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SF PERUSALS

No Foreigners Beyond This Point

by Warren Leight

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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NO FOREIGNERS BEYOND THIS POINT premiered at Center Stage in Baltimore, Maryland in their 2002-2003 season. The performance was directed by Tim Vasen and the cast was as follows:

PAULA WHEATON . . . . . Carrie Preston
ANDREW BAKER . . . . . Ean Sheehy
PRINCIPAL WANG / YING / PEASANT . . . . . Ben Wang
TEACHER CHEN / XIAO ER . . . . . Jane Wong
VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG / LINCOLN / PEASANT . . . . . John Woo Taak
LAO WAN / LAO HU / PEASANT . . . . . Les J.N. Mau
MR. WANG / SHERMAN / PEASANT / CUSTOMS OFFICIAL . . . . . Andrew Pang
XIAO WAN / XIAO DA . . . . . Nancy Wu

NO FOREIGNERS BEYOND THIS POINT was next produced by the Ma-Yi Theater Company in association with Swingline Productions and Culture Project in New York City on September 17, 2005. The performance was directed by Loy Arcenas, featured sets by Loy Arcenas, lights by Japhy Wiedman, and sound by Fabian Obispo. The cast was as follows:

XIAO WAN, XIAO DA . . . . . Laura Kai Chen
SHERMAN, WORKER YING . . . . . Ron Domingo
TEACHER MING, WIDOW WAN . . . . . Wai Ching Ho
VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG . . . . . Francis Jue
TEACHER CHEN, PEARL . . . . . Karen Tsen Lee
PAULA WHEATON . . . . . Abby Royle
ANDREW BAKER . . . . . Ean Sheehy
PRINCIPAL WANG . . . . . Henry Yuk

NO FOREIGNERS BEYOND THIS POINT was originally commissioned by Baltimore Center Stage's Pealrstone Theatre, where it premiered in November of 2002. It was subsequently produced in New York city by the Ma-Yi Theater Company in September of 2005. Many thanks to both.

CHARACTERS

WIDOW WAN - probably in her 70's. Well fed, long term survivor, few words (all in Cantonese, usually commands), much power.

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG - late 20's, Northern Chinese, educated, vital but guarded. An outsider in Canton.

TEACHER CHEN - 30's but worn for her years, Cantonese, anxious, kind.

ANDREW BAKER (BAI KE) - 20's, New Yorker, very urban, glib. Wears glasses, no fashion sense.

PAULA WHEATON (WEI TAN) - 20's Waspy New Yorker, striking.

PRINCIPAL WANG - 40's, Cantonese, formal, nervous. The bureaucrat who lives in fear.

TEACHER CHEN - 30's, Cantonese, anxious, kind.

LAO WAN - older long-term survivor; few words, much power.

XIAO WAN - 19, but acts younger; assigned to be the American teachers' maid.

SHERMAN - 20's, smart-ass student; city kid, privileged, General's son (can be doubled by Principal Wang).

LINCOLN - student, late teens/20's, Sherman's sidekick, cynic (doubled by Vice Principal Huang).

XIAO DA - 20's, Northern (Hubei) student, female. Studious, serious: a believer (can be doubled by Xiao Wan.)

PEARL - Straight, initially shy student, female, Cantonese (doubled by Teacher Chen).

TEACHER MING - old lady, long hard life; nominal chair of language department (doubled by Widow Wan, her opposite).

YING - late 30's, peasant; school maintenance man/worker/electrician (doubled by Principal Wang).

CUSTOMS MAN - Young, modern (doubled by Vice Principal Huang).

SETTING

Primarily Da Lang Institute of foreign Trade,
Canton (Guangdong), China

TIME

1980-81

AUTHOR'S NOTES

All rooms are very spartan. Concrete walls, hard, uncushioned furniture, powdery paint.

ACT ONE

(Lights up on the school's official entourage, leaving the American's apartment: **PRINCIPAL WANG**, *[he speaks formally, as if his every word were recorded and could be used against him]. Next,* **VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG** *[the lone Northerner in the group, his manner is different from the others. He's also younger.]. The two men tend to ignore* **MRS. CHEN** *[***TEACHER CHEN***]. She is very nervous, always, and often simultaneously translates for the* **WIDOW WAN** *– Wan is old, imperious, seems to speak little English, and will prove to be the only well-fed person in Da Lang. They wear layers to ward off the cold.* **WIDOW WAN** *bullies* **VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG**.*)*

WIDOW WAN. *(in Cantonese-inflected Mandarin)* Shanghai ren, ni bu xiang diu mian, ni zhou ba ta-men liu xia lai. *(Shanghai man: If you want to save face, you better hope they stay.)*

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. Thank you, Widow Wan.

(He nods. She leaves, with **WANG** *in tow.* **HUANG** *turns to* **CHEN**.*)*

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. Chen Lao shr, you do think the Americans will renew?

TEACHER CHEN. They did say they've been well taken care of.

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. You have a Special Relationship, with Miss Wheaton. I would be very grateful, for any help you can give.

