CHINA CALLS

A Play by

Lonnie Carter

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CHARACTERS (in order of speaking)

MR. AO, 40, Mongolian, Master of Ceremonies, Driver for All Seasons,
Shape-Shifter on Automatic

BRODIE, 56, American

PAULETTE, 5, daughter of LONNIE

GREGO, 9, adopted son from Ukraine

ALEXA, (LEXIE), 10, adopted daughter from Ukraine

SYLVIE, une certaine age, adoptive mother of GREGO and ALEXA; natural mother of PAULETTE

TIME - 1998-99

PLACE - Beijing,

Chicago

and the air and telephone space in between

MR. AO *announces -*

Man goes right to left
Travels west to east on plane
China is his stop

BRODIE *speaks to us -*

Keats Died at 28

In Snoop Doggy Doggerel
With apologies to all Romantics major and minor

Keats died at 28, no, 7, no, 6
Today I'm 58, no, 7, no, 6
You pays your century
You takes your picks
His was the 19th, mine the 20th
He roared in with sonnets ablaze
I'm stepping out with 50 plays
I'm on United going west to east
It's 14 and change the first leg to Tokyo
To see my kids Lexie, Grego and Paulette
They live with their mom in Beijing no jokeyo

MR. AO *announces -*

This mom's a banker
Proactive – whate'er that means

Her name is Sylvie

BRODIE
Two people, two lands, not getting along

That's putting it – well, you're hearing the song

BRODIE *is in a cramped airplane seat.*

MR. AO *announces -*

Epicanthic Air
Economy - round/slanted
Breaths mingle as One

BRODIE
Flying the friendly skies, drinking and flicks
Slurping udon noodles and Absolut
I see Olde Charon on the River Styx
Jackie Chan kick-boxing the video to mute
Here I am and here are my seatmates, two on my left, one on my right

and now we all imbibe
Two cans of Kirin - Japanese woman
Two baby bottles of Bailey's Oirish Cream - Japanese woman
Two Absoluts - me
Two cans of Budweiser - Japanese woman
Five feet one, five feet one, six feet one, five feet one
Japanese woman, Japanese woman, me, Japanese woman
Aisle, inside, inside, aisle
Each
Of
Us
Miserable

How - do - I - know?

Because the 'How', the Japanese woman
And the 'do', the Japanese woman
And the 'I', the me
And the 'know', the Japanese woman
All started breathing together - con - spire - ing, as it were
tapping our toes, nodding off, snoring in unison, waking each other up
as each of our adenoids took turns dominant-to-tonically
Our feet rank and gross in sweat
The Asian economic miracle, no debt, you bet
Sucking Kirin, Bailey's, Absolut and Bud

MR. AO *announces* -

Midflight - air choppy
Air in airplane recycled
Quiet flows the germ

BRODIE

"When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain
Before high-piled books, in charact'ry
Hold like rich garners the full-ripened grain"

The Keats lines have stuck in my craw, been my law
Bellowed my flaccid iambic members
Held my gnarled dactyls to the embers
Keats dead from consumption at half my age
And still I cough up fresh blood for the stage

MR. AO *announces* -

Chinese Opera
Economic miracle

Please support the arts

BRODIE

Wait, I'm flying West to East
Jumping Judas priest
My birthday hours are two times rapidly cut
My time in the air ages me Dorian Grey-ly, heavens' gate shut
I'll be 112 in 28 years
Four times Keats and Shelley his peer
Holey Moley, as was said in Homer
No wonder O-Diss that jive-ass roamer
Spoke all his lies and never wrote a jot
Striving seeking finding yielding not
So what, that in mid-age wrote Samuel Taylor Cole
Those haunted lines from his opium hole
And Wordsworth was 80 or so before he gave up the ghost
Not all the good die young
Do the young die good's what matters most
I'm on United going east with the flow
And what will happen, Buddha only know

The plane descends.

MR. AO *announces* –

Landing - Absolut
Beijing International
Capital North Doors
Here Middle Country
Here Beijing Bloody China

Now practice your spit

BRODIE *is plunged into the 'Komplete Kaos' of the airport.*

BRODIE

Holy Mongoley, it's O'Hare on stereoids.
I am Siam – The Chung King and I
Madame Chiang Kai-Shek meets the Gang of Four

Over the airport loudspeaker - a Woman's voice.
SHE *has taken over the airport*.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Hi, Bro
Mr. Ao, your driver, will meet you

MR. AO *rushes up to* BRODIE*; awkwardness abounds.*

MR. AO

Brodie, Mr. Ao.

BRODIE

Mr. Ao, Brodie.

MR. AO

Brodie, Mr. Ao.

BRODIE

Mr. Ao, Brodie

BRODIE *to us.*

Mrs. Claypool, Mr. Gottlieb
Mr. Gottlieb, Mrs. Claypool

The same Woman's voice over the airport loudspeaker

WOMAN'S VOICE

Go right through customs
Go right through
People everywhere, but no lines
This is Beijing
This isn't Tokyo
The Japanese queque for everything
The Chinese queque for nothing
Go right through

Mr. AO *guides Brodie through the airport 'kaos'*

MR. AO

Get to car and quick
I grab bags, get others too
They make way for you

BRODIE

But everything's stamped, it's all such a blur
These guys in uniform, that man in fur
Carts, ten soldiers shout, gesticulate
My notebook, my sonnets, my prologue - wait!

MR. AO

There's everything here
All your words accounted for
Watch the swinging door
Three more men will stamp
Your hand, valise, watch the ramp
What you say? - NO FEAR!
Chairman Mao, - it's time to Lock and Loll

They are finally out of the airport kaos.

BRODIE
Mr. Chairman Ao, did you say
'Lock 'n Loll'?

You didn't really say that, did you?

MR. AO
I didn't really say anything -
Yet

MR. AO *declaims* –
The Banker Sylvie
beats the Boys at their own sport
Last heard and now seen
this is her Final Report

SYLVIE *is before us.*

SYLVIE *speaks to us.*
Last Ditch Saloon
Final Attempt - 'Uno mas' - to Re-ignite
One More Try - before - 'No Mas'
Freshness Optimism Passion
Love, even
Everything else on top of the Setting Sun
Relationship recycle – HQ Beijing
Salvage Center in the People's Republic of China
Call when you get here – immed-jet-ly
Fire when ready, wordsmith

MR. AO *to* BRODIE -

MR. AO
Sylvie say call when we get here immed-jet-ly

BRODIE
We're here because we're here because -

MR. AO *dials his cell phone and hands it to* BRODIE.
We see split-screenly, and hear SYLVIE**.**

SYLVIE
This is Sylvie

BRODIE
We're here. I'm here.

SYLVIE
Booby, you're here!

BRODIE
In pieces.

They put me in one of those miniature crypts in our Narita hotel during the layover and
took me out in the a.m. limb by bloody limb.

SYLVIE
I can't wait to see you, limb by bloody limb.
The doors of The Forbidden City are flung open wide!

Pick up the children at WAAB
WAAB, so-called, Western Academy of Beijing
Go right to Beijing Riviera
Three stories, walled gates, guards, pool, gym, playground
Basketball court indoor and out
You'll like that
How are the Bulls? The Bears?
Army, 24-7
The government charges 50,000 American dollars a month
Going up like mad
When do you go back
When do you return
And watch out for the Ring Worm.

BRODIE
Who's got ringworm?

SYLVIE
Road. Ring Road.

SYLVIE*'s phone is breaking up.*

BRODIE
You're breaking up.

SYLVIE
Is hard to do.

Suddenly the ***CHILDREN*** *are on the cell, but it's also broken and we hear about every third word.*

PAULETTE, *the almost five year old is first.*

PAULETTE
Daddy...lesson...later...love...Daaa -

LEXIE, *the ten year old*.

LEXIE
...to...lesson...wheel...weee...Daaa –

GREGO, *the nine year old*.

GREGO
rink...ah...like...sharp...ah...like -

BRODIE
Paulette, Lexie, Grego - how...how...something...Hi!

The connection is broken.

BRODIE
What hath God wrought

BRODIE *speaks to the audience*.

BRODIE

Alright, now I'm going to fast forward.
We went to pick up the kids at WAAB, but the other driver,
a Mr. Ma, had already done so,
taking Lexie to the pottery class at the Hyatt,

"to...lesson...wheel...weee...daaa"

Grego to hockey practice in the newly-opened
first-ever NHL-approved rink in all of Asia

"rink...ah...like...sharp...ah...like"

and Paulette, the almost 5, to her swimming lesson
at the Lidoo, some hotel where embassy people hang

"Daddy...lesson...later...love...Daaa"

at least I think that's where they all are
I've already been to Beijing Riviera,
I'm back in this limo of sorts and I'm here all of five hours and
what am I looking at in this Sino Crash Course?
We are speeding down one of the Ring Worm Roads in Beijing.
That is, until we're slambang on the Hollywood Free
Stuck between Tiananmen, as in Heavenly Peace Gate, Square, on the left

And the Forbidden City on the right.

BRODIE is in the car with MR. AO.

BRODIE

Mr, Ao?

MR. AO

Brodie -

BRODIE

May we park? Is it possible? It looks impossible…

MR. AO *makes a driving maneuver, the first of many, that dazzles* BRODIE.

MR. AO

Park? We park.

BRODIE

Mr. Ao, you just found a parking space where there is no space, with a piece of driving I not only question, I don't think I saw it.
Now, walk. I want to walk in the Square.

MR. AO

Square clear. Not many people - your President -

BRODIE

My President? O, Rubba Tubba Bubba.

MR. AO

Rubba - ?

BRODIE

Clinton's due here tomorrow. That's why I arrived a day early. I'm head of his advance team.

Now, how do we get across this, what is this that makes a boulevard as narrow as a country lane?

Somehow, MR. AO *guides* THEM *across.*

Unbelievable! You walk like you drive.

THEY *have crossed the road and are now in Tiananmen Square.*

And there's - virtually - no one here.

Mr. Ao?

MR. AO

Brodie -

BRODIE
I'm not head of the President's advance team.

MR. AO
Your President, Rubba, he come tomorrow, meet with leaders - over there -

BRODIE
Over there in the - Qway Zhong Zhi Moo People's Revolutionary Behemoth Building –
Is that the Leviathan crawling up the steps?

MR. AO
Life nasty, brutish, short, so we
Serve the People Heart and Soul.

BRODIE
Chairman Ao.

MR. AO
Chairman Mao.

BRODIE
The bigger the buildings the smaller the people
The Albert Speer Theory of Architecture

MR. AO
No small parts, only small people.

