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Greetings, and thanks for taking a look at my short-film script.

I am an indie filmmaker from Oklahoma. I've won a few things at small festivals and I now live in China, where you can make enough to comfortably survive by working 10 hours a week, which -- in theory, at least -- leaves plenty of time to pursue non-commercial filmmaking.

My top-5 favorite films used to be: Schindler's list, In The Mood For Love, The English Patient, The Sea Inside and Shawshank Redemption.

Here's a Photobucket album with screengrabs from a few things I've done in China:

http://s305.photobucket.com/albums/nn219/photoalba/shorts/

My apologies that this isn't a properly-formatted Final Draft script. It will need to be bilingual by the time pre-production starts, which would be hard to do in FD, not to mention that nobody in China has even heard of the software, or of script format. "Scripts" here are messy treatments by our standards.

Among other rules (e.g. "character must be described in action before appearing in dialog"), I've dispensed with things geared toward script execs with goldfish attention spans (CAPITALIZING "important" stuff, for one).

I also cheated and smuggled a lot of action into dialog as parentheticals. The small production company is already very uneasy about the 20-some-page length.

Since this is my own shooting script, it is very sparse on people and location descriptions, but also already includes a lot of stage directions. If you ever used China-made products, you will not be surprised to read that EVERYTHING is shoddy here, including actors, their techniques and craft.

If I didn't put in the endless sighs, beats and throat-clears, they'd just run through their lines like robots without taking a breath. I want them to be conscious of the little ways in which the dialog needs to be broken up BEFORE we rehearse, while they're memorizing their lines.

Anything in dialog, plot or character development that you think should or could change, be added or deleted, is not realistic, logical, clichéd or boring, is too heavy or too light – any comments at all will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you again. ranimer@ymail.com

FADE IN

Grainy TV-footage of Li Na (Chinese female tennis champion) at tournaments, playing tennis and accepting awards. Overlaid are a few opening credits, intermittent with: A girl's voice (off-screen):

GIRL

Li Na's dad died when she was 14.

She won the French Open last year and became a Chinese national hero.

Her parents must be very proud of her.

I'd like to be like her one day.

Or maybe at least meet her.

FADE TO BLACK

Film's title card: THORNS

FADE IN

1. INT. - LOWER-CLASS APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

An old man is lying in bed, staring absently, breathing a little laboriously. He seems weak. A 12-year old girl is sitting on his bed, wearing a long-sleeve shirt and reading a well-worn comic book. A wheelchair is nearby, as is her bed with many stuffed toys. On the wall above it are Li Na's and comic-book-character posters and magazine clippings. She glances at an alarm clock; it's 23:07. She helps the old man blow his nose.

GIRL

(same voice that was heard during opening credits) Grandpa, do you want to listen to a radio play?

No response, like he didn't hear her. She turns the radio on anyway. A man's voice is in the middle of theatrically acting out an ancient heroic legend, using different voices to great effect. The girl goes back to reading. Off-screen the sound of the squeaky apartment's door opening can be heard. She looks up.

GIRL

(to grandpa) Dad is finally back.

The door slams shut, startling her, but grandpa remains impassive. She turns the radio off. The sound of things being moved around and dad's muttering can be heard from the adjoining living room. The girl looks at grandpa and then walks up to the open bedroom door and stops there, comic book in hand. She is watching her dad, a weathered man in his 40's. He pulls a half-full bottle of liquor from a cupboard, opens it, then sits down heavily on the sofa. He is tired, drunk and ignoring her.

He drinks a big mouthful, puts the bottle down, then carelessly takes cling-wrap off a few bowls of food on the coffee table and begins to eat. Girl watches him with foreboding.

GIRL

It's all cold. (he's ignoring her; beat) I will heat it up for you.

DAL

(finally looking at her, coldly, scratching his ribs) What's that gonna change? It's tasteless. Your cooking is as bad as your mother's.

GIRL

(hugging the comic book to her chest, half-whispering) Grandpa can't eat spicy food.

DAD

Oh, right, he can't. (sarcasm) That's great. Your mother ran off to Chengdu while I'm stuck here taking care of her lazy father and you. She's on a big vacation and I'm here eating trash. My life's just great. (he takes another swig, then goes on eating)

GIRL

(Surprised, never heard him talk like this) Mom said she only took the job because your salary is not enough to pay my new school's tuition. It's because of me...

Dad stops eating, stares at her for a moment, then scoffs and hurls the ceramic bowl of food with chopsticks across the room, shattering it; he jumps up and instantly is face-to-face with the girl, knocking over a stool piled high with newspapers in the process.