TEACHER CHEN. I will do my utmost.

(She nods, uncomfortably, and exits. **HUANG**, *alone, dictates a report.)*

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. Da Lang Institute of Foreign Trade. November 27th, 1980. Memorandum to all departments:

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. *(cont.)* Widow Wan's generous offer to renew the contracts of Teachers Baker and Wheaton was relayed to the Americans by Principal Wang, and was of course, received with enthusiasm. They did not signal their acceptance right away, but barring unforseen circumstances, they will doubtless continue on as our Foreign Guests for another semester. While there have of course been…growing pains as the administration adjusted to having its first foreigners, much progress has been made since the Americans' arrival five short months ago…on July Four, 1980.

(Under this, **ANDREW BAKER** *and* **PAULA WHEATON** *detrain in Guangzhou [Canton], July 1980. It's hot, and loud. Andrew's gear fits in a duffel bag and back pack.* **PAULA** *has a big trunk, several bags, and backpack. [He's a little…urban, she's a little Waspy.])*

(A railway announcement, in Mandarin, plays on the station's loudspeakers.)

RAILROAD LOUDSPEAKER. Wang Shanghai de huo che, xian tzai dao di er yue tai shang che.

PAULA. *(very anxious)* You're bringing a typewriter? That's illegal.

ANDREW. Paula, our whole trip is illegal. All the arrangements were made by a Chinatown boss, named…"Kan."

PAULA. He's a friend of my parents. They met him in… Yugoslavia. He helped mother's clinic, dad's school. He –

ANDREW. Right, so…we have no reason to worry. We have no teaching experience. No documentation. No work visas. What could possibly go wrong?

PAULA. *(losing it)* Andrew, this isn't a joke. We have a real chance here to make a difference.

*(They do not notice the approaching entourage [***WANG, HUANG, WAN** *and* **CHEN***].)*

PRINCIPAL WANG. Mr. Bai Ke. Miss Wei Tan.

ANDREW & PAULA. Yes?

PRINCIPAL WANG. I am Principal Wang.

PAULA. Yes, of course, Principal Wang! Kan told us about –

(to **ANDREW***)*

It's Principal Wang.

*(***ANDREW** *goes to shake hands,* **WANG** *bows slightly.)*

PRINCIPAL WANG. And this is the Widow Wan.

TEACHER CHEN. She wishes you her welcome after your journey.

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. *(shakes* **ANDREW***'s hand)* And I am Vice Principal Huang.

ANDREW. I'm Andrew, this is Paula.

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. *(avoiding her offered hand-shake)* This is Teacher Chen.

TEACHER CHEN. Happy Fourth of July.

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. Do you have your declaration forms.

ANDREW. Here you go.

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. I will handle them.

(He takes them, sees them as a disaster, rips them up, hands them blanks.)

It is more convenient to sign this form, I will fill out the rest for you. Oh, and your passports please.

*(***ANDREW** *goes along with this.* **PAULA** *balks, at first.)*

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. Sign here. Very good.

PRINCIPAL WANG. So, did you enjoy your journey?

PAULA. Very much.

TEACHER CHEN. I hope it is not too cold, and not too hot.

PAULA. *(to* **CHEN***)* No, that's right.

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. *(to* **PAULA***)* Sign here. Very good. Shall we push on then.

PAULA. Um, I think we still need to clear customs…

ANDREW. And our passports?

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. Do not worry. Just this way.

ANDREW. But –

PRINCIPAL WANG. We have a back door.

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. *(a bit upset by* **WANG***)* So, how was the journey? Did you see the beautiful countryside?

ANDREW. Yes. It was very beautiful.

TEACHER CHEN. You must be very tired.

PAULA. Are you sure we don't need to clear customs. I just –

PRINCIPAL WANG. You have traveled very far. And so, you must be plainly exhausted.

TEACHER CHEN. Everyone at the school is so anxious to meet our foreign experts.

PAULA. We're not really experts…

(She's inadvertently triggered a round of glances and looks. **HUANG** *takes over.)*

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. Yes, technically you are not official Foreign Experts, but you do our school a great honor in bringing your foreign expertise, is what Teacher Chen meant to say.

ANDREW. We can't wait to see the school.

WIDOW WAN. *(in Cantonese)* Mmduck. *(No way.)*

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. Duei. *(Got it.)*

(to the Americans)

Of course, but for now you are tired, and need to rest. So you will stay here *(points)* at the Dong Feng Binguan.

(Awkward silence. **ANDREW** *and* **PAULA** *are not as impressed as they should be.)*

PRINCIPAL WANG. It is, may I say, the pearl of Guangzhou's hotels. Exclusively for foreign guests. We Chinese, you see, are not even allowed to enter.

PAULA. What? That's not right – that's apartheid.

TEACHER CHEN. It is very expensive.

ANDREW. We're really ok. I mean, I think we would just as soon go straight to the school.