BRODIE
Actors, perhaps?
A man with a kite.
A man selling ices.
An American couple, Turistas?

MR. AO
North Dakota.

BRODIE
How do you know?

MR. AO
Maybe South.

BRODIE
Pierre or Fargo?

MR. AO
Pierre Go Far Far Go

I think North

BRODIE
So tomorrow this Square will be emptier than it is now?
Not even those Fargo-ites, Fargosians?

MR. AO
Far Go Go-Fars Mini-sota
Go-Fars sharpen teeth

BRODIE
Beavers…

MR. AO
Beavers!

BRODIE
Use your magic. Let's get back across. We shall return!

MR. AO *uses his magic and* THEY *are returned.*

We are returned. Beyond meta-radar.

MR. AO
Radar, ex-ray? Where we go now?

BRODIE
We go far already. We forgo lots.

MR. AO
Not far enough. Forgo.

MR. AO's *cell phone rings*.

MR. AO
Hway!

MR. AO *yells furiously in Mandarin, or perhaps this is his normal speech which this Westerner interprets as furiously.*
MR. AO *stops long enough to declaim -*

Les Enfants Chinoisie avec Telefon!

PAULETTE, BRODIE's *not quite five year old daughter comes forward. And is* SHE.

PAULETTE (*shouting*)
Daddy Daddy -

Barking in the distance.

We got two new puppies Louie and Lilly!

BRODIE *speaks to the audience.*

BRODIE
Last week I was in Chicago doing my play.

How do you communicate with your daughter who's in the so-called Middle Country when you're in the Middle of your own Country?

PAULETTE (*shouts*)
On your cell phone, daddy!

BRODIE *speaks to audience.*

BRODIE
I only got this bloody thing because it's the only way to speak -

BRODIE *speaks to* PAULETTE.

Paulie, I love and adore you and not so loud!

PAULETTE
You're far away, Daddy, I have to talk loud.

BRODIE
I can hear you loud and clear
You now have four dogs? In China?

PAULETTE
Four dogs. One two three four!
Beijing, Shanghai, Louie and Lilly.

BRODIE *speaks to the audience.*

BRODIE
Beijing and Shanghai are what I used to call Pekinese,
Which are commonly found on the menus, I mean the streets,
walked by well-to-do ex-pats.

BRODIE *speaks to* PAULETTE.

So Paulie, whose dogs are these?

PAULETTE
My dogs, Lilly and Louie.

BRODIE
Are they the same kind of dogs?

BRODIE *speaks to the audience.*

Now, if I weren't in Chicago, I'd ask Mr. Ao what kind of dogs these are.

MR. AO *speaks to the audience.*

MR. AO
Dogs.

BRODIE
Thanks. Great, Mr. Ao.
Paulie, what kind of dogs are these?

PAULETTE
Cocker spaniels.

BRODIE
Cocker spaniels?

PAULETTE
Daddy -

BRODIE
Jen, where did you get cocker spaniels?

PAULETTE
Mommy got them at the dog market.

SYLVIE, *Mommy*, *makes* HER*self known*.

ALL THREE CHILDREN
Mommy!

SYLVIE
My children
My precious children
So Lexie
So Grego
So Paulie
Hi Bro
Call Dave
Call my father
Call my mother
I'll call my mother

Call my Father
Call the Schools
Get Grego's hockey skates
Call the gardener
Get Dave
Get him to hook up the hose
Call Dickie and Tinie
Ask about soccer camp
Tinie's selling their house
Property values just went up
Selling for two mill
They bought land in Cornwall across the street from Whoopie
Or is it Brokaw
How's your mother
Have you heard from Chris
How are Pete and Jimmy
I'm faxing you a paper with a drawing of Grego's foot so you can get him his skates
I have to go to Hong Kong
Do you want anything from Shanghai Tang
Ching will be here while I'm gone
Mr. Ao will bring over his daughter Dandy she's Lexie's age
They can go to McD's Dunkin' Doughnuts A & W some fun place for lunch
So, Bro, how are you?
Call John and Glenda
Christine takes Northwest next week they fly over the pole
Concentration will be on flash cards multiplication tables an hour a day
Grego's behavior positive reinforcement don't be hard on him
Paulie's a party girl you should see her in her pink dress and she always buys shoes we call her Imelda
Congratulate Lexie on finishing her science project
Grego's science project something about bugs
Call Dave
The children, Bro, the children
Always wanted them to live abroad
Isn't it exciting?
For each and every one of us?
Bro?

SYLVIE *makes* HER*self unknown*.

PAULETTE
Lexie, Daddy wants to talk to you.

BRODIE
Paulie, stay on the phone.

Light shift to PAST.
SYLVIE *is exuberant.*

SYLVIE

Give me five.

SYLVIE *and* BRODIE *high-five*.

BRODIE

Well?

. SYLVIE

Positive.

BRODIE

The test? Fantastic! When? August?

SYLVIE

Leo Time. Congrats to us.

BRODIE

The kids?

SYLVIE

Lexie and Grego will be thrilled. We'll tell them tomorrow.
Alvarez said it - it's a miracle.

BRODIE

El Milagro!, says our Ob-GYN from Madrid.
Madrilenos tutti!

SYLVIE

You're mixing your linguas.

BRODIE

Oui, oui, Madame.
Es ist ausgezeichnet
Noticias del Mundo
Fantastico Bambino!

And now, my dear, as you promised, as promised, as we…you're coming to Washington with me.

SYLVIE

Oh. I've got to go to San Fran.

BRODIE

It's a birthday lunch – every year, I want you to meet –

SYLVIE

Go go, where are the children?

BRODIE

Pottery, hockey, swimming.

SYLVIE

A bite? I'm starved.

BRODIE

Next door?

SYLVIE

Sure.

SHE *fusses a bit with his attire as only a fastidious woman can do.*

That's a nice green.
Dark enough

BRODIE

May we tell everyone?

SYLVIE

Everyone?

BRODIE

Everyone, silly.

SYLVIE

Let's savor it for ourselves, Mr. Miracle-Worker.

MR. AO *Declaims* -

District of D.C.
Capital of U.S.A.
Beijing big rival

Back to SYLVIE *and* BRODIE.

BRODIE

I met these people who know, or at least have met you.

SYLVIE

Where?

BRODIE

There was a little party -

SYLVIE

You said you were going for lunch.

BRODIE

I did and then there was this small gathering at Lucy's -

SYLVIE
So it wasn't just a lunch for your best friend on her birthday.

BRODIE
It was, and then -

SYLVIE
You said -

BRODIE
I'm trying to tell you that I met two people -

SYLVIE
It's not what you said -

BRODIE
Sylvie, I asked you to come -

SYLVIE
I didn't want to interrupt you and your artistic friends.

BRODIE
Look -

SYLVIE
No, you look

BRODIE
Jesus Christ -

SYLVIE
Grego, Lexie!

MR. AO *announces* –

MR. AO
Past before the past
How did they get here from there
Terrified – that's how

WE are at the first time meeting of BRODIE *and* SYLVIE.
BRODIE *speaks to us* –

BRODIE
So we've just come from this party at Pitty and Petey Barclay and they served Oscar Mayer wieners, not even that high end, not Chicago Wrigley Field franks, no thanks to the franks,

and Pitty and Petey live on 700 aces in Connecticut, I mean this is not Montana, 700 acres is the biggest planet in the Constellation Konnektikutte with three ‘K’s’, and they’ve more money than the Holy Ghost –

We are in SYLVIE’S *pad.*

SYLVIE
Stop!

BRODIE
OK, but WHO are these people?

SYLVIE
He runs –

BRODIE
I know he runs, he was in 700 dollar sweats.

SYLVIE
Let me finish –

BRODIE
Let me start –

SYLVIE
What?

BRODIE
What? Yes, what?

SYLVIE
Whatever you think we should start?

BRODIE
What

SYLVIE
Would

BRODIE
That

SYLVIE
Be?

I feel as if I can ask you anything – never having laid eyes on you before two, three hours ago.

Do you have students who go on?

BRODIE
Many go on and on. I can't possibly stop them.

SYLVIE
To do great things? Good things?

BRODIE
Things going on, no doubt. And you? You have interns? Followers, acolytes of a sort?
Women who have you as a role model?

SYLVIE
Yes, I do. I suppose it's why we do this.
Is it not?

BRODIE
We do the same thing?

SYLVIE
I don't know, that is, what you do.

BRODIE
Would we ever?

SYLVIE
Now you speak of the impossibility of 'knowing' someone else.

BRODIE
Not 'someone else', but you, me, in particular.

SYLVIE
So, you've known lots?

BRODIE
'Lots', as in real estate? That's New York talk, when New York talks about 'the country'.

SYLVIE
People leave New York so they don't have to talk 'lots'.

BRODIE
We would talk all the time, that is, 'lots'.

SYLVIE
Is this "The Artist Meets Businesswoman" and takes care of him happily ever after?

BRODIE
No, this is "The Businesswoman Meets Artist" and they take care of each other.

SYLVIE
Because only they know each others' differences.

BRODIE
It's pretty to think so.

A moment of decision.
SYLVIE *breaks the ice by suggesting the ice*.

SYLVIE
I'm having a small vodka.

BRODIE
Get us two 'Little waters', that is, Polish for vodka.

SYLVIE
I'm better at the languages Romance.

BRODIE
Yes, that Slavic stuff – ShChShCh – awfully unromantic
Will you excuse me?

SYLVIE
Do I have to?

BRODIE
From the looks of things, I'd say you don't have to do anything.

SYLVIE
Or that I have to do lots of things to maintain this look of things.

BRODIE
The loo? Where's the nearest?

SYLVIE
Dark at the bottom of the stairs.

HE *leaves.*

This sort of thing has never worked, it seems
There's too much baggage, just like an airport
When handing over luggage seems the way
To insure a safe trip, and rids you now
Of burdens thought to be unriddable
But arriving at your destination
On the conveyor belt of your bad dreams
The same old baggage, suddenly now short
Of wheels or straps. At the end of the day

You've banged your head and scraped your knees and Ow!
You'd like to cry, but hide your tears pitiable
'Cause hiding's what you do best. Relationships
Come and go and you're the queen who comes up small
And never do you learn to give it not your all

BRODIE *returns*.

SYLVIE
You're here! I thought you'd gone.

BRODIE
I said I was going to the loo.

SYLVIE
You said you were –

BRODIE
going to the loo.

SYLVIE
I thought you'd looft – I mean that you would be - loofing.

BRODIE
No goofing. I wouldn't say I was if I wasn't.

