Shuya and Jiajia are all dressed up and drinking champagne.

HAOMENG

What is going on?

CASSIE

Mengmeng! This is my friend, Nick.

Nick is wearing a dashing white suit and a 2 million-dollar Richard Mille watch. He is tall and tanned, with chiseled facial features.

NICK

Hey.

HAOMENG

Hi.

NICK

I heard that you just had an ABC boyfriend. Why don't you bring him along.

JIMMY

He might not be able to afford it. But you can pay for him.

HAOMENG

Oh, I thought this is Chinese-only karaoke.

NICK

Hahaha.

HAOMENG

Which karaoke are we going though?
I hope it's not too far. Oh thank you.

Shuya and Jimmy throw a little tablet in the drinks. She gives Haomeng a cup of champagne.

NICK

We are going to Havana.

HAOMENG

Never heard of that Karaoke.

INT. AIRPORT - NEW YORK CITY - EVENING

A limousine drives into a small airport, and all the way arrives in front of a jet. A bunch of fancy-dressed Chinese young people get out of the limo. Haomeng gets out of the car as well. She anxiously grabs Cassie.

HAOMENG

I can't just go to another country!
I promised I'll go home tonight!

CASSIE

Calm down! Maybe you can call Chris and see if he can join us?

NICK

Hurry up, guys! My chartered plane leaves in 30 minutes.

Momo holds Haomeng's arm.

MOMO

C'mon! You don't need your boyfriend's permission to hang out with your friends for a while.

JIAJIA

Unless you don't consider us as friends.

Haomeng holds her phone and follows Momo. She looks at the message box and exit the conversation.

HAOMENG

(whisper)

It's a only a couple of hours.

EXT. JOSÉ MARTÍ INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - NIGHT

A small jet arrives at the small airport. Around 10 Chinese young people rush out of the plane.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF THE AIRPORT - NIGHT

Haomeng can't hold back her surprise and grabs Cassie arm.

HAOMENG

Did you see the airport staff outfit? They're wearing white socks!

Jimmy looks at his phone.

JIMMY

There's no Uber around?

Nick gestures to a line of colorful vintage cars waiting by the streets.

NICK

Who needs Uber when you have these fancy cars?

The girls are screaming.

JIAJIA

Whoa! These cars so beautiful! Are you saying that we can drive them tonight?

NICK

Oh, I hired drivers already. I'm not sure if your driver license can work here.

MOMO

Don't be so boring! We're driving them! Just pay the drivers to go away!

The Chinese people run to the cars.

HAOMENG

Are we really driving by ourselves?
But is it legal? I, I don't know if
it's safe to drive here.

Cassie grabs her to one of the cars.

CASSIE

Don't worry! We'll drive. I
promised Auntie that I will take
care of you!

Shuya holds a selfie stick and quickly mounts a big phone on
it.

SHUYA

Guys, guys! Slow down! Don't start
the car until I start the
livestream!

But no one pays attention to her. The Chinese kids all get
into the cars and puts some money into the drivers hands.
They take the seats and turn on the radio. With the local
Spanish music playing, they start the cars and slowly drive
away.

EXT. Cabaña Fortress - NIGHT

On the old fortress, some cannon are being fires with
soldiers in white uniform holding flags next to them. The
Chinese young people sit in the colorful cars which are
parked outside of the fort and cheer.

EXT. OUTDOOR CLUB - NIGHT

In an open space filled with palm trees, local dancers and
singers are performing on stage in local dresses. The Chinese
kids dancing and drinking. Girls are snapping selfies like
crazy. Jimmy takes off his shirt and puts his arms around
Jiajia.

JIMMY

Babe, unbutton your shirt and show
some skin! We're taking a picture.

Jiajia reluctantly unbuttons the top two buttons of her shirt
and pose with Jimmy.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

In a local night club, Spanish songs are blasting people's
eardrum. Shuya holds her selfie stick up high to cover the
entire room.

SHUYA

Damn, Cuba Internet sucks! My fans
can't see me!

Jimmy, without any shirt on, puts a beer bottle up to
Haomeng's mouth.

JIMMY

C'mon, you're a big girl! You can
do it!

Haomeng annoyingly tries to push him away. Nick takes the
bottle away.

NICK

Jimmy, what the hell are you doing?
Leave her alone.

JIMMY

I was messing with her! Relax!

HAOMENG

I told you I don't want to drink
that much! Which part do you not
understand?

JIMMY

(smirks)

Oh I understand very well. When a
woman says that she doesn't want
it, it means she wants it.

HAOMENG

You're so disgusting!

Haomeng pushes through the crows and walks away. Nick looks
at Jimmy.

NICK

Dude, I understand what you're
saying, but saying that out loud is
stupid.