WIDOW WAN. Ju mut ye-ah? *(What is going on?)*

TEACHER CHEN. Kuoi se-arn hoi gan hawk hau. *(He wants to go to the school.)*

WIDOW WAN. Diu. Hou tou yim. Mmduck! *(So fucking annoying. No way.)*

PRINCIPAL WANG. Our school is, I am sorry to say, very backward and we need to complete our special preparations for our foreign experts.

*(***VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG** *looks at him.)*

PRINCIPAL WANG. *Guests* – our foreign guests.

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. Sometime in the future perhaps, when you have washed and slept and relaxed, and settled in, we will take you out for a banquet.

ANDREW. *(realizes it's a done deal)* Yes that sounds lovely.

(overlapping gooodby)

PRINCIPAL WANG. Until the banquet.

ANDREW. Wonderful.

TEACHER CHEN. We shall call for you at a quarter past six.

VICE PRINCIPAL HUANG. Cheerio

WIDOW WAN. Zoi gin ah.

(They are alone now and exhausted.)

ANDREW. Jesus. I'm ex –

PAULA. Did she say a quarter past six?…We have ten minutes.

(Before they can exhale, **TEACHER CHEN** *returns with what seem to be menus, but are in fact Trade Dialogue Scripts.)*

TEACHER CHEN. Can you read these?

(They are seated at a small table in front of microphones. **TEACHER CHEN***, wears archaic headphones, cues them.* **PAULA** *plays A,* **ANDREW** *reads B. They are a little stiff.* **TEACHER CHEN** *is very happy.)*

A/PAULA. The Commodity Inspection Bureau is very much surprised at hearing your complaints of this nature. As a state enterprise, we are not allowed to export any

A/PAULA. *(cont.)* faulty goods or blown tins. Furthermore, the goods reached you in June, yet you did not lodge a claim until October. We have every reason to turn down the case, don't you agree?

B/ANDREW. You see. Mr. Chang, *(covers mike, to* **CHEN***)* Should that be Mrs. Chang? Or Miss Chang?

(gets a head shake from **CHEN** *in the booth)*

No? Ok. Just thought – no. Fine.

(continues into mike)

You, see, Mr. Chang, it was a slack season when the goods arrived. To prevent a heavy loss, we had to hold our horse. In September the cases were finally opened with the result that the blown tins were discovered.

A/PAULA. Exactly. That is where the shoe pinches. Even the best canned goods will decay during the hot season in Kuwait. So we've got somewhere at long last.

TEACHER CHEN. Very good. Very good. One more please.

ANDREW. Sorry about stopping for the question, I just thought, since Miss Wheaton is a woman, I should say *Mrs.* Chang –

TEACHER CHEN. We should not change the Foreign Trade dialogues from how they are written. It is more convenient to leave them as is. The students would be confused.

PAULA. Will we get to the school soon, to see the students?

TEACHER CHEN. The school is not yet ready for your arrival. It is more convenient to stay a few more days at the hotel, until everything is ready for your arrival. You are very lucky to stay there, it is the pearl of Guangzhou's hotels.

ANDREW. It's a lovely hotel, and last night, we found a way to keep ourselves busy –

PAULA. *(sotto, embarrassed)* Andrew!

ANDREW. – still it's been almost a week, and Paula, we, are going a little stir crazy there.

TEACHER CHEN. No worries, I have good news. Principal Wang has made arrangements for Vice Principal Huang and I to take you on a tour of the Monument to the 72 Martyrs of the Guangzhou Uprising.

PAULA. That sounds…great.

TEACHER CHEN. And afterward perhaps we can…yum cha.

ANDREW. And we'll get to the school…soon.

TEACHER CHEN. Very soon. *(by rote, but very anxious)* The school is backwards in many ways. Though we have made some progress, we have quite a lot of shortcomings and much leeway to make up before we would expect our foreign guests to stay there. It is much better to stay in the hotel. Now, one more please…

(She hands them more scripts.)

B/ANDREW. FOREIGN TRADE DIALOGUE. LESSON *FOURTEEN*

A/PAULA. A PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW

A/PAULA. Pleased to meet you, Mr. Clark.

B/ANDREW. Glad to know you, *Miss* Chang.

(He has made this change unilaterally.)

A/PAULA. When did you get in?

B/ANDREW. I came on Saturday by the afternoon train.

(As they continue to read their dialogues, he stands and starts to kiss her on the back of the neck.)

A/PAULA. How was the journey? Pleasant, I hope. The weather was not too cold, and not too warm.

(She responds, kissing his hand.)

B/ANDREW. Very pleasant, indeed.

A/PAULA. This is your first visit to the *fertile* lands of Guangdong, I suppose.

(They make their way to their dorm bed.)

B/ANDREW. I've been looking forward to the pleasure of coming in close personal contact with our Chinese friends.

(They climb under the mosquito netting.)

A/PAULA. Mr. Clark, besides doing business you may take this opportunity to see what's really going on in China.

(She starts to unbutton her blouse.)

B/ANDREW. You have certainly achieved great successes. When I get home, I'll be sure to tell my friends and colleagues about this.

(She rides him, while reciting the dialogue.)