SYLVIE
Don't be cross.

BRODIE
You're used to men saying they're going to the euphemism and then bolting for the door, are you? Hard to believe. Unless they're afraid of your power or you've had awfully bad luck.

SYLVIE
I thought you'd gone. And I don't like the word.

BRODIE
'Power'.

BRODIE
My apologies. I didn't mean –

SYLVIE
To be mean. Of course, you never would.

BRODIE
A Crash Course in how to speak
when you don't quite know what to say.

SYLVIE
You do know what to say now.

BRODIE
May we choose a bedroom upstairs?

SYLVIE
That's what to say.

MR. AO
The past pluperfect
So past so plu so perfect
So plu plu perfect

BRODIE *and* SYLVIE *in bed*.

BRODIE
Do you know any Democrats?

SYLVIE
Besides you?

BRODIE
And the nanny? Is she legal?

SYLVIE
It's all legal and it's all good. Only *your* party gets involved with illegal nannies.

BRODIE
My party, sure. Fierce enemies on the political landscape?

SYLVIE
Subjects to be avoided.

BRODIE
At all costs. Cancelling out each others' votes.

SYLVIE
I'd never tell you about mine.

BRODIE
But of course, I'd know.

SYLVIE
No, you wouldn't.

BRODIE
You'd never tell me outright? Even as we are now?

SYLVIE
I'm not the person you think I am.

BRODIE
I hope not. That is, I almost hope you are.

SYLVIE
For instance, I'm pro-choice.

BRODIE
Pro-Choice, meaning what? Whatever you choose to be, you're for it?

SYLVIE
A bit too glib, don't you think?

BRODIE
O, I think –

SYLVIE
Yes, of course, but do you?

BRODIE
As much as you? Well, that's a matter of an extended argument, is it not?

SYLVIE
And would we have extended arguments, o, yes, we would.

BRODIE
And would that be good?

SYLVIE
It would be great, for a while.

BRODIE
Fatalist. And yet –

SHE *gets up to leave*.

BRODIE
You're leaving the Republican bed and going to the Democratic.

SYLVIE
That's the one in the dungeon with the pregnant black widow spider.

BRODIE
Baby black widow spiders start out white, but, of course, you know that.

SYLVIE
And you know that the Republicans are trying, apparently successfully, to eliminate the adjective 'Democratic', so they say the 'Democrat bed'.

BRODIE
Never the ‘Democratic bed’. Right you are, if you think you are.

SYLVIE
A subject to be avoided.

BRODIE
You would tell me, of course.

SYLVIE
Not on your life.

BRODIE
To the loo?

SYLVIE
And another chance for you to bolt?

SHE *leaves. And, of course,* HE *stays right there.*

Dog barking.
Fast forward.

Once again BRODIE*’s talking on the cell.*
HE*’s in Chicago, the Kids in Beijing.*

LEXIE
Hi, Daddy.

Barking. More.

BRODIE
Lexie, what’s with these dogs?

LEXIE
What’s with these dogs?

BRODIE
How’s school, darling? Are you studying your Chinese?

LEXIE
My Chinese.

BRODIE
Chinese Chinese. Can you count to ten?

LEXIE
One two three four -

BRODIE
In Chinese.

LEXIE
five six seven eight nine ten.

BRODIE
Very clever.

LEXIE
Daddy, how old am I?

BRODIE
What do you mean, how old are you?

LEXIE
I mean, am I ten or am I eleven?

BRODIE
How old were you on your last birthday?

LEXIE
Ten.

BRODIE
How old will you be on your next birthday?

LEXIE
Eleven.

BRODIE
So how old are you now?

LEXIE
That's what I'm asking. How do I know if I'm ten or eleven?

BRODIE
Ah yes, the joys of elitist private schools. Do you know when you were going to school on the upper east side of Manhattan I repeatedly told your mother we were spending -

LEXIE *joins in.*

LEXIE & BRODIE
too much money and the world would change overnight if all the mothers would take their children out of private schools.

PAULETTE *is present*.

PAULETTE
For my fifth birthday, Daddy?

BRODIE
For your fifth birthday, baby.

PAULETTE
Let’s go someplace far away.

PAULETTE *is out*.
SYLVIE *is in, distraught back in Connecticut.*

SYLVIE
Aaron died.

BRODIE
What?

SYLVIE
He’d gone to his gym after work. They found him the next morning sitting in bed.

BRODIE
Aaron dead in a hotel bed in Beijing.

SYLVIE
I’m going to have to go.

BRODIE
Of course.

SYLVIE
And stay.

BRODIE
Take his job?

SYLVIE
I’ll have to.

BRODIE
Would you go back and forth?

SYLVIE
I’d stay.

BRODIE
Well, the children -

SYLVIE

I've wanted the children to live abroad -

BRODIE

China? I can't pick up -

SYLVIE

I won't argue about it. Your career, just do it.
I've got to make these calls.

BRODIE

Make them in five minutes.
You can't just decide -

SYLVIE

I have to finish Aaron's job.

BRODIE

Why? At the expense of everyone, everything else? You can't just yank these kids out of school.

SYLVIE

There are two schools in Beijing for ex-pats -

BRODIE

There's a Montessori on the moon, but that doesn't mean we bus them down to Canaveral for the next blast.

SYLVIE

It will broaden them and they need to be with me
I'll go tomorrow
Can you bring the children as soon as they're out for the summer?
Betty will go with you.

BRODIE

It's a fait accompli
The children and Betty may have to go without me

SYLVIE

Why?

BRODIE

Auditions.

SYLVIE

For what?

BRODIE

My play in Chicago.

SYLVIE
Where?

BRODIE
You know – that city with the wind?

Make your bloody calls
But from now on, it’s a season at a time

SYLVIE
When’s it not been?

BRODIE
It has not been
It was not been -

SYLVIE
O, please, wordsmith

SYLVIE *is gone.*

We’re back with MR. AO. *and* BRODIE *in the limo.*
MR. AO *still on the phone.*

BRODIE
China Calls.
That's the phone and the calling.

Never leave home without your cell.

Never leave your cell, or your hutong, that's Chinese for 'alleyway', 'cause when you return, that alleyway's been ripped up, and up has gone a bank and I don't mean the swollen banks of the Yangtze, damnated for the Three Gorges Dam to the displacement tune of two million?, ex-pen-dable vermin, carve 'em up with the dogs, cook 'em in a Mongolian hotpot, leaping off their leashes, but the Chinese don't eat dogs, do they, Mr. Ao?

MR. AO. *finally off the cell.*

MR. AO
Dogs? Chinese people like dogs.

BRODIE
Capitalist dogs, they eat them.

MR.AO
Capitalist dogs. Weery funny. Chinese people not eat dog

BRODIE
O, right. Chinese don't eat their dogs. It's the Koreans who eat their dogs.

Or is it that the Chinese eat Korean dogs?

MR. AO
Chinese eat Korean dogs, haha.

BRODIE
Capitalist Korean dogs.

MR. AO
Seoul Food? Koreans eat their dogs. Chinese people not eat dogs.

BRODIE
Their dogs or any dogs?

MR AO
Their dogs or any dogs.

BRODIE
Is it that they don't eat any dogs or just not their own dogs?

MR AO
Chinese people like dogs.

BRODIE *looks out the window.*

BRODIE
Wasn't there a hutong there, like a minute ago?

MR. AO
Yesterday.

BRODIE
I just got here.

I think, therefore I'm here. That is, just.

Today a bank - the China Revolutionary Bank, the China Capitalist Dog Bank, the China Imperialist Running Sore Bank -

MR.AO
Capitalist Running Dog Bank, haha. Weery funny.

BRODIE
It's where capitalists-in-training eat their dogs.

MR. AO
Eat their dogs, ha ha

A car whizzes by.

BRODIE
Chinese Audi.

MR. AO
Chinese Audi.

BRODIE
I have Audi.

MR. AO
You have Audi.

BRODIE
Twelve years old, black, look just like that, but not Chinese.

MR. AO
This new Audi, made in south China.

THEY *whizz by a car.*

BRODIE
Russian car, they all look fifteen years old, Lada? Every car that whizzes by us is an Audi; every car that we whizz by stranded is a Lada. All dirty tan, rusted out. Not a Lada car.

MR. AO
Break up.

BRODIE
Soviet Union.

MR. AO
Lada no good. Many government people drive Audi. Audi good.

BRODIE
Mr. Ao, every day we see police pull people over -

MR. AO
Pull people -

BRODIE
Stop people for violations.

MR. AO
Why-o-lations, yes. No stop, never stop government cars, little cars, taxis –

BRODIE
The little red cars, what are they called?

MR. AO
Taxis.

BRODIE
Right. Now what does the saying across the back of the window say, Serve the people --

MR. AO
Serve the people, heart and soul.

BRODIE
Chairman Mao.

MR. AO
Chairman Mao, ha ha, weery funny.

BRODIE
So the police stop the little guys -

MR. AO
You know, if police stop me over, I just drive away.

BRODIE
Because -

MR. AO
I just go by.

BRODIE
O, because they have no cars.

MR. AO
I just drive away.

BRODIE
What if they take down your license number?

MR. AO
I just go by.

BRODIE
They wouldn't stop you anyway, a Mercedes limo, they wouldn't stop us, right?

MR. AO
No, we just drive away.

BRODIE
Wow, look at that!

MR. AO

Bus. Eweery day.

BRODIE

That bus sure bent that bicycle out of shape. And the windshield, the bike did as much damage as the bus.

MR. AO

Many damage.

BRODIE

How long do you suppose it'll take them to clear this up?

MR. AO

Clear?

BRODIE

It seems to take them days to clean up each accident.

MR. AO

Days. Maybe tomorrow.

BRODIE *speaks to the audience.*

BRODIE

We'll undoubtedly be by here another six times before tomorrow, hauling kids to school, hauling kids back to Beijing Riviera, which has no river nearby that doesn't spawn three-headed industrial strength fish. You can't live with the Chinese, and they can't live in these villas, paid up in full by Shell Oil or any investment bank measuring success one investor at a time you can shake a yuan at.

MR. AO

See clean up truck bus taxi bicycle, cart-horse-drawn watermelon pedicab vehicular rickshaw, excuse Rick-Shavian vehicle road-boat, how you say it?

BRODIE

How I say what? Mr. Ao, what did you just say?

MR. AO

Three years language school before become driver. Now just driver.

BRODIE

Are you sad about that?

MR. AO

Sad?

BRODIE

Mad?

MR. AO

Mad?

BRODIE

Mr. Ao, who are you?