Nick follows Haomeng.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF THE CLUB - NIGHT

Haomeng takes deep breath by the pool. She takes out her
phone and opens the chat with Chris. But there's no signal.

NICK

Hey, are you ok?

HAOMENG

No. I feel bad. When can we go back?

NICK

You wanna go back right now?

HAOMENG

I still have a lot of work to do.

NICK

(slowly puts his hand on
Haomeng's shoulder)
You're stressing yourself out.
Let's enjoy this moment and worry
about work when we're back.

Haomeng looks at him embarrassingly. She tries to walk away, but Nick holds her close to him.

NICK (CONT'D)

Plus, you can't go anywhere without my help! Don't worry, I've paid for everything already. You just let me know what's more you need. I can get you everything.

HAOMENG

Oh, ok.

Haomeng pushes him away awkwardly.

NICK

I mean, everything.

HAOMENG

I don't need anything, but thanks.

Haomeng sees Cassie and waves to her immediately.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

Cassie! Here!

Haomeng pushes Nick away.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

I'll catch up with you later.

Haomeng runs to Cassie.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

Help me! Cassie!

CASSIE

What's wrong? Is Nick harassing you?

HAOMENG

Not harassing, but he's a little weird. Why are you dating a guy like him?

CASSIE

I dated him. He has a sweet side to him. But he could also be pretty immature, and even awkward sometimes. He's used to having everything his way.

HAOMENG

This is all too much for me. I shouldn't have come here.

CASSIE

Don't say that! Since we are here, we may as well stay and make the best of it. C'mon, let me introduce some local alcohol to you! Your boy will be fine at home by himself for one night.

Haomeng sighs and puts her phone back to her bag.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Inside the NYU library. Haomeng looks pale with messy hair. She stares at the paper. Shuya and Jiajia are also sitting next her. Shuya chats with people on her phone. Jiajia is taking selfies.

HAOMENG

Why haven't I ever seen you guys studying?

JIAJIA

Because it only costs two dollars a word to hire someone to write your paper?

HAOMENG

Seriously?

JIAJIA

Most of the people who went to Havana on Saturday night came here with fake grades, girl.

HAOMENG

Jesus! Why are you here if you don't study at all?

JIAJIA

I don't know about this girl, but I'm here taking pictures for my fans.

SHUYA

I'm here to breath some intellectual air.

Haomeng rubs her temple.

HAOMENG

I feel too weak to process what you're saying. Why did I feel so awful. I slept a whole day but still feel so sick.

Shuya sneaks a look at Haomeng from behind her phone.

SHUYA

You were literally on cloud nine that night. You exhausted yourself.

Haomeng's phone vibrates. She picks it up. It's a voice message. Haomeng puts on her air pods and clicks on the message.

SUMEI (O.S.)

Delete all your pictures! Right now! How disgraceful!

Haomeng takes off air pods immediately.

SHUYA

Damn! What a scream.

HAOMENG

What is wrong.

Haomeng opens WeChat, and sees lots of pictures from the Havana trip where she looks super happy with arms around stranger guys.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

Oh, dear.

SUMEI (TEXT)

I should never have let loose of you! See what kind of demon you've become!

(MORE)

SUMEI (TEXT) (CONT'D)

I heard that you didn't contact the Lawyer either! I'm going to your place! I'll bring you back to the right track!

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

The hallway clean and bright. Many students walk around with books in their hands. Chris walks out one classroom with a bunch of friends.

FRIEND #1

Congrats on your defense! Only two papers and three exams to go!

CHRIS

Yup! I will have a B.S. in accounting and a huge student loan to pay off very soon.

FRIEND #2

Isn't your girlfriend a mainlander? She might be able to help you out.

CHRIS

Hey, is that what you think of me?

FRIEND #2

Just kidding. But seriously, a mainlander girl? They are very superficial and high maintenance. They treat their boyfriends like slaves and have them do their homework.

CHRIS

Haomeng is a very independent girl. She never asked me to do anything for her.

Jimmy with some Chinese guys walk in the corridor. Jimmy points at Chris.

JIMMY

Are you the guy from the other night?

Chris and his friends look at him confusingly. Jimmy turns to his friends.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Guys, guys, this is the bartender who's dating Haomeng secretly.

His friends all smirk.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Man, she's a wild girl. We had fun
last weekend in Havana.

Chris angrily pushes him.

CHRIS

Watch your mouth!

Chris' friends pull him from Jimmy. Jimmy takes out his
phone. He shows it to Chris. There are pictures from Cuba.

JIMMY

Wow. I only said what I know. I
party with your girl every week.
You didn't know?

FRIEND #1

Chris, ignore him.