A/PAULA. China is a socialist country, and a developing country as well. Though we have made progress, we have quite a lot of shortcomings and much leeway to make up.

B/ANDREW. The Chinese people are known for their modesty.

A/PAULA. There is much for us to learn from you.

(Their pace picks up.)

B/ANDREW. Candid comments –

A/PAULA. – of our friends –

*(***TEACHER CHEN***, students enter, cross stage.* **CHEN** *speaks into an old microphone.)*

TEACHER CHEN. The Americans are coming.

(The students shout "lai-le" and "Meguo ren shenzai ichee lai-le" as B and A reach the climax of their dialogue.)

B AND A. *(overlapping above)* Always…do…us…good! Oh god yes.

*(***XIAO WAN** *appears in their bedroom. She is nineteen, dresses in Hong Kong style acrylic clothing, unlike all the others. She carries a teddy bear.)*

XIAO WAN. Everyone is waiting for you.

PAULA. Oh jesus.

ANDREW. Just a minute Xiao Wan.

(The lovers go to the hallway, **XIAO WAN** *grabs* **PAULA***'s hand.)*

XIAO WAN. Make haste. The movie can not start until you sit down.

PAULA. The what?

XIAO WAN. Movie! Movie!

(They quickly pull themselves together, follow **XIAO WAN** *to the basketball court where a projector has been set up.)*

*(***PRINCIPAL WANG***,* **TEACHER CHEN***,* **TEACHER MING***, students* **SHERMAN** *and* **LINCOLN***, and* **XIAO WAN** *join in, clapping in unison.)*

PRINCIPAL WANG. These are our very special Foreign guests. Mr. Bai Ke and Miss Wei Tan.

PAULA & ANDREW. *(waving meekly)* Hi.

PRINCIPAL WANG. They will be teaching Spoken English, for this whole semester, or maybe *longer*. To welcome them, we have lodged them at the Dong Feng Binguan, for *ten* days. Now they are here. And we give our American guests *four rooms* in the Bachelor Faculty dorm.

(He pauses for this to sink in.)

And their own bathroom. And a servant, Xiao Wan – who is the daughter of our newly recommissioned Nurse Wan.

(She curtsies, very proud.)

And when they need to travel to town, our car and driver. And a refrigerator! –

TEACHER CHEN. *(sotto, to* **ANDREW** *and* **PAULA***)* – although we ask you not to plug it in yet as it is the first one here and we must wait for our chief electrician to read the manual.

ANDREW. Of course.

PRINCIPAL WANG. They are not used to our hardships, and so every thing we can do to make them feel comfortable, they have only to ask.

(more rhythmic applause)

PRINCIPAL WANG. *(cont.)* It is not as nice as their home, but we give them fresh air and quiet nights and tonight, in honor of their arrival, a movie.

(1970s Chinese movie music swells as the court transforms into a classroom. **STUDENTS LINCOLN** *and* **SHERMAN** *sit first. Then* **PEARL** *and* **XIAO DA** *[***PEARL** *is a sweet, smart, people-pleasing student.* **XIAO DA** *is a strident believer, from the North].)*

*(***PAULA** *enters.)*

PAULA. Good morning class. I see we have –

*(***LINCOLN***,* **SHERMAN***,* **PEARL***, and* **XIAO DA***, seated boy/boy, girl/girl, stand.)*

STUDENTS. Good morning Teacher Wei Tan.

PAULA. Boys *and* girls today. Very good. Sit. Sit. Sherman, and Lincoln, I know, but *(to the girls, who giggle)* your names are…

SHERMAN. Her name is Pearl.

LINCOLN. After the great American writer. *This* one is –

PAULA. She can answer for herself, can't she?

SHERMAN. She is shy so we can help her.

XIAO DA. Xiao Da. Little Big. Because I am first born: Jie Jie, Big Sister, but still little. Xiao Da. From Hubei. In the north.

*(***ANDREW** *arrives.* **STUDENTS** *stand.)*

STUDENTS. Good morning Teacher Bai-ke.

ANDREW. At ease.

STUDENTS. *(repeating, but not sitting)* At. Ease.

PAULA. *(introducing them)* Xiao Da, Pearl.

ANDREW. *(signals students to sit, while sotto voce to* **PAULA***)* Talked to Principal Wang still no textbooks.

(They look at each other, in panic. Quickly debate what to do.)

PAULA. Oh. I know…

(returns attention to class)

Today we're going to try something new. This is free conversation class. We can talk about anything you want to talk about.

(No one says anything.)

ANDREW. Anything at all.

PAULA. So that you can practice your Spoken English.

(No one even looks at them.)

ANDREW. So, who wants to talk about something?

XIAO DA. You have not told us what we should freely talk about.

LINCOLN. Do you have free conversation scripts for us?

PAULA. No, then it wouldn't be free conversation.

(This makes no sense to them.)

PEARL. Should we talk about the damaged cargo and blown tins and how they are not the responsibility of the Commodity Inspec –

PAULA. I think we've already talked about that story enough last week. *(to the boys)* Don't you boys?