MR. AO

Who are you?

MR. AO*'s cell rings.*

MR. AO

Hway!

BRODIE

Let's leave it all and have a Grand Olde Party

MR. AO *speaks in Chinese over the cell as*
BRODIE *declaims -*

BRODIE

The G.O.P.!

SYLVIE *materializes.*

SYLVIE

I can leave what I do anytime
I just leave everything behind
Nothing comes with me once I leave it
It's all there the next day to be found again
It's just that I've left it completely
I've cut it away from myself

BRODIE

You never leave a thing behind
You have with you every piece of baggage you've ever bought
Leather bags, canvas bags, steamer trunks, overnight bags, shoulder bags, hanging bags, attache cases, handbags, bags of bags
Never can you leave what you've acquired
You and it have merged
Acquisition is you

SYLVIE *(plaintiffly)*

What drew us together in the first place?

BRODIE *(matching her emotional tone)*

Novelty. Excitement.

SYLVIE
Passion. Action. When we were linked, I felt nothing could stop us.

BRODIE
Linked, yes.

SYLVIE
I'm not a Republican I'm not a Republican.

- directly, gently, charmingly to BRODIE

SYLVIE
You said you'd never known a Republican.

- directly, not gently, to SYLVIE

BRODIE
I said I didn't know a Republican I liked.

SYLVIE *is out.*
LEXIE *is present.*

LEXIE
The world will change overnight -

BRODIE's *on the cell speaking with* LEXIE.

BRODIE
O.K. O.K., Lexie, so what are you doing in school? The last time you were doing a play.

LEXIE
We're doing a play.

BRODIE
Right, and it's a play you're making up?

LEXIE
Yeah, but -

BRODIE
Yeah, but?

LEXIE
Yes, but, we're not really making it up.

BRODIE
So, what's it about?

LEXIE
I don’t know.

BRODIE
I’d like you to know at least a little about it . Who are the characters, for instance?

LEXIE
Me and Sarah.

BRODIE
Sarah and I, you and Sarah, O.K. And what do you do?

LEXIE
Daddy, Grego got into big trouble.
Him and William got caught smoking.

BRODIE
William and he. May I speak with Grego, please?

LEXIE
He’s sleeping.

BRODIE
Is your mother there?

LEXIE
She had to make a speech.
Daddy, when are you coming to China?

BRODIE
Back to China. I was just in China. I’m in Chicago. Once my play opens I’m coming back to China.

LEXIE
For good?

BRODIE
For something.

LEXIE
Mommy’s grounded Grego for smoking cigarettes.

BRODIE
O, yes, I forgot, smoking cigarettes.
Lexie, it isn’t your business. Now, have you done your homework?

LEXIE
I didn’t have any.

BRODIE
So when I check tomorrow everybody will agree with you that you had no homework?

LEXIE
Yeah, but -

BRODIE
Yeah, but?

LEXIE
Yes, but -

BRODIE
Did you leave it at school?

LEXIE
Well - I took the wrong bookbag. I took the green one.

BRODIE
What color is yours?

LEXIE
Red.

BRODIE
So why did you take the green one?

LEXIE
I don't know.

LEXIE *starts to cry.*

BRODIE
Alright Lexie, it's not that serious. Tomorrow morning pay attention, get to school early if you can and do some of your homework before class.

LEXIE
I can't and Paulie is bothering me and she won't be quiet and she runs around our room with no clothes on and Grego takes my things and he took my red bookbag that's why I took the green one -

BRODIE
O.K., darling, that's O.K., now take a deep breath, sweetheart, and blow your nose. Is there some ice cream in the freezer, some coconut maybe?

LEXIE
I think so.

BRODIE *speaks to the audience.*

BRODIE
Or is it Paulie who likes the coconut?

LEXIE
Daddy, can I go now?

BRODIE
Will you promise to feel better?

LEXIE
Yes.

BRODIE
O.K., I think you're very beautiful and I love you very much.

LEXIE
Goodbye, Daddy.

SHE *hangs up*.
MR. AO, at the *tail end of phone conversation in Chinese hangs up.*
BRODIE *hangs up*. HE *speaks to the audience*.

BRODIE
O.K., just so it's clear at least to me
I'm back in China.
In Chiang Kai Shek's limo, stuck on a Ring Worm with Mr. Ao.

Mr. Ao, how is your daughter?

MR. AO
She's fine. She's Dandy.

BRODIE
Tell me her name again.

MR. AO
Dandy.

BRODIE
You have one daughter, no son.

MR. AO
No son.

BRODIE
Sylvie's driver, Mr. Ma, 'Ma' meaning strength or horse or smoking or hemp -

MR. AO
Strong horse smoking hemp

BRODIE
Indeed.
Mr. Ma has one daughter, no son.

MR. AO
No son.

BRODIE
People in the West have this image of the Chinese only liking boy babies and killing girlbabies -

MR. AO
Kill? Chinese people like all babies.

BRODIE
All babies, all dogs.

A car whizzes by.

MR. AO & BRODIE
Chinese Audi, ha ha.

BRODIE
Now, this limo, how old is it?

MR. AO
Four year.

BRODIE
This limo is only four years old?

MR. AO
'91.

BRODIE
It's '99.

Another car whizzes by.

Chinese Audi.

MR. AO
Chinese Audi. '99.

Something's wrong with the car.

BRODIE
Mr. Ao? Does Chiang Kai's limo sound funny?

MR. AO
Chiang Kai bad driver, limo sound funny, ha ha.

BRODIE
No, I mean like - now what?

MR. AO
Limo stopping go.

BRODIE
Limo stopping stop.

MR. AO
No. Go.

Car seems to work again.

BRODIE
Mr. Ao, it seems better again.

MR. AO
Maybe need fixing.

BRODIE
This whole bloody country needs fixing.

MR. AO
Country need fixing, ha ha.

MR. AO's *cell rings. HE answers.*

Hway?

Again, the furious Mandarin.
MR. AO *stops his hailstorm long enough to announce -*

Les Enfants Chinoisie avec Telefon Redux!

And back to his Mandarin blitz.
PAULETTE *is back. LONNIE is on the phone with* HER.

PAULETTE
Daddy, Daddy, I lent you one, I lent you an E-mail and I wrote it all by myself and I spelled Daddy.

BRODIE

That's wonderful, darling, how do you spell Daddy, sweetheart?

PAULETTE

D - a - d - y

BRODIE

D - a - d - y, that's great, darling.

PAULETTE

Daddy, Daddy, are you at your play?

BRODIE

Yes, doll, I'm about to go to rehearsal. Do you know the name of my play?

PAULETTE

The Sovrin State of Boogedy Boogedy.

BRODIE

Can you sing it, darling?

PAULETTE *(singing)*

The Sovrin State of Boogedy Boogedy -

THEY *both start singing it, emphasizing the "Sovereign".*

PAULETTE & BRODIE (*singing*)

The Sovrin/Sovereign State of Boogedy Boogedy
The Sovrin/Sovereign State of Boogedy Boogedy

PAULETTE

Daddy, here's Lexie -

LEXIE

Hi, Daddy.

BRODIE

Lexie, did you just get up?

LEXIE

What?

BRODIE

Did you just get up?

LEXIE

What?

BRODIE

Did you have breakfast yet?

LEXIE
I'm up and I'm not hungry.

BRODIE
You have to eat, darling.

LEXIE
But I'm not hungry.

BRODIE
O.K., please put Grego on.

LEXIE
Grego, come talk to Daddy.

GREGO
Hi, Dad.

BRODIE
Hey, Grego, how are you?

GREGO
Good.

BRODIE
Did you have your breakfast yet?

GREGO
What?

BRODIE
Breakfast. Did you have it yet?

GREGO
No. I mean, yes. Dad?

BRODIE
Yes, Grego?
Grego?

GREGO
What?

BRODIE
You asked me a question. Have you thought of something special we can do together when I come back to Beijing?

GREGO

Me and you can go to the horse farm and ride.

BRODIE

O.K.

GREGO

We can go fishing ‘cause it’s real easy.

BRODIE

Now tell me what you’re doing in school.

GREGO

In school?

BRODIE

What about science?

GREG

O, we’re studying arachnids.

BRODIE

Spiders. Great.

GREGO

Yeah.

BRODIE

That’s terrific.

GREGO

And mini-beasts.

BRODIE

Mini-beasts?

GREGO

Like insects with eight legs or more.

BRODIE

You’re becoming an expert on mini-beasts.

Now listen, about smoking -

Silence. No response.

Grego, are you there?

GREGO

What?

BRODIE
I used to smoke a lot of cigarettes. Did you know that?

GREGO
No. But cigarettes are bad for you.

BRODIE
That's right, but it was really before we knew it was bad for us, I mean we knew, but we weren't being very smart. So I understand maybe you've been smoking. Is that right?

GREGO
Ah - here's Mommy.

SYLVIE
Hi, Bro, just got in from Singapore and I'm wiped.

BRODIE
Hester's party?

SYLVIE
Dr. Chang's presentation. I gave a speech.

BRODIE
How was it?

SYLVIE
Proactive Investment Triangulation for the New Millenium.
Ace'd it. These boys don't have a clue. They see a woman walk in, they don't get it.

BRODIE
As you so often put it, Beat the boys at their own game.

SYLVIE
You got it. Brush 'em back from the plate, then catch 'em looking at the Old Tomato.

BRODIE
The ultimatum?

SYLVIE
The Old Tomato. You're the wordsmith.

Huge sustained yawn from SYLVIE.

BRODIE
Wiped?

SYLVIE
Wiped. Did you get your tickets for Xi'an?

BRODIE
I thought we were all going together.

SYLVIE
Got to be in Bangkok. You go. I'll go later with my mother and Grego.

BRODIE
You're the one who really wants to see these terra cotta soldiers, the kids'll be bored to death.

SYLVIE
No, you go. Stop off in Shanghai on your way back. Wasn't there a play you wanted to see? When do rehearsals start? Is Dennis directing? How many classes do you have? Did you call Roger at the computer place? Did they come to fix the laptop? Is the answering machine working?

Again the yawn.

BRODIE
Sylvie, get some sleep. I'll take care of it.

SYLVIE (*sotto voce*)
That's what you always say.

BRODIE
What?

SYLVIE
I said, that's what you always say.

BRODIE
What does that mean?

SYLVIE
It means - never mind.

BRODIE
What do you mean, never mind. I'll - take - care- of - it.

SYLVIE
Bro, I just don't know.

BRODIE
What do you just not know?

SYLVIE
We have to talk.