DAD

That's what she said, huh? She's the saint, she's the perfect mother, she only cares about her family, but *I*'m a loser, I can't even make enough money to send my daughter to a private school? Huh? (Girl is terrified, just shakes head in denial)

GIRL

(looking down) I hate the school.

DAD

(ignoring that) Who's paying for this damned apartment? Who's been feeding that cranky old coot while he's lying in bed all day? Who?

GIRL

He's got Alzheimer's.

DAD

Don't give me that crap again.

He's fine when he wants to be, he just ignores people when it suits him. (mockingly, as he goes to pick up the liquor) *Oh, I think I feel a bout of Alzheimer's coming on, I think I'll stay in bed all day tomorrow instead of going to work.*

(Drinks a big mouthful)

GIRL

(she's had enough) Mom was right. You can only hurt people, can't take care of them.

He walks back to her, bottle in hand, looks at her almost sadly and clears his nose.

GIRL

You don't care, so you don't know that grandpa's been getting worse, he needs—

Dad slaps her across the face with his left hand, making her drop the comic book.

DAD

You need to respect your father. (beat) I'm here. That's all the damn care you need.

Girl holds her face and fights back tears, breathing fast, staring at dad incredulously, then jumps into grandpa's bedroom, slams the door shut and locks it. She hesitates, then sits down on the floor, picks up her comic book and begins to cry silently, when -- she looks up and her eyes widen in terror as she can hear the sounds of things crashing and breaking and dad's swearing. Then silence. Grandpa is looking at her sadly from across the room, then turns away. The door handle moves as dad tries to open the locked door.

DAD

(on the other side of the door, breathing heavily, not angry anymore)
(sigh) Xingyue, open this door.
(he bangs on it, she doesn't respond. In a tired, hoarse voice:)
I'm....You can't talk to your father like this.

He leans against the doorframe, then sighs, sits on the floor and leans against the wall.

DAD

(in a sad, coarse voice) Daddy had a bad day.
(rubs his forehead, squeezes his temples, wincing from headache; to himself:)
Daddy had a bad today. (closes his eyes) You hear me?
(sniffs and looks at the bottle) Very bad day.

Girl wipes her tears and sniffles, then looks at grandpa, then thinks.

2. A WHILE LATER

The bedroom door opens a few inches and the girl peeks through. It's a mess; coffee table overturned, bowls of food broken on the floor. Dad is slumped against the wall, asleep with mouth open, empty bottle in hand. The girl slowly opens the door with a squeak, revealing grandpa on a wheelchair. She is wearing her school-uniform jacket (note: Chinese school uniforms are track suits). She cautiously pushes grandpa past dad, almost waking him up with the sound of a broken bowl being pushed by the wheel. The wheel then rides over a picture frame with broken glass: photo of mom, dad and the girl, in happier times. She picks it up and puts it on a shelf, then takes a worn Mickey-Mouse wallet that is lying next to it. And she goes. The sound of apartment door opening and closing quietly.

3. EXT. STREET – SAME NIGHT, LATER

There is little traffic and no pedestrians. The girl is pushing grandpa, lost in thought. She comes to an intersection and stops, not sure which way to go, looking at signs and around. Nearby, a young man is squatting by his crappy moped, trying to fix it. He notices her.

YOUNG MAN

What're you looking for?

GIRL

(she is alarmed; after a few seconds, not directly looking at him, very quietly:)

Train station.

YOUNG MAN

(he couldn't hear; stands up, wrench in hand, bit annoyed) What?

She is scared, turns grandpa around and pushes him away rapidly, looking over her shoulder a few times.

4. A WHILE LATER

The girl pushes the wheelchair through an empty alleyway. She stops and looks around, tired. She sits down on a step next to the wheelchair.

GIRL

(beat) We'll wait here until morning, then go find it. Okay, grandpa? (he starts whispering something, but then starts coughing) What is it?

GRANDPA

(weakly) You go back home, I will go live with Lao Pan.

GIRL

He-- (pause, sigh) passed away last year. We went to the funeral.

Grandpa doesn't seem to register this. He trembles a bit; the girl gets up, takes off her jacket and puts it over his shoulders, then sits back down.

GIRL.

(adjusting the jacket) We'll live in Chengdu with mom. (looks up at the stars) We'll be happy every day.

5. SAME PLACE – MORNING

The girl wakes up lying on the concrete step and realizes that grandpa is gone with his wheelchair. She is panicked, calls him, unsure which way to go, then runs.