*(***LINCOLN** *looks at the blackboard, where the phrase:* Good Morning *is written.)*

LINCOLN. *(very stiffly)* Teacher Wei Tan, good morning.

PAULA. Good morning.

(That's it. Followed by more silence.)

ANDREW. OK. Good conversation there.

(more silence)

I know…Why don't we talk about last week's movie?

(No one answers at first.)

PAULA. Oh. Movies. That's always a good conversation topic.

(Still no answer.)

PAULA. Sherman, did you like the movie? Just to make conversation, there is no right or wrong answer.

(They ignore **PAULA***.)*

ANDREW. You can "pretend" you liked it, or "pretend" you didn't like it…

SHERMAN. Well, I would say –

(right at **XIAO DA***)*

just pretending…

(He checks the room.)

It was terrible.

LINCOLN. Very bad.

PAULA. Really? In what way?

(The boys are now off and running.)

SHERMAN. All Chinese movies have too much propaganda.

LINCOLN. Especially the old ones.

XIAO DA. I prefer the old ones. The new ones have too much romantic.

LINCOLN. Either way you always know what happen. The good PLA soldier reunite the peasant girl with her father who has amnesia from fighting the Japanese…

SHERMAN. *(play-acting now)* Baba? Baba! *(Father?!)*

LINCOLN. *(dramatically over-acting, to* **SHERMAN***)* "Baba?" Wo shr nide baba? Ni shr wode nu'er!

("Father?!" I am your father? You are my daughter!)

(He hugs **SHERMAN***, whom he has just realized is his long lost daughter. The conversation gets very animated and they act it out, repeating* baba *and* nu'er *through tears of joy.)*

PEARL. Also, you see, the hero never die, even though the KMT or Japanese soldiers are a regiment and he is alone.

XIAO DA. *(upset by the others)* Sometimes he die.

LINCOLN. She right. He die, but it takes a long time for him to die so he can give a speech.

SHERMAN. He has to say, first, long instructions to his fellows about the future and working together, then, he get shot again, and say, "your bullets can stop me, but they can not stop our cause…fight on, Comrades!" Then he die.

XIAO DA. *(passionately)* You forget the most important part, Sherman. Before he die he also should say, "I want to see the Red Flag."

(The boys mock her, in Cantonese.)

PEARL. I like the new ones. The new ones better, much more romantic.

LINCOLN. She right. In new ones, the hero gets his wife back, and his job. He look into her eyes and say –

SHERMAN. "Now that the Gang of Four is smashed, we will be able to modernize the electric plant and produce more and more power for our motherland to advance!"

*(***XIAO DA** *is offended by the boys.)*

PAULA. Very good class. All of you speak so well!

(prompting **ANDREW***)*

Don't they?

ANDREW. Yes. Very well.

XIAO DA. It is now time to talk about how much we like Chinese movies.

(No one says anything.)

PAULA. That's a good idea. I know I've heard some people say movies in China are good because they are educational. Or inspiring.

*(***STUDENTS***, except* **XIAO DA***, laugh at this. Especially* **SHERMAN***.)*

PAULA. Yes, Sherman.

SHERMAN. If people say it, you mean the teachers, right? Well, the teachers were all xia fang at least once.

PEARL. *(trying to rein him in)* Ttss. Tseh.

ANDREW. Xia fang?

SHERMAN. Xia Fang. Sent down.

XIAO DA. *(correcting him)* Re-educated.

LINCOLN. *(pushing it)* Sent to the countryside to clean shithouses and shovel night soil.

SHERMAN. Principal Wang, they purge him so many times, he does not trust his shadow.

XIAO DA. Ni gan shenma?! *(What are you doing?)*

*(***XIAO DA** *is shocked by* **SHERMAN***'s lack of discretion.* **SHERMAN** *disdains her as a fun cop. The class spirals out of control.)*

LINCOLN. Bi zhuei.

PEARL. Bei jingde gao. *(Pekingnese poodle)*

SHERMAN. *(at* **XIAO DA***)* Moh cho. *(Shut up/in Cantonese)*

*(***ANDREW** *writes "in any event" on black board to get their attention.)*

ANDREW. "In any event," IN ANY EVENT…

STUDENTS. In any event.

ANDREW. Let's not talk about what the teachers said. What they said is their free conversation, what you say is your free conversation.

LINCOLN. Inside, outside have difference, Mr. Bai Ke. Chinese expression. You see?

ANDREW. *(writes this on the board)* Yes, that's very good. Inside/Outside.

XIAO DA. It MEAN: between two people should stay between two people, within family within family. AND, Sherman, Between Junguo, China and Wai-guo, outside China –

SHERMAN. Outside China, what do you know about –

*(***PEARL** *senses* **PRINCIPAL WANG** *approaching.)*

PEARL. *(sotto voce)* Haole, haole.

SHERMAN. *(instantly switches gear)* Mr. Bai ke, that is *outside China*, do people like sports?