Chris leaves in anger.

INT. CHRIS' DEPARTMENT - DAY

Haomeng packs her stuff in Chris' place in panic. Chris opens
the door and walks in. Chris walks to her. Haomeng still
focuses on the packing.

HAOMENG

My parents are coming here. I can't
let them know that I'm spending
nights in a man's place. They are
extremely conservative.

CHRIS

You first hid me from your friends.
Now you're hiding me from your
parents. Are you embarrassed of me
or what?

Haomeng stops packing and looks at him in surprise.

HAOMENG

What are you talking about?

CHRIS

You seemed to be having a great
time last weekend in Cuba, while I
was waiting for you all night.

HAOMENG

Oh, please. Not now. Do you know how hard it is for me to balance you and my life? I'm juggling everyday. I never really wanted to go to Cuba.

CHRIS

How is that balancing when you were just lying to me?

HAOMENG

It's not time for this! I'm having a huge crisis right now and if you don't want to help out then that's it.

Haomeng closes her suitcase and angrily leaves the apartment.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

In the airport, Haomeng anxiously looks at the people walking toward them. Sumei, with sunglasses, colorful scarf and golden handbag, along with Kai, who's in a dandy hat and chic coat, show up in the crowd. Haomeng waves at them happily. Sumei takes off her sunglasses and looks at Haomeng with a frown. Kai walks slowly to Haomeng and give her a hug.

HAOMENG

Papa!

Sumei grabs her arms and gently pushes her away from Kai. She almost screams.

SUMEI

What happened to you! Why are so fat!

Haomeng's face turns red.

HAOMENG

I, I'm not fat.

SUMEI

Look at your ass! It's huge! Like an American.

HAOMENG

Mom!

Haomeng looks around, making sure that no one is watching them.

KAI

Sweetie, you do look chubby! Did you eat a lot American food? We told you no American food!

Sumei still grabs Haomeng, studying and touching her outfit.

SUMEI

Look at you! What the hell are you wearing? Uniqlo? Old Navy?

HAOMENG

Wha..? I just wanted to be casual.

SUMEI

I don't remember raising you to look like a homeless.

She takes Sumei's suitcase and rushes to the entrance.

HAOMENG

Let's get you settled first.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Nick drives a car with Cassie sit at the passenger seat.

CASSIE

You don't have to come with me to meet Haomengs' parents. They are from my hometown. If they see me with you, they will talk.

NICK

People talk.

Cassie anxiously puts her hands together. Her nails sink into her skin.

CASSIE

You don't understand. They will talk to my parents, my relatives, their friends, colleagues, people they meet in a park, and all of these people will turn to me and shoot harsh questions and mean words at me till I give in and admit that I'm a failure. Because that's how they see me. I haven't felt this way for a long time. It's like going to a doomed interview.

NICK

You're paranoid. Old people are like that. They just don't like the fact that we have privacy. Not a big deal.

CASSIE

You say that because you're privileged, just like my brother.

NICK

What privilege? Look at your shoes, and your bag. You're well-provided by your parents.

Cassie looks at her shoes.

CASSIE

I always tell myself the same thing. They give me such a good life so they must love me. But when I had to quit school and pretend that I was ill so they can give birth to a son, and when they never call me but post pictures of them traveling with my brother all the time, I feel like an ugly, worthless little girl who can only beg for attention and love.

NICK

Don't be so dramatic. Your brother is young, and he has to inherit your family's name. That requires some extra attention from your parents.

CASSIE

So you will also favor boys when you have kids?

NICK

I like both, of course. But, for a large family like ours, we need a boy to inherit the family name, not a son-in-law to take over the family.

CASSIE

Your daughter will also have your last name. Chinese people don't change our last names after marriage.

NICK

You don't understand the capability of a man. You girls get emotional easily.

CASSIE

I'm not emotional. I'm trying to understand what you think about these things.

NICK

Okay, okay. I don't know how to argue with girls. Just eat, shop and have fun. Don't nag like a middle-aged woman. Nobody cares about these things.

Cassie sighs and looks out of the window.

INT. FINE RESTAURANT - EVENING

In a nice restaurant, Cassie, Nick, Haomeng and her parents are having dinner.

KAI

Cassie, I haven't seen you for years. See how gorgeous you turned out!

SUMEI

Indeed! So stylish and elegant. Teach our Mengmeng something. She came to airport in a 30\$ shirt!

CASSIE

Oh! We did a lot of shopping, didn't we?

HAOMENG

It's comfortable! And also beautiful.

SUMEI

Can you believe her? That's why you don't have a boyfriend and Cassie is with such a perfect young man.

Sumei looks at Nick with a big smile. She looks very jealous. Cassie sips her drinks awkwardly.