6. EXT. STREET – SAME TIME

Grandpa is staring at a half-demolished old apartment building, then slowly wheels away.

7. EXT. STREET – SAME TIME

Girl looking for and calling grandpa, desperate.

8. EXT. INTERSECTION – SAME TIME

Grandpa in wheelchair is on sidewalk, absently staring at traffic. Nearby, a boy of 13 in a dirty school uniform is squatting and stabbing a styrofoam carry-out box with a stick, watching grandpa. He gets up and walks over.

BOY

Sir, do you need help? Where are you going? (grandpa ignores him completely) I can help you cross the street.

No response from grandpa. The boy looks around cautiously, then goes through the pockets of the school-uniform jacket that grandpa still has over his shoulders, pulling out the Mickey-Mouse wallet. He quickly scans the bills inside and puts the wallet in his pocket. Grandpa is watching him, confused.

BOY

A hundred and forty, that's all you got? (no response) Huh? (He looks around again and goes through grandpa's jacket pockets, finds nothing.) Man, I thought old people saved.

And what are you doing wearing a school uniform anyway? Huh? (no response)

You not too bright, got held back a few times?

When're you gonna graduate? (no response)(louder) You deaf, too? (no response) I don't believe this. HEY! (he shakes the wheelchair)

Who do you think you are, ignoring me like this, Kobe Bryant? (no response, shakes him more, yelling) Wake up, old man, time to go back to class!

GIRL

Grandpa! (She runs up to them.)

GIRL

(to the boy) What are you doing?

BOY

What are you doing?

GIRL

(not looking at him) He's my grandpa, I was looking for him.

BOY

You *lost* him? (scoffs) He's *gotta* be your grandpa, then, you're *both* stupid. (feigning honest indignation) I wanted to help the stupid geezer, he's just ignoring me.

GIRL

(still not looking at him) He is sick. He doesn't recognize new people.

Any *idiot* could see that.

She pushes the boy and wheels grandpa away. Boy is staring after them, biting his thumbnail.

BOY

Well, anybody can see you're a bitch!

He scoffs, mutters "idiot" to himself, then picks up a clod and throws it, hitting the girl in the back.

BOY

Stupid chicks like you should stay home and learn to be a housewife! (to himself) Sheesh. What a cow.

Girl keeps on walking.

9. EXT. ROUGH NEIGBORHOOD – A WHILE LATER

The girl is pushing grandpa, looking around worried, then stops and squats, as grandpa is trying to say something.

GIRL

What are you saying?

(no answer, she rubs her face tiredly, then slightly rebuking)

Why did you leave?

GRANDPA

I went to look for Lao Pan.

The girl sighs, then puts her forehead on the wheelchair armrest. Being grandpa's babysitter is getting to be too much.

TEENAGER #1

(off-screen) No school today?

Four teenagers over 15, three boys and a girl, have surrounded the girl and grandpa. Girl gets up.

TEENAGER #1

(Looking at the uniform) Wow, Yunnan University Middle School. If old bag of bones here has enough money to pay your tuition, maybe he's got some spare change for poor students like us.

GIRL

(looking him in the eye, she's a good liar)

Oh, we don't have any money, we just went out to buy some vegetables in the morning, but I left my wallet in my bedroom and now we got lost and--

TEENAGER #1

Poor little sister. You got lost in the wrong neighborhood. (now menacingly) Give us the money or you're gonna need a wheelchair just like Confucius here.

The boy (who earlier robbed grandpa) comes around the corner, sees the teenagers surrounding grandpa and girl and jumps back to hide. He is peeking out, seeing the girl being harassed. He thinks, frowns, but then his head disappears around the corner. In the meantime, the girl looks for but can't find her wallet.

GIRL

My wallet was in my pocket. It's gone.

The teenager scoffs and shakes his head.

The teenaged girl steps up next to the girl and pulls her hair (she winces in pain).

TEENAGED GIRL

You better give us something, little liar, or we're gonna be taking his wheelchair instead.

Got a phone?

GIRL

I don't.

BOY

Leave her alone! (he came around the corner and is now walking up to them). (clears his throat) Cowards, four of you picking on a stupid girl and a geezer.

TEENAGER #1

Oh, it's fatty, everybody. The beating you got this morning wasn't enough, huh? Got some more money for us?

The boy takes out and opens a pathetic little Swiss-army knife.

TEENAGER #1

(scoffs at the knife) Oh, looks like we left you something.

BOY

Get outta here.

TEENAGER #1

Oh, we'll get outta of here. You won't.

A second teenage boy walks up to the boy with a big piece of wood.