BRODIE

Talk.

SYLVIE
It’s not working.

BRODIE
Obviously.

SYLVIE
I’m not going to spend another twenty years living this way.

BRODIE
What makes you think I want to?

SYLVIE
Why did you do it?

BRODIE
Why did I do what, as if I didn’t know?

SYLVIE
Come to live with me. Agree to live with me. Live with me.

BRODIE
Agree to live with ME. We’ve been over this a thousand times. It’s the repetitive nature of this that completely drives me off my nut.

SYLVIE
Say it again.

BRODIE
There was a freshness, an optimism and, yes, passion, love, and both of us had tried everything else under the bloody sun -

SYLVIE
That’s not enough.

BRODIE
Apparently not.

SYLVIE
I won’t have this.

BRODIE
YOU won’t have it?

SYLVIE
Did you ever love me?

BRODIE
O, for pity sake -

SYLVIE
Not for pity sake! The humiliation -

In the distance is PAULETTE.

PAULETTE (*heard in the distance*)
Mommy, Mommy, where's my headband?

SYLVIE
Here, Paulie, talk to your Daddy.

PAULETTE *on the phone.*

BRODIE
Hi, Paulie-

PAULETTE
Daddy, I have to go to Hester's party.

BRODIE
O.K., doll, you can hang up. I love you, my little Beijing Girl.

PAULETTE
I love you too, Daddy, my little Shanghai Boy.

SHE *hangs up.*

BRODIE *declaims* -
MR. AO goes from Mandarin to MandaRap

MR. AO
BEIJING GIRL

Though the Hellmann's mayo is not real
And the bandits your numbers from the ATM will steal
And the terra cotta soldiers have an artificial feel
You can leave your bikes your children and your yuans
While watermelons and roasted scorpiONS you chew on
McDonald's mission is one on every corner
Thirty-five and counting
With Ronald in missionary position
Cholesterol mounting

There'll soon be peep shows and hard porners
The bicycles still abound

And belching blue trucks rumble
But seldom a horn amidst the sound
They're polite but they ain't humble

I walked across Tiananmen Square
The day Bill Clinton spoke
As I looked down at the squares in the Square
My eye took quite a poke
These new ones are of lighter color
That make the older squares that much duller
The tanks had been so heavy
That the concrete had collapsed
They've been replaced and the blood's been cleaned
Now there's plans for stores kids' gaps

If the Emperor's children in the Forbidden City were still around
They'd be digging the Spice Girls all over town
On pirated tapes wearing Tommy Hilfiger capes
DKNY halter tops
Same North Face white boys with Kennedy mops

What's your pleasure, Beijing
Lap dancing or lap tops
What's your measure, Tsu Ling
You got enough change for dog chops?

I doubt it, you got to be paying for those sheer little ankle socks
Riding your bicycle holding a wet rag to your mouth and nose
Dodging pedicabs, double buses and a thousand shocks
Pumping for dear life and they want you to think designer clothes

What's that doing to your psychee
Can you even afford one nut leechee?

Beijing Girl by the hundred thousands
Thou swell thou pretty
Thou just one grain of Thou-Sands

With your hutongs, I say your barrios, your ghettoes and your 'hoods destroyed
Hey, darling, it's just the Asian economic miracle you can't avoid
With Shell and Mobil phones and investment banks
There's nobody giving you a chance to say, no thanks

If in fact it's true that the adoption macro-economy is humming
    along with a surplus of Sino-girlbabies
And without this in- dust - try in dustiest of Beijing these girls
    would never infancy leave no ifs ands buts or maybes
What about Tsu-Ling with her little anklets
    wishing she'd been strangled at birth

so she wouldn’t have to ride her bike
with leaded gas fumes so thick they’re crap-clots

Hey, leaders, you can plant a billion trees in Mongolia to keep the sands
from rushing across the Beijing plains
But if you lose Tsu Ling, her heart her soul her brains
Like Aretha put it, what you got without a little r-e-s--p-e-c-t-e-e
Is the laundry for 1.25 billion and no tickee

Grego *is present and declaims* -

GREGO

Alexa!

LEXIE

My name is Alexa, Lexie, and I was born on a village hillside in Ukraine ten years ago. I don't remember anything about it, except for the things I know. I mean, how could I? I was only six, six months, I mean, when a man, a sort of eagle swooped me off and brought me to the United States, to live with a woman I today call Mommy. He carried me in his beak and talons and flew me all the way to New York where an adoption agency for little eagles, called eaglets, or egrits, I'm not sure, hard of hearing, tired of hearing, would go to live in big nests with lots of wormy toys and whistles and shrieks and crows and MA - CROWS and mommy claws and I don't remember any of this but I know and not because someone told me. I know, for instance, that I know no Ukrainian, or Russian maybe, except ‘Ona, Dva, Tree, Chyetra, Pyat, Shest, Tsem, Votsem, Dyevyat, Dyestyat’, or something - because no one spoke to me for the first six months of my life and not even the eagle who took me up into the air - I know there was screaming and the crackle of wood smoke and hissing snake skin in the fire and smells of wet wool and toes jagged, nails with big calluses and flutes and I had to hold my ears because everything was getting inside them and making me not remember because how could I,
but I know
I know no one spoke to me.

LEXIE *declaims* -

LEXIE

Gregorivitch!

GREGO

Hi. My name's Grego. I was born on the side of a hill nine years ago where they speak Russian. Recently - and my Dad says I'm talking more and more like him - I think I want to go back. I speak Russian, sort of. Well, not really. ‘Da, nyet’, that sort of thing. My sister Alexa comes from the same village, same orphanage, but we’re not orphans. Paulie doesn’t come from that hillside. I’ll just leave it at that. She's almost five. Four point nine. She likes to walk around with no clothes on. She shares a room with Lexie and Lexie doesn't like it. Daddy tells her it'll be fine when we get back to New York or Connecticut where we live too where she can have her own room. I'm not so interested in having my own room. I like everybody else's room. I mean I can't sleep alone. I don't like it. Why would anyone want to sleep alone?

I like to play ice hockey and be the goalie. I like to lie down on the ice when the puck's always down at the other end. The coach yelled at me. Daddy yelled at me.

There's a new ice rink in Beijing. It's not for hockey, but I can still skate.

I got to go.

GREGO *and* LEXIE *declaim-*

GREGO & LEXIE

Paulie!

PAULETTE

Hi, my name is Paulette. Daddy calls me Paulie or darling or sweetheart or doll or baby and everyone else calls me Paulie. Mr. Ao - we have two drivers, Mr. Ma drives Mommy to work, they take, like, Daddy says I shouldn't say 'like', I'm four, five, years old, almost, my birthday's July 19 and Daddy says I talk too loud, Not so loud, Paulie, he says, and I say, quiet, like QUIET! and I say I'm going swimming at the Lido, Lidoo - and I know how to do the breast stroke -

BRODIE

I don't know how to swim. I watch my gorgeous daughter in the Lidoo pool -

PAULETTE

Watch me, Daddy, watch me.
Daddy, look at me, I'm holding my breath.

BRODIE

Yes, baby, you're a beautiful swimmer.

PAULETTE

Daddy, Daddy -

BRODIE

I'm sorry, I shouldn't say that, Paulie, hold your ears.

PAULETTE

I got water in my ears, my ears hurt, Daddy.

BRODIE

Let me hold you, sweetie, and dry you off.

PAULETTE

It hurts, Daddy, it hurts.
Daddy, we're getting the phone wet.

BRODIE

The phone? There's no phone -

MR. AO *declaims* -

“Death without Burial” -

MR. AO

Brodie, you go to play tonight, I take you s-s-s-s-s-ix-thirty. Many traffic. I know where play is.

BRODIE

I’m in Beijing about a day and I read in the Beijing Weekly, an English-language glossy put out by some American and under ‘theater’, it says Jean-Paul Sartre’s classic “Morts sans Sepulture”, which is “Death without Burial”, literally, and the blurb says, if you want to feel worse than you already do in Beijing go see this being-and-nothingness Existential account of life’s awfulness. I note that the letter ‘j’ separates being from Beijing, or be - IING, if you will, and nothingness is separate from Beijing not at all, I’m suspecting, so I get Mr. Ao to locate the China National Experimental Theater which turns out to be somewhere in this mongoose of a city stuck up against the corner of its lower intestine. Mr. Ao, who knows every hutong and cranny like the front of his lobes is febrile in our not finding this off-off-Beijing venue, but finally we do. All along I’m thinking ‘Death without Burial’ must be what we know as ‘No Exit’, and if you’ve never heard of that or Sartre, you must have heard the phrase ‘Hell is other people”, which was the soundbite, before the term existed, for the play’s message.

MR. AO

I tell them you weery feermous.

BRODIE

What?

MR. AO

I tell them you wery feermous writer, show them your book.

BRODIE

So we go into the theater for the play and it’s a stage on three sides and the house seats about two hundred and I smell the blood on the walls because it’s my blood because here in this lower G.I. tract in BEE - IING is where I’ve worked for thirty years in the theater. This ain’t the Chinese Opera, this ain’t the Peony Peahen Pavilion, this is Eurocentric Dray-Ma. And then the play begins and it’s NOT “No Exit”, it’s a very early Sartre written out of his experiences with ‘La Resistence’. It begins with patriotic singing and joyous optimism liberte, fraternite et equalite and suddenly they’re all captured by the Fascists and the final image shows the freedom fighters shot over and again, rising every time they’ve fallen and scrawling the letter ‘V’ in their own blood hugely on the wall against which they’re being shot.

MR. AO *announces* –

Pure play, pure business
Man and Woman Lock and Loll
Leepeat – Lock and Loll

SYLVIE appears.

BRODIE
Mr. Ao! Let's go to OUR restaurant.

MR. AO
O,K,
You drink some wine?

BRODIE
You mean with the snakes in it?

MR. AO
Snakes. Ha Ha.

BRODIE
Can we ask again about the lemon chicken?

MR. AO
Lemon chicken.

BRODIE
Like in Chinatown. In Chicago you go to Chinatown and you ask for lemon chicken and you get it.

MR. AO
In Chicago. Like in Chinatown. Ha Ha.

BRODIE
Mr. Ao, you know what I'm talking about. No, maybe, you don't know what I'm talking about.

MR. AO
Lemon Bloody Chicken.
I know what you're talking about.
I live in a two room apartment with my wife who makes your meat sandwiches
Which you don't like
Alright, to call them meat is gilding the gristle, so to speak
And every time we're on the ring road number whatever and a black four door Audi cuts us off one of us says 'Chinese Audi' because one of us started it and I don't recall who and we break up laughing but that doesn't mean we're buddies
But maybe we are.