*(***ANDREW** *and* **PAULA** *look at each other, not sure what caused the switch.)*

ANDREW. Sports. Yeah. I like basketball.

SHERMAN. Can you play center for our team today, Mr. Bai Ke?

ANDREW. Sure.

LINCOLN. Mr. Bai Ke, the school tells us it is your firmest dream to be a writer. Is this true.

ANDREW. Really? The school told you that. Actually, I hope someday to write about China, in fact –

PAULA. Andrew, it's their Free Conversation, not yours.

(As **PRINCIPAL WANG** *moves on.* **SHERMAN***'s hand shoots up.)*

SHERMAN. Mr. Bai Ke, when the Gang of Four go on trial, will Americans be able to watch it?

*(***STUDENTS** *now shout out questions.)*

ANDREW. I don't see why not –

LINCOLN. Do all Americans hate the Gang of Four?

PEARL. Do Americans like Lee-gun?

XIAO DA. Lee-gun bu hao. Bad. He want two Chinas. Ca-re-ter much better.

ANDREW. Lee-gun? Reagan. Oh –

PAULA. Reagan? No. No one takes him seriously.

(Questions now overlap into cacophony as **PAULA** *and* **ANDREW** *are besieged.)*

LINCOLN. What do Americans think will happen in Yugoslavia, now that Tito die?

SHERMAN. In Poland, they say the ship workers are now rebelling –

PEARL. How come they need Solidarity in a Socialist country?

XIAO DA. They can not rebel. It is a worker state.

LINCOLN. Does every American have a helicopter?

XIAO DA. It's true, in Meiguo, the air is black from pollution?

SHERMAN. That's propaganda.

(to **TEACHERS***)*

They even tell us America lose to Vietnam.

(Nighttime. **PAULA** *does laundry, by hand, in a concrete sink filled with cold water.* **ANDREW** *types, reacts to the campus speakers: Good Night Irene.)*

ANDREW. *(re: music)* That's not just for us, they play it all over campus.

PAULA. Now we know where all those Lawrence Welk albums ended up.

ANDREW. So, I asked Principal Wang about the bicycles today.

PAULA. And?

ANDREW. He said it was "more convenient" to take the car, I said they'd promised bikes as part of our deal. He –

PAULA. They only talk to you.

ANDREW. Who?

PAULA. The Wangs. I can't believe there are nine principals, and they're all named Wang.

ANDREW. No. Actually, only one principal is named Wang.

PAULA. Oh, please. There's the old woman in the silk jacket who doesn't speak English? There's –

ANDREW. No, no. That's the Widow W*an. (pronounced Wahn)* She doesn't have a title. She's never here. So I think she's in charge. Like Deng Xiao Ping.

PAULA. Oh.

ANDREW. And *Principal* Wan*g* is the nervous guy who gave the refrigerator speech. He's responsible, but has no power. Then there's *Vice* Principal *Hua*ng.

PAULA. The handsome guy who took our passports? I still think we should get them back –

ANDREW. Don't worry about it. Huang's their fixer, like Roy Cohn. He outranks Principal Wang, I think.

PAULA. Where'd you get that from.

ANDREW. He has a dog. Does anyone else here have a pet.

PAULA. That doesn't make him Roy Cohn.

ANDREW. Also, he's a Northerner. Sherman told me – on the basketball court – Huang doesn't even speak Cantonese.

PAULA. So?

ANDREW. They hate the Northerners down here. They see them as an occupying army that's cut them off from Hong Kong.

PAULA. See this is the problem, everyone talks to you, and I'm just…Paula the invisible Maygoren.

ANDREW. *(correcting her)* Mei-guo Ren. Not –

(off her glare)

I think it's just…how they do business. Teacher Chen yum chas with you. And Xiao Wan loves talking to you.

PAULA. Our maid? Why do we even need a maid? What is that about? God, my hands are cold.

ANDREW. We could send our laundry out. People could use the work.

PAULA. Spoken like a true neo-colonialist. I hate the separate treatment. A car, a maid, a driver, four rooms – They treat us like we're opium traders. I don't want everyone thinking I'm some spoiled rich American.

ANDREW. They don't, they like you. Everyone tells me how lucky I am to have a girlfriend so much prettier than me…

PAULA. They do not.

ANDREW. Ta bi ni shr hen piao liang. She versus you is much prettier… You want to call it a night?

PAULA. There's a huge bag left.

ANDREW. It's like getting out of debt, you can't work your way out all at once.

PAULA. Andrew, there's no debt here. Everyone works together.

ANDREW. "Teacher Wei Tan has skin as pale as the moon, and hair as red as the sunset."

PAULA. Have you seen how the students share everything?

ANDREW. Inspiring.

PAULA. It is. No one has that…pressure. There's no rat race, there's no –

ANDREW. They ate the rats –

PAULA. They don't have car loans, or house loans, they can't fall behind. There's no credit cards, there's no –

ANDREW. No…THINGS TO BUY? No food –

(notices she's shivering)

Are you ok?

PAULA. Raynaud's syndrome. Once they go cold –

(He starts to blow warm air on them.)