TEENAGER #2
You're dead, fatty. (then, suddenly:)
TEENAGER #3
The geezer is dead.

They are all shocked and stare at grandpa. He seems unconscious.

GIRL

(shaking him, desperate) Grandpa, grandpa! TEENAGER #1

(Looking around, worried to be seen by passersby, then to others:) Let's go.

They leave in a hurry. Girl is desperate.

GIRL

(to the boy, but not making eye contact) Is there a hospital around here?

BOY

Uh...(not sure) yeah. It's near that big internet bar on Beijing Street. You know the place? (girl shakes head; boy sighs, then points and explains haltingly, not quite sure himself) Well, you go down Jinhua Street, then... (hesitates) turn--right at the big pink hotel and....it's not far, go over the bridge and, and then there is a big construction site, and then you will come to the intersection. Oh, and you have to cross the train tracks.

GIRI

Okay. (she starts wheeling grandpa) Thanks. (after a few steps) Turn right after the bridge?

BOY

No. (Sighs, looks at grandpa) I'll come with you, you'd just get lost like my mother.

GIRL

No need, I'll find it. (She starts walking; boy scoffs and starts walking in opposite direction.) What's the name of the hospital?

BOY

No idea. (sighs, shakes his head, then walks past her. She doesn't follow him) You coming or what? I don't got all damn day.

Girl thinks, looks around, doesn't want to go, but then does, following a few steps behind.

GIRL

Why'd you follow us here?

BOY

(stops, turns around, with a bit of indignation) I didn't. I was gonna meet my friend. (they go on)

10. INT. VERY SMALL HOSPITAL – LATER ON

Grandpa is on a bed, IV in his arm, very weak but conscious. A young nurse is taking his pulse, boy and girl are standing by.

GRANDPA

Wenwen. (nurse looks at the girl)

GIRL.

That's my mom's name.

NURSE

Oh. (tired, in a bad mood, chewing gum) You're lucky, you got him here just in time. (writes on a clipboard, blowing a gum bubble) The doctor will be here soon.

BOY

Alright, I gotta go.

GIRL

Okay.

Boy half-waves and leaves, but stops in the doorway when he hears:

NURSE

(to the girl) Did you pay?

GIRL

Oh. Not yet. How much is it?

NURSE

(looking at prescription) Two bottles, 126.80.

GIRL

Oh. I....I lost my wallet, I will try to call my mother--

BOY

(has been listening with a frown, finally says sourly, against his will:) I got money.

(Unseen by the girl, he takes bills out of the Mickey-Mouse wallet and shows them to the nurse).

NURSE

(puts down clipboard, picks up prescription) Pay in the lobby. I'll show you.

The two of them leave.

Girl is staring after the boy, thinking for an instant, then sits on grandpa's bed.

GRANDPA

(very weakly) Xingyue. You go to school, I'll be alright.

GIRL

(shakes head) No.

GRANDPA

(beat, sigh.) Xingyue. Your dad...he...he is not a bad man. He...You have to take care of him. (beat, sigh) When your mother was little, I was very busy at the collective farm (clears throat, in a coarse voice). She almost didn't have a father. She fell into the river and almost drowned. (beat) I've thought about it for 40 years.

(looks at her) He's not perfect. But he's your father. (she just looks down).

(beat) Xingyue. (puts his hand on her face) You are the best granddaughter in Kunming. (beat, with a smile) And the best cook on Xiujiang Street.

She holds his hand to her face and shakes her head, tears welling in her eyes.

GIRL

I'm not. Remember the egg-tomato dish I burnt the day before yesterday?

The house was full of smoke...

They both laugh a little. Grandpa coughs. They realize that the boy has been standing by them, maybe for a while, receipt in hand. Grandpa lays his head down on the pillow.

BOY

(beat, little frown) He likes you a lot. (beat) So your parents won't come? (Girl embarrassed, shakes head). Hmm. My parents are also very— (shakes his head, rubs his eye absently, doesn't finish)

GIRL

If grandpa's better tomorrow, we'll go to Chengdu. My mom lives there.

BOY

Oh.

DOCTOR

(just walked in) According to bloodwork, your grandpa has kidney failure. He needs to be put on dialysis (girl is shocked, takes grandpa's hand). Your father's phone is out of money and your mom's is turned off (blows his nose into a handkerchief).

GIRL

How much will it cost?

DOCTOR

(checks paperwork) Hmm. His condition is serious.

It's...ah...546 yuan, three times a week.