KAI

Thank you for the dinner! It's absolutely great!

NICK

I'm glad you are enjoying our family restaurant.

KAI

Your parents must have worked so hard to be able to expand their business in NYC. How admirable!

Haomeng frowns.

SUMEI

Do you have any male friends?

HAOMENG

Cassie, where should we go next?

SUMEI

Don't interrupt me. Try to make some male friends like Nick.

KAI

You are such a lovely couple. When are you going to get married? Cassie, you can't wait any longer. You're already 25!

Cassie and Nick look awkward.

CASSIE

Uncle, actually, I don't want to get married.

The whole table looks at Cassie in shock.

KAI

What? How can you not get married?

CASSIE

I have a good job, good life, good friends and a lot of freedom. Can you tell me why I need get married?

KAI

No matter how much you have achieved, you are still a girl. You need a man by your side to take care of you. Plus, as the old saying goes, there are three ways to be unfilial, having no sons is the worst. How can you hurt your parents like that?

CASSIE

Girls, sons. I've had enough of that bullshit. Just because my brother has a penis and I don't doesn't take any value away from me. I couldn't care less about my parents' feelings, as they never cared about mine.

Cassie wipes her mouth, as everyone looks at her in shock.

KAI

Your parents did what was good for you.

Cassie stands up and takes her handbag.

CASSIE

I'm sorry for being so rude. I probably had too much wine. I need to go home.

Cassie leaves the room.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF THE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Cassie runs out of the restaurant. Haomeng follows her and grabs her arm.

HAOMENG

Cassie!

CASSIE

I'm sorry. I'm too sensitive.

HAOMENG

No! I'm sorry! I've used to the way my parents talk and forgot how rude they could be. Please don't take it personal.

CASSIE

I know how people back home see me. No matter what I do, how much I achieve, I'll forever be the daughter that nobody wants. This is a wake-up call. I'm not holding on to my family anymore. From now on, I'll only focus on myself and my happiness. You should do the same.

Cassie takes off her shoes and shoves them in a nearby dumpster. She leaves. Haomeng looks at her disappear into the night crowd in the streets with bare foot.

INT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - NIGHT

Haomeng and her parents walk into the big elevator of Empire State Building at night. Haomeng walks behind her parents and Cassie. The crowd separate her from her patents, leaving her alone with Nick.

HAOMENG

Don't you need to comfort Cassie?

NICK

She needs some time to chill out.
By the way, I'm not sure if I want her anymore.

HAOMENG

What?

NICK

She threw a tantrum before we had dinner. She's being a psycho recently. Unlike you. You're so stable. Your family is also stable.

HAOMENG

Uh, thank you.

NICK

I'm sorry.

HAOMENG

For what?

NICK

I didn't know the Havana trip will upset your parents and cause trouble to you.

HAOMENG

It's not your fault. My parents are too sensitive and controlling.

The crowd of people push Haomeng, who almost falls down. Nick puts his arms around Haomeng immediately and holds her in his arms to protect her.

NICK

Be careful.

HAOMENG

Thank you.

Haomeng feels very awkward but the stairs are just too crowded so she has to stay in Nick' arms. Cassie looks at them and smiles. They arrive at the observation deck. Nick lets go of her but still gently puts his hand on her arm to lead her. They see the beautiful starry night of NYC. Cassie holds Sumei's arm and take her and Kai to walk in front of Haomeng.

NICK

Do you plan to go back to China one day?

HAOMENG

I don't know yet.

NICK

Your parents might be heartbroken if you don't.

HAOMENG

That's what they always do. Guilt me into giving up my free will.

NICK

Well, that's called filial piety.

HAOMENG

But, if I fulfill my filial piety like my parents want, there's nothing else I can do with my life.

NICK

They are actually offering you an easy and comfortable life. I don't see anything wrong with that. In fact, I can offer a even more comfortable life.

Haomeng looks awkward and speeds up.

HAOMENG

That's very kind of you.

Nick catches up to her.

NICK

You're welcome.

INT. HAOMENG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sumei and Kai look around in the apartment while Haomeng stands by the door.

HAOMENG

Now you've seen my place. Let me take you back to the hotel. It's pretty late.

Sumei looks at the kitchen sink. Kai is peering into Rui's room.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

There's nothing more left to see. You've even raided Rui's room and bathroom as well.

SUMEI

It's so messy. This is not the place that a lady lives.

HAOMENG

I'll clean up tomorrow. C'mon. I'm so tired. Let's go.

Kai walks towards Haomeng.

KAI

Maybe you should move into a bigger place. This is too small.

HAOMENG

I'll consider about it. Let's go.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF A HOTEL - NIGHT

Haomeng walks out of a hotel. She looks at her phone.