BRODIE
I think I kind of sort of understand
My Mandarin's improving by leaps and oranges.

MR. AO
Tough one to rhyme.

BRODIE
I can't wait to try Mongolian.

MR. AO
How do you know you haven't already?

BRODIE
Whoa, big fellow, this is a new wine.

MR. AO
Out of second jar with scorpion take off rust not unlike my Coca-Cola.

BRODIE
Cako-Lako in Chinese, meaning that which scours your liver of its Western rotgut.

MR. AO
As opposed to Kodak, KODAK, meaning absolutely, in Chinese, nothing at all.

BRODIE
As in 'Being and Nothingness at All'.

MR. AO
'Mort sans Sepulture', 'Death without Burial', the first play last play I ever saw why would I see a play my father Mongolian my mother Chinese I am just a driver drove a taxi the smallest with 'Serve the People Heart and Soul' across the back window. Taxi drivers do not go to plays by French intellectuals.

We have to live our Being and Nothingness; we do not want to see it on our stages. Yet, I was curiously drawn to it.

BRODIE
At the same time in Shanghai, the Arts Center Theater there which is the counterpart to the Beijing Experimental -

MR. AO
Is doing I translate as 'Closed' or 'Closure'.

BRODIE
Jean-Paul Sartre.

BRODIE
Can you believe it? And they're both doing plays by the same dead French guy.

MR. AO
Pretty good dead French guy.

BRODIE
Yeah, well.
Have you ever been to Shanghai?

MR. AO
Shanghai? No.

BRODIE
Have you ever wanted to go there?

MR. AO
No. Maybe.

BRODIE
But if you wanted to, you could just get on a train and go there.

MR. AO
I drive. Train?

BRODIE
Have you ever been on a train?

MR. AO
Yes, I went on train.

BRODIE
From?

MR. AO
From?

BRODIE
O.K., what about driving there?

MR. AO
Drive right away. From policeman here. Ha ha.

BRODIE
Yes, ha ha, but Mr. Ao -

A car whizzes by. Time shifts.

Racing to Shanghai, no doubt, from which I've just returned.

MR. AO
And where did you stay?

BRODIE announces -
The weery feermous Peace Hotel.

This is Vaudeville Time for BRODIE *and* MR. AO *as* THEY *trade riffs and rhymes.*

BRODIE
The Peace Hotel in Old Shanghai's no five star joint for certain

MR. AO
It’s the kind of house where you flop or crash and you never get right the curtain

BRODIE
There’s a note on the bed says they’ll change the sheets but only if you say so

MR. AO
Not one or two but every three days they’d never more replace-o.

BRODIE
Is it the soap they use, their keen concern, and the suds that’s so pollutin’?

MR. AO
The streets are clean in a dampish way, there ain’t no guns there ain’t no shootin’

BRODIE
No snubbed-nose revolvs
And the psycho crimes it solves

MR. AO
No high-speed chases, no Uzis thirty paces
This ain’t no Hong Kong movie set

BRODIE
‘Cause the smack and the crack don’t flood the streets just yet

BRODIE *and* MR. AO
Gets you a sug in the head, you bet

MR. AO
”You change money, change money, change money”

BRODIE
“You get honey, get honey, get honey”

BRODIE & MR. AO
Want a pretty China doll sit on your knee?

PAULETTE *has come forward.*

PAULETTE
Daddy, Daddy, Mommy wants to talk to you.

BRODIE
Darling, doll, gorgeous, baby, honey, my sweet -

PAULETTE
Daaa - deee!

BRODIE
O.K., Paulie, let me talk to Mommy.

PAULETTE
Mommy Mommy, Daddy wants to talk to you.

SYLVIE *comes on line.*

SYLVIE
I'm concerned that you're not paying enough attention to the children. I thought coming to China would be a new beginning but you, the original Luddite, the man who refused to be wired, now spend all your time in front of the computer on the net talking to all your mysterious friends now you're back wherever you are in Chicago when you could have stayed here and been in the fabric of the children's lives in an open honest serious committed way instead of your mysterious untrustworthy self!

BRODIE
One second. You took the children 10,000 miles away and now you're acting as if I'm the one who abandoned them. You didn't have to go to China, you could have walked away from this bringing-Wall-Street-to-the-Forbidden-City life you've decided to lead and now you're practicing your victim position.

SYLVIE
I had to go. A man died and I owed it to him to go.

BRODIE
And guess what?, as you're so fond of saying, he's still dead and now you owe it to yourself and the children to come back.

SYLVIE
The children are perfectly fine without you Grego has no male role model. I've always wanted them to live abroad you're the one who has resisted -

BRODIE

GREGO *announces* -
"**And the Terra Cotta Soldiers Have an Artificial Feel**

BRODIE
So I'm picked up at the airport in Xi'an, China, for my visit to the terra cotta soldiers discovered in 1972 by a farmer, rooting around in his garden. Seems what he unearthed, they say, was from 2200 years ago, hundreds if not thousands of figures of soldiers, horses, carriages, all erected at the Emperor's behest to protect the Sovereign's mausoleum in his after life from his marauding enemies who
too, presumably, would have died and now too would be made of terra cotta soldiers,

like two plaster armies standing in full panoply, and I ask my guide, just what is this I'm looking at, as it's dawning on me that the whole bloody thing is a fake, as I troop through these Brobdignagian quanset huts, jockeying for position on balconies overlooking the soldiers, and my guide says - few farmers got angry 2200 years ago and hit terra cottas and that's why Chinese government now putting back together for edification.
And my guide says it's time for the movie and it's a big mutha extravaganza with thousands of extras, spears, crashing horses and flames and cannons and ketchup and I'm thinking - this was not a couple of disaffected hayseeds with a little corn likker out to do a bit of damage to the Emperor's fantasy of protection in the Nevermind. This was a fullscale revolt of thousands of peasants furious at the Almighty's tyranny Sino-smashing pummelling the Befucius out of these wardroids. Fast forward to 1972 and farmer not on rampage, just wanting to cultivate his garden when - screecho! - his spade cracks on a bit of helmet, then powdery ear, then bit after bit until the government figures out a scam to bolster the tourist industry and keep the peasants in the countryside quiet as millions flood the cities to do the work destroying the hutongs and building the high rises and the Guggenheim Museum in New Jerk City gets in the act and they put up an exhibit of several of the terra cottas and people go gaga and buy their tix from Cathay Pacific Airlines and off to Xi'an they go, thousands each day remarking how extraordinary the soldiers are, each with distinct expressions - chop suey, says me, they're all faux at best and they all have exactly the same expressions - it's the terra cookie cutter school of sculpture and the Xi'an groupies from around the galaxy have been reeled in, with the farmer out there serenely signing autographs, by the by, hook, Chine and MSG sinker.

And the hutong goes down
And the high rise goes up
And the peasants all frown
And the guv’mint they’d schtup
If they could, but they can’t
Not just yet; wait you’ll see
For it’s each little ant
Bearing weight – they – will - be

The hotel in Xi'an had this saloon with a lovely young woman at the door telling me it's a karaoke bar and I look in and I see a bar, so I sidle up to the
rail and order a Jameson's. I'm not being a smartass, I can see the bottle and the bartender pours enough not even to coat the bottom of the glass. I see several very pretty women all around, and a giant tv screen suspended above, and just then a young man in white shirt and black tie comes up to me, greets me and offers to buy me a drink. I try to beg off, but he, very brokenly, insists back and I relent. Then there's another Chinese in same outfit and a third and I think maybe they're Confucius' Witnsses and they're going to hand me a copy of the Great Walltower with its positive message and we start talking and they're all smoking full strength Marlboros and they say they're medical people, they did not say doctors, at the local hospital and they drop some medical-like references, Johns Hopkins guy had just visited, etc. and I say I'm from Chicago and they offer me cigarettes which I politely refuse and more have gathered and I swear there are eight guys all dressed in this uniform of Xi'an and they want to talk about Michael Jordan and they ask me about Clinton's scandals which they basically shrug off, and I say that Americans love Chinese people because they are so honest. I swear on a stack of little red books, I thought they were going to carry me off on

their shoulders all of us having just won the Rose Bowl, or the Peonie Bowl, and they all gushed that they loved the American people because we are so honest and they've bought me three drinks, which unfortunately is by this guy's pouring not enough to wet your finger and I try to buy all eight of them drinks and they would have wrestled me to the floor to keep me from doing so. When I finally extricated myself having shaken everyone's hand at least three times, pushed away countless offers of Marlboros, I felt like a bit of a shit at ever having doubted their motives, because the only thing that they wanted, was comraderie and conversation with an American.
And that, my friends, was the Chinese karaoke bar in Xi'an, China.

MR. AO *announces* -
The Sovereign State of the Middle Country

PAULETTE *is present.*

PAULETTE
Daddy, Daddy. China bombed Jugoslavia.

GREGO
Nato
Nato bombed the Chinese embassy.

PAULETTE
That's what I said. Nato bombed Jugoslavia.

Light shift to radio broadcast station

SYLVIE (*as the Chinese Ambassador with heavy stilted accent*)
Not once have you acknowledged that your criminality in bombing our embassy has violated our national sovereignty and taken the precious blood of Chinese lives.

BRODIE (*as newsman)*Mr. Ambassador, the President has apologized profusely and the reason we invited you to be on this program is to have this open exchange of views. Surely, you don't believe that NATO deliberately bombed your embassy -

SYLVIE (*same*)
You have yet to acknowledge the travesty of trust, this betrayal of international law, this rampant violation of human decency. Your government is lying to its people and the world.

BRODIE (*same*)
Sir, the CIA has said it had an out-of-date map -

SYLVIE (*same*)
The United States of America expects us to believe that, with all its power and technical expertise, it didn't have the proper map, that it didn't know it was deliberately bombing the embassy of the People's Republic of China? Do you think we are fools?

BRODIE (*same*)

Of course, we don't think you are fools. We have respect for you -

SYLVIE (*same*)
Not once have you acknowledged your dishonesty, this deception that lead to the murder of Chinese citizens. How is it possible for China ever to believe the United States?

BRODIE (*same*)
There is this little matter of the Congressional report stating that China stole U.S. nuclear secrets -

SYLVIE (*same*)
An outrage. We don't need to steal your secrets. Keep your sordid little secrets. We have our own sordid little secrets. We don't need to steal yours.