GIRL

My god. (boy whistles silently)

DOCTOR

(puts paperwork down and takes grandpa's pulse, looking at his watch) He needs to be put on it *immediately* or he will not live through the afternoon. Understand? (girl nods) I'll go get the machine. (as he's walking out) It's pay-upfront.

The girl is crushed.

BOY

(sits on a bed across from the girl, looking at the paperwork, shaking his head) Thieves. They always charge you for stuff you don't need. (beat) So what to do?

GIRL

(weakly) Don't know. (puts her forehead in her hands). (beat) You got a cellphone?

BOY

(shakes head) Stolen. (points with chin toward door) You can use theirs.

(beat) Can you borrow money from a friend? (she shakes head)

Your school is full of rich kids, some of them carry ten thousand in their wallet.

GIRL

(clears throat) I don't go to school.

BOY

(not in the mood for joking) What?

GIRL

I haven't gone to school all semester. Told the teacher I'm in Chengdu with mom.

BOY

Oh. (thinking) Why?

GIRL

(shakes head, then) My classmates....

(boy gives her an inquisitive look; she pulls her sleeves over her hands)

They don't like me.

BOY

What? (blows silent raspberry, shakes head). Why? (she just shakes head)

BOY

Hmmm. How about other friends? (girl just shakes head, boy arches his eyebrows)

GIRL

I like to be by myself.

BOY

(shaking head) You're weird. (thinks, picking his nose) Hmm. No money at home?

GIRL

Dad has a tin box...but...there can't be enough.

BOY

(thinks, flicks bugger) Is your dad home?

GIRL

(shakes head) Working.

BOY

(problem solved) So, go get the box. Your home isn't that far.

GIRL

I can't take his money.

BOY

Bull--shit. (throws paperwork down) You're gonna let the geezer die?

GIRL

(shakes head, then) Anyway, there can't be enough.

BOY

(sigh) Alright. You go get the box and I'll go get some money, too.

GIRL

(really looks at him for the first time) Really? (boy nods without enthusiasm, scratching his neck) (beat) Okay. (thinks) My mom will pay you back.

BOY

Alright. Let's go.

GIRL

(takes grandpa's hand) We'll come back soon (no response). (to boy) So you're going home? (boy shakes head)

They leave.

11. INT. GIRL'S APARTMENT – A WHILE LATER

The apartment door opens, girl comes in and stops, shocked. Dad is sitting on sofa, wearing a wife-beater, eating carry-out noodles and grimacing at how spicy they are.

DAD

Where'd you go??? I went to the police, I looked for you on the streets all morning...

And where is grandpa?

GIRL

He's at the hospital. (beat) Are you going back to work?

DAD

(beat, picks his ear, looks down) I was fired yesterday.

GIRL

Oh. (looks down, taken aback, then remembering to ask:) Did u call mom?

DAD

(looks at her for a beat, then continues to eat)

Your mother, that *perfect* mother, called me yesterday. (looks at her) She wants a divorce. (girl shocked, opens mouth; dad has a sip of water to quench the burning, then burps). I got so angry I argued with the boss and got fired (gnaws on a bone).

The sound of flushing toilet can be heard. Girl looks behind her, puzzled, then looks at dad, then a woman around the age of 40 comes out of the bathroom. Girl is staring.

DAD

This is Wang Hui. She's my coworker. She helped me look for you. (beat, swallows food in his mouth) You'll be seeing more of her from now on. (the woman shyly smiles at the girl)

GIRL

What? I...I and grandpa will go live with my mom.

DAD

(looks at her, beat) No, you won't.

GIRL

(angry) Why?

DAD

Because she doesn't want you. She found some man. She wants you to stay with me.

GIRL

(shakes her head, breathes heavily, incredulous) That can't be.

DAD

You ask her yourself.

GIRL

(yells) You're a liar!

She runs out of the apartment, slamming the door. Dad sighs heavily and frowns, scratching his shoulder, thinking.

12. INT. POLICE STATION – SAME TIME

The boy, handcuffed behind his back, dried blood on his lip, is sitting on a chair next to a desk, behind which a surly middle-aged policeman is typing something into computer while smoking a cigarette. He's talking as he is typing. Boy looks out of the barred window, then looks down.

POLICEMAN

What are you doing stealing people's wallets? Your parents aren't poor. (no answer, no eye contact). Huh? What do you need money for?

BOY

(looking at the floor) Dialysis.