CHRIS (TEXT)

Call me when you have time. We need to talk.

INT. CHRIS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Haomeng sits on the chair, facing Chris.

CHRIS

I'm sorry for what I have said. That's unnecessary.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I was shocked that you didn't tell me that you went to another country last week. With guys like Jimmy.

HAOMENG

I didn't mean to lie to you or play with you. I really thought that they're just gonna have a little fun. But it completely went out of control. I didn't feel like myself. I'm sorry.

CHRIS

I don't want to sound sour. I just feel like I'm not part of your circle. I'll never be.

HAOMENG

But you're part of my life! I promise that I wouldn't do that again.

CHRIS

How's your parents?

HAOMENG

They're enjoying torturing me. They've been complaining about me and America all the time.

CHRIS

Did you mention me to them?

HAOMENG

It's too soon! It's not the right timing! I don't want to upset them,

Chris looks disappointed.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

I know it's unfair to you. I hate it too. I hope they can leave quickly.

CHRIS

Wow! I didn't mean to be a toxic boyfriend who drives his girlfriend away from her family! Just enjoy your time with them. I can wait.

Haomeng hugs him tightly.

INT. HAOMENG'S APARTMENT - DAY

Haomeng opens the door of her apartment in the morning. She looks around and sees the apartment looks nothing like the same apartment she left last night. Everything is tidied and organized. The kitchen sink is clean and all dishes are washed. Rui sits in the living room playing video games.

RUI

Your parents came back last night but you're not here. As you can see, they cleaned up the entire apartment, including my room and toilet. Thanks.

Haomeng immediately takes out her phone and sees 50 unread texts.

INT. CHINESE CLINIC - DAY

In a small Chinese clinic, Sumei stands by the counter and talks to the therapist who is showing her different kinds of herbs with Nick. Haomeng sits back with Kai.

HAOMENG

There's no need for you guys to clean my apartment, especially when mom is suffering from back pain.

KAI

If we don't clean it, you'll never clean your apartment. We know you.

Kai looks at Nick and lowers his voice.

KAI (CONT'D)

Where were you last night?

HAOMENG

Library.

KAI

We were so worried. Don't let anyone know that you didn't go home at night. It's going to ruin your reputation.

HAOMENG

Is the reputation of all the hard-working students ruined?

KAI

We never asked you to work hard.
You just enjoy yourself and meet
more people, good people.

Kai glimpses at Nick.

KAI (CONT'D)

People like Nick. Cassie told us
that they're not together.

HAOMENG

Dad! No!

KAI

Your mom and I are very pleased
with Nick! Not just because he's
rich. He went out of his way to
accompany us the whole time. He
obviously likes you and cares for
you.

HAOMENG

He's just being nice.

KAI

Take a walk with the nice guy while
your mom's having acupuncture.

HAOMENG

No!

Kai nudges her.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

No!

Kai clears his throat.

KAI

Nick, I'll accompany Sumei from
here. Can you take Haomeng to buy
some tea for us?

Nick turns around and looks at Haomeng.

NICK

Sure.

EXT. CHINATOWN - DAY

Haomeng walks on the street of the Chinatown with a cup of
tea in her hand. Nick holds a bag of tea next to her.

HAOMENG

You really don't have to be here
with my parents.

NICK

I don't have anything else to do.
Why not?

HAOMENG

I've been curious for a while. What
do you do?

NICK

I'm the only son of Henry Wu.

Haomeng looks at him, confused.

NICK (CONT'D)

The top 50 richest man in Rupert
Hoogewerf report?

HAOMENG

Oh. Okay. That's very impressive.

NICK

Yeah. I know. But your parents are
very impressive too. My parents
always have nannies take care of
me. But your parents care so much
about you that they do everything
for you. Damn, they couldn't even
go to sleep without making sure
that your place is comfortable
enough to sleep.

Haomeng drinks her tea. They stop at the clinic, and

Haomeng sees Sumei receiving the acupuncture with a frown
while Kai looks at her with worries.

INT. NICK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A big house decorated with minimalist furnitures. The wall is
covered by a massive black painting. The table is also black
and designed with an aesthetic curve. The couch is in grey
color and spread across the living room. A couple of deep
blue speakers stand by the side a huge TV. The room is pretty
tidy and clean, enough space for around 20 people. In fact,
it is packed with Chinese people sitting or standing. The
chic table is full of drinks and glasses. Nick holds a
glasses of wine and standing with Haomeng's parents and
Haomeng.

KAI

Your house looks so cool. What a great taste. Can you help design our new house maybe?

HAOMENG

Dad, please. Don't bother him. You can hire someone to do that.