BRODIE
Let me drop any pretense of being a newsman and talk it straight. Mr. Ambassador, you give us too much credit for being so smart that we couldn't have made this mistake with the map. Of course, we are stupid enough and I say "we" indeed, we are studpider, stupidest and let me tell you when I noticed it starting and this will resolve the whole issue perfectly and we can get back to R & K, that's Rhythm and Karaoke, In the 50's, 60's and even later out in Burma Shave country, which takes too much explaining, when you went to fill up your car at the gas station, inside the station, in plain sight, were maps - maps of the United States and maps of every state, detailed, precise, colored, not as in Negro, maps. And you know what they cost? Nothing. All maps were free. Every driver had an accurate map of wherever he wanted to go, or bomb, for that matter. And where did people go? Everywhere. And what did they bomb? Nothing. Then some jackass got the bright idea that he'd charge for these maps - 2,3,4 bucks - and it caught on - and this mentality gripped the nation. Except some. Then many, in fact, rebelled. They refused to pay. People did without maps. Soon the maps yellowed on their little metal vines inside the gas stations and the phrase, ‘He couldn’t find it on a map’ became meaningless because the maps weren’t being drawn and therefore could not be found.
And then the bombing began.

And that’s the honest-to-God truth.
And I love the Chinese people because they are honest.
And the Chinese people love me because I tell them the truth

PAULETTE *announces* –
If You Lie, You Die.

BRODIE *and* SYLVIE both *in China.*

SYLVIE
All I’ve ever wanted is an honest, open relationship built on trust and mutual respect. No secret friends, no separate phone numbers, no unexplained absences. I’m not out to monitor your every move, but mutual respect and openness and support and being best friends, but it has to be honest and I’ve never said I didn’t like your work, do I understand it, am I offended by it, is it in my face to the point that I don’t like it, yes, sometimes it’s just too confrontational, do I support it, yes when it’s open and honest and mutually respectful and not secretive, do we have separate views, differences of perception, is my perception always the right one,

yours isn't always the right one, but it's an honest, open disagreement, generous with each other and when I didn't understand what you were doing or writing and I said so I still supported you in an honest, open trusting way until I couldn't trust you and your secret friends and your lack of openness and support in the worst eighteen months of my life when I had to redefine myself and no one was there for me and I couldn't see the forest for the trees all I've ever wanted is a loving, trusting relationship with my best friend.

BRODIE
Let's talk about your secrets.

SYLVIE
Secrets? I have no secrets.

BRODIE
Your life's an open portfolio.

SYLVIE
You hate what I do.

BRODIE
I don't even know what you do.

SYLVIE
I'm reticent to respond.

BRODIE
You're reluctant. You're not reticent. No one has ever accused you of being reticent. You don't want to respond. This 'you lie you die' nonsense. You lie every day. It is how you're so hugely successful, but what works in business does not work in what I like to call life.

SYLVIE
Life. You call it life. I've tried to provide a life for you so that you could pursue what you love. I'd hoped you would love me along with your work and be there for me and the children but you've insisted upon being secretive, your secret friends, your secret eee mails -

BRODIE
Yes, I have secrets, but I know what they are. You don't know what yours are. It's taken me a long time to be able to form what seems to me now as the obvious question. Why did you adopt these two children and then why did you have one?

SYLVIE
Why did you?

BRODIE
I didn't adopt. That was left to you and the man whom you said was never around and, if I'm to believe you, he wasn't.
And I fathered Paulie with you because I thought at my ripe young age of 51, with you at 45, that it'd be a bloody miracle.

SYLVIE
And it was. And I wanted ten more. And you didn't.

BRODIE
And what did you think you'd do with ten more? Would they be toys? Investments?

SYLVIE
You're vicious and you're falling apart. You can see it in what you say, in the way you look, your whole psychology –

BRODIE
Psychology? That's your joke. Every time you get some shrink who actually makes sense, you dump him or her and rush back to that midget with the shawl who sucks up to you.

SYLVIE
This can't be. I won't let you destroy me
You have all the emotional power. I have none.
Destroy yourself.

BRODIE
One of our first conversations you took exception to my saying you were a powerful woman. What a faux pas that I should recite the obvious. You shied away from the word - power - like it was dirty, like it got up under your nails - nice nail job, power nail job -

SYLVIE
Power like you've never seen.

BRODIE
You got that right.
Power right back atchoo

PAULETTE present.

PAULETTE
Daddy Daddy, I can't talk long, I have to open up my new bag of underwear Mommy brought me from Hong Kong.

MR. AO
babies defecate
it just goes it just goes
never a tickee in sight
Pampers?
You got to be kidding

PAULETTE
Daddy Daddy, where are you?

BRODIE

I'm in Chicago, darling, rehearsing my play.

PAULETTE
When are you coming to China?

BRODIE
Right after the play, sweetheart.

PAULETTE
Daddy, do you stay with Grandma in Chicago?

BRODIE
Sometimes, Paulie.

PAULETTE
May I talk to Grandma?

BRODIE
I'm not there, darling.

PAULETTE
Here's Mommy.

SYLVIE
Hi.

BRODIE
How are you?

SYLVIE
How's your mother? Have you talked to her? How's she feeling? Is she fine?

BRODIE
I'm going to Vienna and then Prague with a school group.

SYLVIE
Go see your Polish mistress. Go off with your students you always seem so close to them and I'm sure you're a wonderful teacher but why can't you get close to the children close to me?

BRODIE
One second, I have a chance, for free, so to speak, to go to two cities I've always wanted to visit, neither of which are in Poland, incidentally.

PAULETTE
Daddy Daddy, you're going to Poland?

BRODIE
Paulie, you're my Polish Spice.

PAULETTE
I’m not Polish Spice.

BRODIE
You’re blonde blue-eyed and you’ll always be my Polish Baby Spice.

GREGO
Daddy, how much are Pokemon cards?

BRODIE
Depends where you get them? We paid $5.99 for a slim packet of eleven.

PAULETTE
Daddy, would you put some ranch dressing on my pasta?

BRODIE
Darling, I’m in Chicago, I can’t put ranch dressing on your pasta in Beijing, and why do you want dressing on your pasta anyway?

PAULETTE
Oh, hee hee, silly Daddy, I fooled you.

LEXIE
I forgot how to do division.

Dad?

BRODIE
Yes, Lexie.

LEXIE
Why do I always forget?

SYLVIE
Grego’s been acting up.

BRODIE
What’s he been doing?

SYLVIE
Well, we’ve gotten past it.

BRODIE
What did you get past?

SYLVIE
Paulie had six dollars in her wallet, now she has none.

BRODIE

What's she doing with six dollars in her wallet?

SYLVIE
Grego today spent six dollars on Pokemon cards. Now Paulie can't find her Pokemon cards.

BRODIE
So not only did Grego take the six dollars from Paulie, he took her Pokemon cards worth $5.99. Is that what you presume? And what did he say when you confronted him?

SYLVIE
He denied it.

BRODIE
Of course. So how did you get past it?

SYLVIE
What?

BRODIE
How-did-you-get-past-it?

MR. AO *is very, or weery, much present.*

MR. AO
Sylvie, she want to go to dirt market, silk market, wicker market, porcelain market, flower market, antique market, China World Hotel, Kempinski Hotel, Hotel Lidoo, Dunkin' Doughnuts, A & W, MacDonalds, Planet Hollywood, Hard Rock Cafe Beijing, the German butcher, Schatzky's deli, the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, Beihai Park -
weery far from each other not get there quickily to each in one day

BRODIE
Seeing that it takes an hour and a half to get to each one of these places from the last or first or anything in between given the traffic the fumes the everybody being supremely pissed off but not expressing it because they're all drugged on exhaust smoke from the putt-putt motor-scooters Marlboro smoke 5-5-5 smoke, just tell her it takes six hours to do anything like go to the Internet Cafe and that you're just quitting as her driver.
Mr. Ao?

MR. AO
I've never been to Shanghai.

SYLVIE
I know you don't like Grego.

BRODIE
What are you talking about?

SYLVIE
I know you try.

BRODIE
What the bloody hell are you talking about? I'm trying to find out -

SYLVIE
My mother, in trying to console me last night, as to why you won't come back to us -

BRODIE
Come back?

SYLVIE
Said you'd told her you've never thought of yourself as a "family man" and so, now because you're tortured staying with the family, it's probably better to let you go.

BRODIE
I never said anything of the sort. Have you gone daft? Have you conveniently left out the fact to your mother that you unceremoniously gave me the boot? Has she read your Dear John - eee mail to me?

SYLVIE
I've made some mistakes in my life and now it's your decision not to return.

BRODIE
Would someone kindly remind the Madame that "all the residences and conveniences belong" to her and that I've been scrambling around like a crazy JAMF with my shoes under five different hide-a-beds, my notebooks in five different suitcases, my tapes of my "greatest hits" in five different borrowed drawers -

SYLVIE
I'm changing the locks on the doors
Get out
Get out
You sold your soul for a plane ticket

BRODIE
I hadn't the foggiest idea what you meant when you first said that but thank you so much for reminding me of one of your more charming moments which prevented me from walking off with the silverware.

SYLVIE
You wanted what I couldn't give you
I wanted what you couldn't give me

SYLVIE & BRODIE
We both wanted what we couldn't give each other
And what was that?
Everything

SYLVIE

As you are nauseatingly fond of saying -- IT'S PRETTY TO THINK SO...

BRODIE
Isn't it pretty to think so.

SYLVIE
Mr. Ivory Tower, Mr. I-would-never-deign-to-come-down-and-*soil*- myself-with-filthy-lucre.

BRODIE
The Sun Also Rises.

SYLVIE
NO. That might mean actually *working* for a living. And why should you when you can have someone else do it for you -- all the while basking in the glow of your smug starving artist superiority.

BRODIE
O, I forgot, you don't read novels.

SYLVIE
What was it? My stunning looks? My ready-to-order-politically-correct-it's-a-small-world-after-all-family?

BRODIE
You only make remarks that only characters in novels would make.

SYLVIE
You *jumped* at the chance to live like the other side... Because *The Price Was Right*, wasn't it?

BRODIE
Is that show still on?

SYLVIE
The show was still on when you got out of that hairshirt and into an Armani suit so fast it made *my* head spin. I'd like to see you try to last ONE day in my shoes.

BRODIE
Christian Louboutin, Manolo Blahnik, no I have it – Jimmy Choo!

SYLVIE
Pretty easy, taking shots from the cheap seats, *isn't* it??
You want to know my secrets? In order to understand them, you'd need to take an interest in what it is that I actually do. And then you might know firsthand whether it is lofty or exalted or just plain down and dirty.