POLICEMAN

What? (puts out the cigarette, then to himself, shaking his head) Dialysis. Kids from good families running away these days. (to boy) You're the second one today. You're lucky the chief knows your parents are good people. *And* that this is your first time. (boy looks out the window again) We catch you again and you'll be looking through bars

(boy looks out the window again) We catch you again and you'll be looking through bars for a long time. (policeman takes a sip of tea from a cup with a lid)

When you come back, you'll be a different person, I can guarantee you—oh, finally.

The boy's mom just walked in. Fashionable yet tasteless clothes, jewelry, painted nails; holding an iPhone, take-out coffee and a handbag.

MOM
Sorry, I couldn't find this place.
POLICEMAN

She stops next to the sitting boy and hugs him. The boy pulls away.

POLICEMAN

Did you have lunch?

13. EXT – IN A PARKED CAR – A WHILE LATER

Mom is behind the wheel, taking a sip of coffee. The boy is in the passenger seat, looking out of the open window, sullen. She starts the car.

MOM

Your father wants to send you to a military boarding school.

BOY

(sullenly) Great.

MOM

(sigh) Why are you like this?

Your father and I work hard to give you a good life, everything we do—

BOY

(disgusted) That's a load of crap. (looks at her) Let's go.

MOM

What are you talking about?

BOY

(shakes head) You two...you just care about your stupid company.

Last time I ran away you didn't know for two damn days.

MOM

(sigh, looks down, beat) We have a lot of competition, you know that. It's not easy to make profit these days. Don't you want to go to university in America like your brother?

BOY

I don't care. And he's not my brother.

MOM

(indignant) Don't—

BOY

And I don't want to go to university.

MOM

(sigh) We are working so hard because of you. You are luckier than most kids. (boy shakes head; mom sighs, looks at her watch) I need to go back to work, I have a meeting.

Boy scoffs and nods head as if to say sarcastically, but of course you do. Mom exhales, puts her hands on steering wheel.

MOM

He wants me to be a housewife, but I-- (shakes her head, sighs, looks away thinking, then looks at the boy) Okay, forget the meeting. We'll do anything you want.

You want to go shopping? Or to the game arcade?

BOY

(looks at her, thinks, chews his lips, then:) Okay.

MOM

Let me see your lip (boy shakes head). Come on.

He reluctantly lets her touch the wound, scowling. She pulls out a wet wipe and gently wipes away the dried blood around it. Slowly the boy inches closer to her, warming to her touch. She runs her hand through his hair and he puts his chin on her shoulder, his face behind her head, blinking away moisture in his eyes. She leans her head against his.

MOM

Let's go. (boy sits back in his seat, sniffing once)

Mom puts the car in gear, then drums her fingers on steering wheel, thinking, frowning.

MOM

Hmm, how do we get there. (boy rolls his eyes)

14. INT – HOSPITAL ROOM – LATER ON

Grandpa is hooked to the dialysis machine. The girl is sitting on bed across from him.

GIRL

Grandpa. (no response) I don't have the money (she looks up as she hears passing high-heel footsteps in the corridor). (quieter) Mom wants a divorce and dad lost his job. (she sniffles) I don't know what to do.

She puts her face in her hands. It's the end. But then, the bed squeaks and she looks up to find – the boy sitting next to her.

GIRL

(blinking away moisture) I thought you ran away.

BOY

(shakes head, little offended) No. Mom brought me.

GIRL

Oh. What happened to your lip?

BOY

It's nothing. Did you get the money?

GIRL

(looks down) No.

BOY

That's okay, I got enough for today.

GIRL

(huge weight off her chest) Really? (he nods) Let's go pay.

The girl takes her jacket and they rush off. Grandpa is thinking for a while. Then, with difficulty, tries to reach the dialysis machine. Can't. Tries again, manages to pull it closer to him. He stares at the dials and knobs confused, touches around, then finds a switch. He turns the machine off, then lays back down and exhales heavily. The heart-monitor beeps come less and less frequently.

15. INT – HOSPITAL LOBBY – CONTINUOUS

The children are paying. The girl is studying the receipt.

GIRL

So much money. Thank you.

BOY

That's alright.

He notices something on her wrist and pulls back her long sleeve to reveal a series of very thin, long scabs as if from knife-cuts on top of her forearm.

BOY

What the hell is this?

GIRL

(pulling her sleeve back down, not looking at him) It's nothing.

He stares her in the face, then she looks up and they lock eyes for a long few seconds. Then, the faint sound of alarm can be heard.

GIRL.

(looks at the impassive cashier, then at the boy) Grandpa!

They run off.

16. INT – HOSPITAL ROOM – MOMENT LATER

The children rush up to grandpa. The alarm is from the heart monitor; the heartbeat beeps are even slower now. His eyes are closed.