SUMEI

Nick, thank you so much for looking after our Haomeng.

NICK

I didn't do much.

KAI

You've done a lot! We can go back to China happily knowing you are here.

HAOMENG

I can take care of myself. I'm not a kid.

In another corner of the room, Shuya and Momo drink their beer and look at them.

MOMO

I can't believe she stole her best friends' man.

SHUYA

I told you she's a shady bitch. She's showing her true color.

MOMO

Poor Cassie. She didn't even come here.

SHUYA

Cassie made a mistake by including her in our circle. She was flirting with Jimmy the first day we met.

MOMO

Didn't she hook up with the bartender that night?

SHUYA

Exactly.

MOMO

What the hell?

Shuya smiles and shows off her phone with a shiny diamond case.

SHUYA

She should have all her men
together since she likes men so
much.

The doorbell rings. Jimmy opens the door. It's Chris who's delivering food for them. Momo looks surprised and she turns to Shuya who is smirking.

Chris sees Jimmy. He pushes the food to him.

CHRIS

Here is your food. Have a great
night.

JIMMY

Hey, don't go so fast! Put the food
in the living room please. My hands
are full.

Chris takes a breath and walks to a table next to Shuya and Momo. Momo sees him and whispers to Shuya.

MOMO

Holy shit! You guys are evil.

SHUYA

(in Chinese)

The poor boyfriend delivering pizza
for her rich boyfriend. Haomeng is
the luckiest girl in the world.

Chris looks around and sees Haomeng and Nick stand close to each other and look weird. He puts down the food and walks up to Haomeng. Haomeng is shocked to seeing him.

CHRIS

What is going on?

HAOMENG

Why are you here?

CHRIS

You didn't tell me you had a party
with these people.

HAOMENG

Can we talk later?

Nick steps in and puts his hand in front of Haomeng.

NICK

(Chinese)

What's wrong? Is this delivering
guy harassing you?

HAOMENG

No, no!

Kai and Sumei both stand behind Haomeng.

KAI

(Chinese)

What's going on?

HAOMENG

Dad, nothing.

SUMEI

(Chinese)

Who is this person?

HAOMENG

(Chinese)

I met this person before. At a
gathering with Cassie.

Chris stares at them. He opens his mouth but doesn't know who
to talk to.

KAI

(Chinese)

Oh. Cassie's friend. Let's have him
a drink too.

Kai walks to Chris and pats his shoulder.

KAI (CONT'D)

(Chinese)

Young man, grab yourself a drink.

Haomeng steps in.

HAOMENG

(Chinese)

Dad, he has work.

KAI

(Chinese)

What work?

HAOMENG

(Chinese)

Um. He's delivering food.

SUMEI
 (Chinese)
 What kind of work is that?

Sumei looks at Chris.

SUMEI (CONT'D)
 (Chinese)
 Come and have some biscuits I
 brought from Sichuan.

Chris looks at them with confusion. He looks at Haomeng for help. Haomeng freezes and looks around but can't open her mouth. Chris adjusts his hat.

CHRIS
 Have a good night.

He leaves the room with his head down. Jimmy shuts down the door behind Chris. Haomeng looks into the direction where Chris disappears in desperation. Shuya shakes her head.

JIAJIA
 Your poor lover just left like
 that.

SUMEI
 What? What lover?

SHUYA
 (filming with her phone)
 OMG!This is too good! I can gain at
 least 1,000 followers by this
 drama!

MOMO
 Auntie, uncle, you don't know that
 delivery guy is her boyfriend?

Kai stares at Haomeng.

KAI
 Is that true?

CASSIE
 Uncle, don't be mad at her! It's
 just a misunderstanding.

Sumei holds a chair and puts one hand on her chest.

SUMEI
 I can't breath.

KAI
I've never been humiliated like
this. You should be ashamed of
yourself!

Kai walks to Sumei and holds her in his arms.

KAI (CONT'D)
Look what you just did to your poor
mother!
(turns to Sumei)
Sumei, let's leave here.

Haomeng grabs Kai's arm.

HAOMENG
Dad!

Kai shakes her off. They angrily leave the house. Nick puts
his hand on Haomeng's shoulder.

NICK
Let me talk to them first. Don't
worry.

Nick follows Kai and Sumei. Cassie grabs Haomeng's shoulder.

CASSIE
It'll be fine. They just need time.

JIAJIA
You should've just stuck with us
and enjoyed your life. But you
somehow thought you're different
and better than other girls and
every men love her. See, now you're
losing everything.

Haomeng looks at everyone with teary eyes.

HAOMENG
I didn't think I was better than
others.

JIAJIA
We warned you not to go out with
losers and you wouldn't listen. You
picked him over Jimmy.