ANDREW. Save your hands. We'll do the rest tomorrow, let's get under the mosquito net.

(She smiles, nods, they embrace and she now leads the way to the classroom.)

(The chairs are in a rough, disordered semi-circle, to facilitate "Free Conversation". **LINCOLN** *has just told them the campus gossip: that the Americans are using only one bedroom.)*

CLASS. *(responding to* **LINCOLN***'s gossip)* Ooooooooooh.

*(***ANDREW** *follows* **PAULA** *into the classroom, where* **LINCOLN** *wraps up.)*

LINCOLN. You see, Teacher Wei-tan entered the dining room before the bell was rung.

(The students laugh. **PEARL** *sees the teachers have walked in on them, shushes class.)*

PEARL. Tseh-tseh.

ANDREW. What? What's so funny.

PEARL. *(explaining)* Oh, he is telling a yellow joke about… an unmarried girl who does much romantic.

*(***ANDREW** *and* **PAULA** *fake getting the joke.)*

XIAO DA. *(prosecutorial)* Are you and Teacher Bai Ke married?

(Awkward silence. Giggles.)

SHERMAN. Choose a new topic. Teacher Wei Tan. Go ahead, it is free conversation.

(off of her pause)

There is no right or wrong answer.

PAULA. OK, Sherman: why do you keep that sticker on your sunglasses?

XIAO DA. You are right. The Cantonese are too Western. In Hubei, no one dress this way. But here, it is like Little Hong Kong. Don't care about pitching in, just want to get out. They practice 63 laps in pool because they think that's how long to swim to Hong Kong.

PEARL. Bu shr. *(to the* **TEACHERS***)* Not so.

XIAO DA. Duei duei.

PAULA. I still don't understand, why you wear that sticker?

SHERMAN. Ca-la-wen-kuh-lein-a. Monee talkee, they say in Hong Kong.

*(***SHERMAN**, **LINCOLN**, *and* **PEARL** *laugh.* **PAULA** *and* **ANDREW** *and* **XIAO DA** *don't.)*

PAULA & ANDREW. What?

SHERMAN. Ca-la-wen Kuh-lein-eh. Yes.

PAULA. *(gets this one)* Ca-la-wen Kuh-lein? Calvin Klein!

LINCOLN. They are Cal-vin Kuh-lein glasses, from Hong Kong.

PAULA. And the sticker?

XIAO DA. Because he want to look like decadent Westerners. With their stickers.

ANDREW. Um…

PAULA. Westerners don't keep the sticker on.

XIAO DA. Oh?

SHERMAN. Ah, but the sticker also tells everyone wo zho ho men.

(Everyone giggles.)

PAULA. Wo-Joe who?

SHERMAN. Zho ho men, run the back door. Many items and privileges can not be obtained in stores, so, I use the back door.

XIAO DA. Nonsense. China does not have a black market.

LINCOLN. *(calmly explaining)* Bu shr. Xiao Da does not know back door. She is from the North. She has many guanxi, so she does not –

PAULA. Guanxi?

PEARL. I think you say connectors.

ANDREW. Connections?

SHERMAN. Her father is Minister of the Guangdong Cereal and Dry Goods Corporation, so she walks in through the front door. Too many ministers from the North.

ANDREW. So, are…most students here children of ministers?

PEARL. *(points at each student)* In finance or trade, or cadres. Or like Sherman, a General's son.

XIAO DA. The children of peasants are also welcome.

LINCOLN. Xia yibeizi.

(Everyone laughs.)

SHERMAN. *(explaining)* Xia yibeizi. Wait until the next life. When you come back…

PAULA. What are cadres? Exactly.

(Everyone looks at her.)

SHERMAN. Surely you are…pulling our leg.

(They can't fathom her confusion.)

XIAO DA. "Cadre" means "the Party representative in your work brigade, or school department, or housing commune."

PEARL. Like the Widow Wan.

(imitates her)

She decides if you can get larger apartment or have a baby or get travel permit to visit relatives if someone die.

(They see **PAULA** *still doesn't get it.)*

SHERMAN. "A penny in the hand of a cadre is worth more than a dollar in the hand of a peasant." Chinese expression.

XIAO DA. In Hubei no one makes such jokes. The school cadres would not allow it.

PEARL. In America, do school cadres say you are now too old to study medicine, even though it is not your fault schools were closed for ten years.

PAULA. It's a little different in the States. We don't really have cadres.

(The students can not comprehend this. Much discussion in Chinese:)

STUDENTS. *(overlapping)* "Shenma?" "Ta shuo "mei yo ganbu." "Zhen da?" "Kai wan xiao" "Tamen bu dongah" "Kenan bu shr nega ca-de-re, shr… ca-ra-te?"
("What?," "She says, 'they don't have cadres'.," "Really?," "Really?" "They are joking.," "They don't understand." "Maybe it's not 'ca-de-re', maybe it's 'ca-ra-te'.")

PAULA. English, English. Can we please speak English?