BRODIE
You never lie to a woman
That's the real, 'You lie, you die'

You never lie to a woman
You can lie to a man without cease
And he just won't get it
But to a woman, if you lie
Because she
OWNS
And you,
You HE
You rents, you pays
Lie to her and to her
You'll 'yield the lease-hold of your days'

PAULETTE is present.

PAULETTE

Daddy, Daddy, why can't you just come home? Mommy says you won't come home. Mommy says you won't let us visit Grandma for her heart operation. Mommy says you're in love with someone else. Mommy says she loves you loves you and that we should tell you that over and over again until you come home.

BRODIE

Paulie, you're five years old.

PAULETTE

You keep saying I'm five years old.

BRODIE

You are!

PAULETTE

I'm a lot older than five and I know what's what.

BRODIE

What?

PAULETTE

I'm a lot older than five -

BRODIE

What's what?

PAULETTE

Mommy kicked you out because you're distant and cold-hearted but she knew because you told her that once you actually left you wouldn't be back and she blew a gasket anyway and she went ballistic and talked about the residences and conveniences all being hers because she owns everything and kept absolute control over everything and everybody but now she's become a completely different woman and she's said she wants you back and what kind of life are you going to have with anybody else and you can't have your boxes of books in somebody's garage and Grego and Lexie and I don't want to have a father who's living such a

tawdry life and Mommy just insists that you come back because we had a family meeting and she said that even though she'd made some mistakes she was going to fix it right now even though she booted you out a year ago and told you to live your life and be with anyone you wanted and even though she had said that fifty times and you didn't go because in your words she was going bonkers like when she yelled at you in front of us in that Paris hotel room when I was only two and you thought you had to stay and it was the fifty-first time you actually left and are you in love with someone else and how can you, don't you love us, don't you know what a miserable plight is ahead of you?

BRODIE

Paulie, you're in China -

PAULETTE

Mommy said there was a Polish woman -

BRODIE

O, Jesus fucking Christ -

PAULETTE

Daddy!

GREGO

Dad?

BRODIE

Yes, Grego?.

GREGO

I have a hard time expressing myself, but I think since I turned nine, I've found my tongue.

BRODIE

I am ready to hear this.

GREGO

I've always wanted Mommy all to myself. I've wanted to lock her up in a box with only me having the key. You knew this. I knew you knew.

BRODIE

And the fact that I haven't had a problem with that is a problem.

GREGO

She wants you to lock her up in that box.

BRODIE

Your box?

GREGO

No. Your box.

BRODIE

Do you know the price of Pokemon cards?

GREGO

Eleven for $5.99.

BRODIE

Do you know my price?

GREGO

Your price?

BRODIE

Yes.

LEXIE

Dad?

BRODIE

Yes, Alexa?

LEXIE

I remembered how to divide.

BRODIE

Tell me.

PAULETTE

Daddy?

BRODIE

Yes, Paulette?

PAULETTE

I know how to spell ‘Daddy’.

BRODIE

Is it D - a - d?

PAULETTE

Y. D-a-d-y, Daddy.

BRODIE

I can’t do it, Paulie.

PAULETTE

Won’t?

BRODIE

Can’t.

PAULETTE

I'm a smart little girl, Daddy.

BRODIE
It would be better to be happy.

PAULETTE
I won't ask you again, Daddy.

BRODIE
I know you won't.

PAULETTE
Just like you. Once you leave, you're gone.

BRODIE
Once you stop asking -

PAULETTE
Is your Polish friend, is she old enough to have a baby?

BRODIE
Paulie, I don't know where Poland is.

GREGO
And you don't know your price.

LEXIE
And you don't know how to divide.

BRODIE
And you all want the last word.

And my next to last word is always - I love you.
There's not going to be a last word.
And if that sounds - what is that word, Grego? It's not argumentative?

GREGO
It's coockoomentative.

BRODIE
If it does, it's not.
I'll say it over and over again, no matter what you say back.

SYLVIE
You're a piece of work.

SHE *hands an envelope to* BRODIE. HE *doesn't take it*.
SHE *stuffs it in his pocket*.

SYLVIE

A ticket to China. It's good for one year. Use it when you decide to reclaim your family.
Reclaim it, as have I.

SHE *turns to leave.*

BRODIE
Isn't it pretty to think so?
And isn't this the ticket you claim I've already used?

SYLVIE
There's one thing you've never understood.

BRODIE
Only one, such an improvement.

SYLVIE
And, yes, it's about power.

BRODIE
Like I've never seen.

SYLVIE
Because it's not in the groves of academe
And it's not in the Theater of MakeBelieve
It's not in the head, not even the heart
It's where you told me the ancients believe the soul resides

BRODIE
In the gut.

SYLVIE
Right in the bloody gut
And it's where you don't have it

You may think this is over, smartguy, but it's not.

BRODIE
May we disagree not to agree
Who's China, you or me?
You want to be the Good Olde U. S, of A.?
Love one of these countries or leave the other
The Beijing to Chicago local
There is no middle ground when it comes to the Middle Country
The symbol, the pictogram for 'middle' -

a square, sort of, with a slash through the middle
a sword, a saber cutting the box in two

a stick right through the heart
if only the heart were not a little left
you have to be on the bloodiest of fringes

May we never disagree to agree
Not if you're you
Not if you're me

MR. AO speaks to BRODIE.

MR. AO
Brodie, you go back to school?

BRODIE
I never left.

MR. AO
All school
All avant-garde play
Make would-be priest
Tough confessor

BRODIE
Bless you, number one son.

MR. AO
You be Chan Charlie, solve own mystery
Screw in Screw in
Screw - table
Sylvie, She Ma, Good Ma, Strong

BRODIE
Me Pa, weak.

MR. AO
You two, not together, but, as you say -
Disagree not to agree
Weery wise

BRODIE
Weary indeed

MR. AO
Too many in thought
Too many in word
Too little in deed

BRODIE
Weery right, Charles Ao.

Mr. Ao, what's your first name?

MR. AO

Mr.

BRODIE

Oh.

MR. AO

Ao.

BRODIE

Humility, the false estimation of one's worth.

SYLVIE & MR. AO

One's worth!

SYLVIE

I would never say anything bad about you in front of the children
I want the children to grow up in an atmosphere of mutual respect in a loving home full of confidence and warmth
I would never put up any obstacles between you and the children
Unfortunately I do not want you coming to see the children in China this Fall
I need this time to pick up the pieces
Please know that I am not angry and only wish you the best
Tell me where to send your things and I shall have them packed and sent to you
Take care
Sylvie

Children, let's all get into Mr. Ma's van.

The markets await.

GREGO

Do we have to?

LEXIE

Mommy, I don't want to.

PAULETTE

Shoes! Glorious shoes! Jimmy Choo's!

SYLVIE

The Chinese have always had markets
The silk market
The flower market
The pearl market
The wicker market
The dirt market where they sell dirt of all grades
Dirt on your floor

Dirt on the floor you don't have
Dirt under your nails
Dirt under the nails that have been pulled from your cuticles
Time for a nail job
Dirt beneath dirt
The dirt that dare not speak its name
The dog market
The cat market
The lizard market
The bird market
The snake market
The cocker market
The alte cocker market
The rat market
Yippie Aye O Dow Jones
Shang Kai Check Nas DACK
The Market!

The CHILDREN *and* SYLVIE *are gone*.

BRODIE
Mr. Ao, don't you want it?

MR. AO
The penultimate or the ultimate?

BRODIE
You.

MR. AO
You want me to want both because you don't know what either is. Beginnings -

BRODIE
Middles -

MR. AO
Ends. And not necessarily in that order.

BRODIE
Sartre, Jean-Paul?

MR. AO
Godard, Jean-Luc.

BRODIE
Mr. Ao?

MR. AO
Yes?

BRODIE

Try.

MR. AO

You. But me first.

A car whizzes by.

Chinese Audi will be first to smash.

THEY *whizz by a car.*

Lada smashed, vodka-crashed already.
The Middle Kingdom is moving.

BRODIE

And tonight? Shall we take in a play?

MR. AO

I'm driving to Shanghai. With my daughter.

BRODIE

Ah, Dandy.

MR. AO

Peachy keen.

BRODIE

I take a taxi from the front of the Peace Hotel with my Chinese characters
saying Huai Hai Road so the driver understands
He offers me a 555 cigarette and I take it for later

He drops me off at Huai Hai Park and I walk out into almost Old Shanghai

Past the site of the First National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party
closed from 11:30 to 13:00
Across from the first French primary school now Chinese
closed for the summer
Didn't Chou En Lai live around here someplace?
Past Shanghai Science and Tech Research Center for Artificial Limbs
open twenty-four hours a day
Dr. Sun Yat-Sen had a pad here someplace, Dr. Sun, the founder of the
Chinese nation

Here 'tis, o, closed, hey, guys, 12 year olds, bouncing your Michael Jordan
basketballs with your Chicago Bulls' caps turned around backwards, you guys know
why Dr. Sun's crib be shut up tight?

The new Shanghai Art Museum showing striking watercolorist, Chen Chi, who writes -

Un-building
Re-building
Ever-building
On and on in man's garden
I paint

And my favorite -

I myself, no self
I paint

That first time in Beijing, after seeing 'Morts sans Sepulture' at the Central China Experimental Theater deep in the lower intestine, Mr. Ao tells me –

Back in the limo.

MR. AO
Close the windows.

BRODIE
As I see workers with huge fire hoses spraying tall trees and scores hundreds of people walking obliviously showered and Mr. Ao says -

MR. AO
Animals live in trees, must be sprayed.

BRODIE
And today in front of the Spanish embassy, two city workers with masks aiming fire hoses into the tall trees spew over the scores hundreds of people and Mr. Ao once again says -

MR. AO
Close the windows, they're spraying the little animals that live in the trees.

PAULETTE
Daddy, would you put ranch dressing on my pasta?

BRODIE
I'll squeeze it through the cell phone, darling, and pour it over your cyber Kraft macaroni and cheese.

PAULETTE
Hee hee
Daddy?

BRODIE

“When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain
Before high-piled books in charact’ry
Hold like rich garners the full-ripened grain
When I behold, upon the night’s starr’d face
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I may never live to see thee more
Never relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love - then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.”

MR. AO

A-b-a-b
C-d-c-d
E-f-e-f
G - G

PAULETTE

G - G, Daddy.

GREGO

Dad?

LEXIE

One, two, three, four -

BRODIE

And so, this is my play.
It’s not like my life.
It is my life.
And that’s the penultimate.
Thanks for listening.

The End.