CASSIE
Stop it.

HAOMENG

What's wrong with you? Jimmy is your boyfriend.

JIAJIA

He's not my only boyfriend and I'm not his only girlfriend.

HAOMENG

Oh my god! You are disgusting!

JIAJIA

What? A lot of us are having casual relationships. Are you accusing your friends disgusting?

HAOMENG

Yes! And you're not my friends! I've been so scared of leaving the Chinese circle because I thought I should listen to my mom, listen to my seniors, and listen to everybody but myself! I should've listened to myself from the beginning. This is not what I want for my life.

Haomeng runs out of the room.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF NICK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Haomeng finally leaves the house. She looks around but Chris has already gone. MANDY HU, a bespectacled young woman, jumps in front of Haomeng.

MANDY HU

(in tears)

Have you done partying? You bastards. I failed my doctoral defense again and again, and it's all your fault because you guys make Chinese students reputation so bad and everyone thinks little of me.

Haomeng screams at the sudden ranting. She runs away.

INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT

Haomeng sits in the subway and sobbing.

INT. HAOMENG'S ROOM - DAY

Haomeng locks herself in her room crying on her bed. She looks at her phone. All the messages she sent to Chris but labelled unread. She turns off her phone. She hears someone knocking her door. Haomeng opens it. It's Kai and Sumei. Rui stands behind.

RUI

I don't want you to die in my apartment.

Haomeng hugs Sumei.

HAOMENG

Mama, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me.

Sumei pats her gently.

KAI

How can we not forgive our only child.

SUMEI

We just hate to see you walk on the wrong path and ruin your life.

KAI

Well, we think you're not mature enough to live alone. Go back to China with us.

HAOMENG

I don't want to go back. I was finally able to move out and live my life. I'm not going back.

KAI

What have you achieved by living here? Being dumped by a delivery boy? You are still very much dependent on us.

SUMEI

Nick is going back as well. You can go to Shanghai with him if you want. He doesn't care what happened. He's a truly understanding man.

Haomeng sobs in Sumei's arms.

INT. CHRIS' PARENTS' RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Haomeng sits in Chris' parents restaurant at night. A plate of steamed buns are on the table. The restaurant is decorated in sparkly redness. Chris' mom Ren sits with her.

REN

Eat more. You're too thin.

HAOMENG

Haha, that's not what my parents think of me.

REN

You're skinny!

Haomeng looks down and eats a steamed bun.

HAOMENG

I'm eating a lot.

REN

You need to take good care of yourself before you do anything. Even my Chris should never be as important as your own well-being.

HAOMENG

You're too kind. Actually, I'm thinking about going back to China.

REN

Really? For the break?

HAOMENG

I don't think I have the ability to build a life in the U.S. I need some time to grow.

REN

Chris father and I came to America 25 years ago. We didn't speak English at all and had no idea what the world outside China was like. No one expected us to survive here but we not only managed to survive, we even had our two sons go through universities. You are so beautiful, smart, and know much more than we did. You can absolutely build your life. A very good life.

Haomeng looks at her with gratitude. The front door bell rings. Chris comes inside. Haomeng looks down embarrassingly.

REN (CONT'D)

You're back in time! Haomeng is here.

Haomeng stands up.

HAOMENG

It's a little late. I have to get up early tomorrow. I think I got to go.

REN

Oh. Chris. Take her back! It's too dangerous for a young girl to walk around.

Chris nods.

INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT

Chris and Haomeng sit quietly in the subway. An elderly man walks near them and there is no available seat. Haomeng gives up her seat to this elderly man. Chris looks at her and stands up as well.

CHRIS

You can take my seat.

Haomeng quietly takes his seat. Chris stands in front of her.

EXT. THE STREET - NIGHT

Haomeng and Chris walk in the snowy night with lots of festive decorations.

HAOMENG

I'll be leaving tomorrow morning.

CHRIS

Did you finish your degree this fast?

HAOMENG

No. My parents are taking me back.

CHRIS

Your parents. Geez. You surely have way too much respect for the elderly people that you do whatever they tell you.

Haomeng stops walking.

HAOMENG

I'm not being a foolish daughter. My parents have tremendous love for me and have done so much for me. I owe them too much that I can never repay. But I also understand that I hurt everyone by trying to not hurt anyone. I want to change and learn to grow up without my parents. My parents also need to learn to grow up without me. I want to be an honest person if you still have faith in me.

Chris stares at her in her eyes.

CHRIS

I was partially to blame because I never tried to understand your struggles. I think we can try to know each other one more time.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Sumei and Kai sit in the hotel lobby with their suitcases sitting on a golden cart. Nick sits with them. Haomeng walks in the lobby. Nick stands up when he sees her. But his smile disappears when he notices that she only has a handbag.