GIRL

(taking his hand) Grandpa! (no response; to the boy:) Go get the doctor!! (he bolts off) (now desperate:) Grandpa, wake up!

He opens his eyes weakly.

GRANDPA

Wenwen.

GIRL

I'm Xingyue. Grandpa, the doctor is coming. You will be okay.

(the heart monitor beeps are slower now).

GRANDPA

(shakes his head) I'm sorry, I—(trails off)

17. INT – NURSE'S STATION – SAME TIME

The boy gets there; the alarm is still sounding, light flashing on the wall, but the nurse is not there, just an opened newspaper, cellphone and a half-eaten bowl of instant noodles on the desk. The boy runs off again.

18. INT – HOSPITAL ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Girl is sitting on grandpa's bed, holding his hand.

GIRL

(looking at the door, desperate) They'll be here soon.

GRANDPA

(shakes head, very very weak) No. Wenwen. I'm too tired.

I don't want to make you two...Let me go. Please don't be angry. I'm sorry.

(he closes his eyes, then the heart monitor flatlines).

GIRL

(crying) Grandpa.

The sound of running footsteps, boy and doctor rush in, doctor flips on the dialysis machine, then hurriedly starts compressing grandpa's chest. Nurse rushes in with a bag valve mask and a few syringes; she puts syringes down and starts to pump air into grandpa's mouth.

DOCTOR

(yelling) Where the hell were you?

NURSE

Restroom. I have diarrhea.

DOCTOR

Stupid cow. Why didn't you ask somebody to cover for you? (she just shakes head, she is sorry)

The girl is covering her ears, looking back and forth at grandpa and heart monitor. Finally the heartbeat returns. She gasps in relief.

DOCTOR

(to nurse) Give me 50cc's of Epinephrine (she is stressed, fumbles with the packaging) Hurry up! (she hands it to him) This is Atropine! (she apologizes, sniffling, and hands him the right one; he fills the syringe and gives grandpa the shot; to nurse, incredulous) What are you waiting for? Ventilate him! (she does, but not well enough) Give it here (he takes over and she just stands there watching him, helpless, pitiful.)

(To the kids:) You two, wait outside! (girl doesn't move) Go! He'll be okay.

(the children leave). (to nurse:) You're fired.

19. INT – HOSPITAL CORRIDOR – A WHILE LATER

The children are sitting on a bench.

BOY

So your parents still won't come? (girl shakes head) Why is your mom in Chengdu? GIRL

Working. (beat) She's often worked in other cities since I was small.

Hard to find a good job here.

BOY

Oh. (beat) And your dad?

GIRL

(sigh) They wanna divorce.

(beat) Mom doesn't want me but I don't want to live with dad alone.

BOY

Oh. (pulls his shirt over his mouth, not looking at her) My parents never married.

(beat) Split up when I was little. I got a new dad.

(beat, looking in her direction) So what will you do?

GIRL

I don't know.

BOY

(beat) I got an idea. Maybe you and grandpa can stay with us. We got and extra bedroom and an old maid, she can take care of grandpa.

GIRL

Thank you, but...we can't do that.

BOY

Don't worry. My mom's outside, I'll go ask her. I'll tell her that you're a good student and will help me with schoolwork.

She smiles a little and he walks off. She sighs, puts her jacket on, hugs her knees and rocks back and forth. Nurses pass by, their heels clicking on the tiled floor. She hears "Are you crazy?" from outside; it's the boy's mom. She turns her head and sees them arguing outside the hospital, mom shaking her head vehemently.

She looks down, slowly shaking her head. More heel-clicking, somebody passes by, but sits on the bench, arm's length away. The girl looks up. It's a woman.

GIRL

Mom? How did you know?

MOM

The hospital called me.

GIRL

You are not in Chengdu?

MOM

I just came back. (beat) I saw grandpa, he will be okay. (beat) Your collar is turned in (she reaches over to straighten it, but the girl pulls away)

GIRL

(looks down, beat) Dad said you want to divorce.

MOM

(disappointed) Oh, he told you. (beat) Yes.

GIRL

Said you found some man (mom looks down, doesn't respond).

(The girl buries her face in her own lap, rocking back and forth, choking back tears) He also said you don't want me. (no response from mom) He said I'll stay here with him.

MOM

(beat) I was very angry yesterday. But I got on a plane this morning because I want you and grandpa to come live in Chengdu with me.

GIRL

(looks up through tears) Really?

MOM

Yes.