SHERMAN. IN ANY EVENT, we think cadre must be different word in American English.

PAULA. No. Schools just don't have cadres, I'm sure.

ANDREW. They don't. But you still need connections. Guanxi?

SHERMAN. Teacher Bai Ke and Teacher Wei Tan must not have any guanxi if they end up in Da Lang.

LINCOLN. And not even get paid in Foreign Currency.

(Everyone giggles and agrees.)

PAULA. You know what we make?

PEARL. 100 ren men bi a month.

SHERMAN. To be in Siberia of Guangdong Province.

XIAO DA. It is a just salary. The same as all the other teachers.

PAULA. I agree.

ANDREW. And actually, we also will be getting bicycles.

LINCOLN. Xia yibeizi.

(Everyone laughs again. **ANDREW** *shoots* **PAULA** *a glance.)*

PEARL. My mother want to know, do you believe in God?

ANDREW. Sorry?

PEARL. Years ago, many fangweilos come here to teach about the baby Jesus.

ANDREW. Fangweilos? What is that – I hear it everywhere.

XIAO DA. *(simply explaining)* Foreign devils…

PEARL. …foreigners.

*(***ANDREW** *and* **PAULA** *look at each other.)*

PEARL. Those fangweilos came to save China. Why did you come.

ANDREW. *(caught off-guard)* "Why did we come?" Um. Well, Paula and I went to High School together, and I'd always had a…crush on her.

STUDENTS. *Oooooh.*

PAULA. Andrew –

ANDREW. So in April, we ran into each other, and she told me she was applying to teach English in China…so I said, I've always wanted to teach in China.

PAULA. Teacher Bai Ke is…joking. We came here, because – well, it starts with our families, really. Andrew's parents are workers, very active in their unions –

ANDREW. Right. Of course. And my mom hates our landlord. She's been on rent strike for like, two years.

PAULA. And my family, they're…professionals, but they've traveled the world over, sharing their expertise, and learning from different cultures. Now, the USA, has always taken the Capitalist Road.

(off students' excitement)

And I know, I know you think there are some good… things about that, but there are also many bad ones. We don't have free health care, or barefoot doctors, or free education for all. And I wanted to see for myself what it was like to live in, and learn from, a country that has taken…the Socialist Road.

(She finishes, somewhat proud of her speech; so is **XIAO DA***, who claps.)*

XIAO DA. Capitalism is "a dying man who is sinking fast."

SHERMAN. *(stands, looks East, ala Mao)* Only Socialism can save China!

(The others start to laugh. Uncontrollably. **LINCOLN** *recovers.)*

LINCOLN. He is joking, of course. The truth is, China is very backward. Very poor. Everywhere in world, Chinese people are very rich, except in China. Always so. China never change.

XIAO DA. Bu shr. Already many things change. School get Toyota van, Hitachi TV…foreigners.

PEARL. And also, because of you they move the sign back.

PAULA. What?

LINCOLN. *(off of their confusion)* The sign on the road.

PAULA. What sign?

PEARL. This is why they keep you in the hotel for ten days. You could not come here until they move it. Before it say: "No Foreigners Beyond This Point."

LINCOLN. It still does, they just move it back three miles.

*(***LINCOLN** *does not notice an approaching shadow.* **PEARL** *signals* **SHERMAN***, who interrupts* **LINCOLN***.)*

SHERMAN. *(shifting gears fast)* Mr. Bai Ke – "pair sunglasses" or "pair *of* sunglasses"?

(Suddenly the students straighten out all their chairs, and sit up straight. **PAULA** *and* **ANDREW** *can't figure out why the mood has shifted. A moment later,* **TEACHER MING** *walks in and students immediately stand.* **MING** *is an old woman seen the night the Americans were introduced to the campus. She's no older than* **WIDOW WAN**, *but she has had a much tougher life, and it shows.)*

PAULA. Hello?

TEACHER MING. I am –

CLASS. Good morning Teacher Ming.

TEACHER MING. *(in an older style of English)* Chairman of Language Studies.

PAULA. Can I help you…

TEACHER MING. Am sorry to be late. Please accept my humblest apologies.

ANDREW. Yes of course, Teacher Ming. We met the night of the movie. You are welcome to…

TEACHER MING. Please forgive me, my English is very poor. I speak Russian, and Yugoslavian. And Esperanto, of course. Eduku, traduku, lernu.

*(***TEACHER BAI KE** *and* **WEI TAN** *look at her blankly.)*

TEACHER MING. But my English, you see, is very poor. So I come as your humble student.

ANDREW. We're teaching Free Conversation today.

TEACHER MING. Yes. I know. Please…go on.

*(***MING** *takes a seat, front and center. As the students sit, they push their chairs neatly back in rows)*

ANDREW. We were talking about the sign on the –

XIAO PEARL. *(stopping him)* Teacher Bai Ke, you said it needs the article "of," is that for plural only, pairs *of* sunglasses, or also when it is just one pair sunglass?

ANDREW. *(realizes the fun is over)* Oh, uh, I see.

("teacher mode")

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