NICK

Hey.

HAOMENG

Hi.

SUMEI

Haomeng's here. We can leave now.

Haomeng walks to Sumei.

HAOMENG

Mom, wait.

Haomeng takes a deep breath.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

I, want to stay.

KAI

Are you still not over that American guy?

HAOMENG

His name's Chris, and no. It's not all about him, or anyone. It's about me. I want to see if I can make it in another country. I want to be a better person.

SUMEI

How many times have I told you. We don't need you to make it or succeed at anything.

HAOMENG

But I need myself to make it!

NICK

Auntie Sumei, I think she's made up her mind. I saw that the moment she walked in.

HAOMENG

Nick. Thank you so much.

KAI

Nick, we feel so sorry. So embarrassed.

NICK

No. You should feel sorry for your daughter, Uncle Kai. I wish you all the luck.

HAOMENG

Stop it. You are the last person on earth who can't find a girl.

Nick smiles. Haomeng walks to him and hugs him.

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

I'll see you in Shanghai one day.

Nick adjusts his clean white jack.

NICK

I think I need to leave.

SUMEI

Are you also staying here? Maybe you can leave together.

HAOMENG

Mom, it's not gonna happen.

SUMEI

(sigh)

How can you ever meet any man
better than Nick.

NICK

I second your mom's opinion. But I
won't take you back. A man should
never chase the women who reject
him.

Haomeng stares at him awkwardly.

HAOMENG

Ok.

Nick smiles and leaves.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Haomeng stands next to the TSA with Sumei and Kai. Sumei
holds her hands.

KAI

You sure you're not coming with us?
You don't need any luggage. We can
buy things in home.

HAOMENG

Dad, I've made up my mind.

SUMEI

You can always come back home if
you want. And when you do, remember
to take the first class. You have a
bigger chance of meeting good men
in first class.

HAOMENG

Mom.

Chris comes to the airport. He nervously goes up Haomeng.

CHRIS

Hey.

Kai and Sumei stare at Chris. Haomeng holds Chris' hand.

HAOMENG

Dad, mom, this is Chris. He's my
boyfriend. We've been together for
a while.

(MORE)

HAOMENG (CONT'D)

He is the most hard-working,
honest, kindest, and nicest person
I have ever known.

Chris reaches out his hand to Sumei and Kai. Sumei shakes his hand and studies him.

SUMEI

How tall are you? You don't seem
very tall.

CHRIS

What?

SUMEI

Aiya! I want to know how tall are
you! I want to see how tall my
future grandkid can be!

HAOMENG

Mom! What are you talking about?

KAI

What do your parents do? How much
money do they make? How much money
do they make? How much money do you
think you can make in 5 years?

SUMEI

Is your mom fat? Is your dad bald?
Do you have any sibling or relative
that needs your financial support?

HAOMENG

Stop! Please stop! The flight!
Let's go catch the flight!

Chris smiles.

CHRIS

My parents run a little restaurant
and are not rich. And I will be
fat, bald, and not very rich
either.

Sumei sighs and grabs Chris.

SUMEI

It might make you uncomfortable,
but I want to feel comfortable
whenever I think about my
daughter's happiness.

KAI

We cannot imagine life without you by our side. If it's possible, we want you to marry someone in China. But we love our babygirl so much that we're willing to put her happiness above ours.

Haomeng hugs Kai.

HAOMENG

I'm so sorry. Dad. Mom.

INT. DRIVE-THROUGH FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Haomeng, wearing a fast-food uniform, serves in a fast-food restaurant drive through when a fancy car of drunk Chinese kids pulls over. Jimmy is one of the people.

JIMMY

Hey, guys, it's Haomeng!

Haomeng smiles at them and prepares the food.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Haomeng, you missed our regular Friday parties to do this? Did your family go bankrupt?

HAOMENG

Here is your food. 35 dollars please.

Jimmy gives her his credit card.

JIMMY

We missed you. Shuya was such a bitch last time. Jump in my new car and we will punish her together later!

Everyone laughs in the car. Haomeng gives him back his credit card and the receipt.

HAOMENG

Have a great night.

Haomeng closes the window. She takes off her uniform while walking outside. Other staff walk past her.

STAFF #1

You going out?

HAOMENG

Yeah. My shift is over. I'm having
a little party tonight.

STAFF #1

Ooo! Friday night party. Sounds
exciting.

Haomeng puts on her own coat.

HAOMENG

I know. See you tomorrow!

Haomeng runs out of the front door of the restaurant. We see
her runs to an old Nissan and Chris sits in the driving seat.
Haomeng jumps on the passenger seat and they drive away.

FADE OUT.