GIRL

(wipes her nose, sniffles, beat) You and dad can't stay together? (no response) He'll find another job, like before. Maybe in Chengdu.

MOM

(beat, sighs; sits next to the girl) We can't, honey. (hugs her and pats her hair) We can't.

20. EXT – ON A STREET – DAY

Girl and boy are eating noodles at a roadside stall, sitting on stools, and at the same time playing a game on an iPhone laying on the table.

The girl puts a dumpling in his bowl with her chopsticks.

BOY

(thoughtfully) You're gonna like Chengdu. So many things to do, not like here. They got big arcades with 3D games and an amusement park where you can shoot people with guns...

(beat) I'll come stay with my uncle during vacation, so we'll go there together, okay?

GIRL

(with full mouth) Okay.

BOY

Oh, almost forgot, I got something for ya.

He fishes through the mess in his bag and pulls out an unshapely small thing badly wrapped in newspaper and taped around many times.

BOY

Happy birthday.

GIRL

(smiles, puts her bowl down, takes it and looks at it) What is it?

BOY

Open it. (beat) I didn't have any wrapping paper.

She tries, but can't. He hands her the Swiss-army knife and continues eating. She struggles with the package, but finally opens it to find a new wallet with a comic-book character holding a tennis racket on it.

GIRL

(smiling) Nice. How much did it cost?

BOY

(In English, in a serious, deep voice) One million dollars (they laugh).

GIRL

I don't have anything for you. (opens the wallet)

I will come see dad next month, so I'll bring you some Chengdu food.

ROY

Great. (looks at his new watch) We gotta go, the train isn't gonna wait for you. (he shovels his mouth full of noodles, then mumbles) Eat up!

GIRL

That's okay.

BOY

(mumbles) What a waste! Look at this (he opens his mouth full of chewed noodles).

GIRL

(hits his shoulder) Disgusting pig!

They put on their backpacks. The boy hands her the knife.

BOY

You'd better take this, too. (she takes and looks at it) There's a lot of crazy people in Chengdu. (takes the knife back, clowns and stabs around) Get away, creep! (she laughs). (suddenly he has a thought) Oh, but it won't work on fatties. It's too short, won't even get through the fat. (with authority:) Here's what you do: (he stabs a dumpling and starts moving it in front of her face as if to put a spell on her) you— distract them with food and -- (jumps away, flinging the dumpling at her) run away!

GIRL

(throws another dumpling at him) Now who's wasting food! You're paying next time.

Boy hands her the knife, but then yanks it away.

BOY

(in jest) Now, no more cutting yourself.

GIRL

(smiles, takes knife) Hooligan, I'll cut you.

And you should cut your dirty fingernails for once.

Let's go, you'll make me miss the train.

BOY

(jokingly) Yes ma'am.

He puts on sunglasses. Mr. Cool Guy. A song like *Reckoner* by Radiohead begins playing (will play through the end of end titles). She smiles at him. He takes her rolling suitcase and they walk off. They continue to talk and play-fight; he is animated, gesticulating, and puts his uniform jacket over his head. As they walk, they intertwine their index fingers.

FADE OUT

END TITLES

Mixed with credits are animated photos of the two children having a good time at different places:
watching river from a bridge
riding a bike
eating ice-cream
trying on new sunglasses
boy giving her a tennis racket with a big gift-bow, she is shocked
girl hitting him with the racket
pushing grandpa in his wheelchair
etc.

After end credits

21. EXT - AT TENNIS COURT - DAY

The girl is playing tennis, concentrating hard on hitting the ball. The boy is sitting nearby, using a newspaper rolled into a cone as an amplifier, commenting loudly:

BOY

Zhang Xingyue is one point away from winning the Australian Open. The eyes of entire China are on her, will she— (the girl misses a ball) Ah, such a pity, she loses the match. Now she will have to go back to being a *bad* housewife.

(the girl looks at him with mock anger). So much promise, such big failure.

She takes a tennis ball out of her pocket, thinks for a moment, then hits in in his direction and starts chasing him, picking up balls and hitting them towards him.

BOY

(running) Ah, and now she attacks an innocent bystander! Luckily, he knows kung-fu (he makes exaggerated poses as he is dodging the balls, then is hit by one)

Ah! He is going down (falls dramatically) and dying. (closeup on his face; *in English*:) *Good night*. (closes his eyes)

She lies down next to him; in close-up we only see her head laying down next to his, upside down. She looks at him and they smile at each other.

GIRL (in English) Good night.

FADE OUT

Title card:

Living is like licking honey off a thorn.

(Anonymous)