

THE SHANGMAO STEINWAY

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. LIMOUSINE, MOVING - DAY

SUPERTITLE: PARIS, FRANCE

The MAESTRO, 40, a Beijing native, cultured, elegant with his rock star hair and Italian silk suit, watches the Eiffel Tower hove into view from the backseat of a CHAUFFEUR-driven limousine.

His wife ALTANT, 40ish, quite beautiful and youthful, and his little son, WEIMIN, 6 gaze at the view.

WEIMIN

The Eiffel Tower, papa.

MAESTRO

Oui, Le Tour d'Eiffel.

Altant points at the Eiffel tower, smiles a lovely smile and SIGNS. The Maestro, though clearly not deaf signs back at her, his deep love clear in every sign.

INT. LIMOUSINE, MOVING - DAY

The limousine approaches the Arc de Triomphe.

WEIMIN

(reads from a guide book)

The Arc de Triomphe honors those who fought and died for France. There's a tomb beneath the arch, papa, where a soldier is buried.

The Maestro is lost in some train of thought -

MAESTRO

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier...

- some painful memory.

INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY

The limousine pulls up and the Maestro gazes reverentially at an elegant eighteenth century townhouse.

WEIMIN

Are we visiting someone, papa?

MAESTRO

No. Someone very famous used to live here.

WEIMIN

Who?

Altant signs - Chopin.

MAESTRO

Yes, a man called Chopin.

WEIMIN

Did he play the piano?

MAESTRO

Yes, he did.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

The Maestro watches a RECORD PRODUCER cue a tape and hit Play. Chopin's haunting Piano Concerto #1 SOARS.

The Maestro nods his approval and the Record Producer grins.

RECORD PRODUCER

I've heard this piece so many times, but I'm hearing things in this I've never heard before.

MAESTRO

It's a very special arrangement.

EXT. CHATEAU DE VERSAILLES - NIGHT

The magnificent Chateau de Versailles is lit up against a starry night sky.

INT. CHATEAU DE VERSAILLES, FOYER - NIGHT

"Sold Out" banners overlay three-sheet posters displaying the fiery, passionate Maestro conducting Chopin's Piano Concerto.

MUSIC LOVERS mill and buzz excitedly. A FEMALE MUSIC LOVER approaches the box office.

FEMALE MUSIC LOVER

(in French)

Any returns? A single ticket?
Standing room?

The TICKET CLERK shakes his head - no.

INT. CHATEAU DE VERSAILLES, DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The Maestro adjusts his bow tie in the mirror. The STAGE MANAGER KNOCKS and pokes his head in the door.

STAGE MANAGER
Ten minutes, Maestro.

The Maestro takes rolls of what looks like toilet rolls from a satchel. He unrolls them. They're covered in musical notation.

He takes a BATON from its ornate box and gazes at its BLACK EBONY, enscribed with BLOOD RED Chinese characters which read - Hear the Secret Harmony.

INT. CHATEAU DE VERSAILLES, PASSAGEWAY - NIGHT

The Maestro makes his way along the dim passageway. It's like the tunnel to a football arena. He hears the audience's excited HUM, the orchestra TUNING.

Silence. The Maestro pauses, gazes at the baton for a beat.

AHEAD: a stage light beckons -

EXT. SHANGMAO - DAWN

SUPER: Shangmao, Inner Mongolia, Winter 1968

- a weak dawn sun shines on the single, dirt street of the village of Shangmao, overlaid with a blanket of snow.

An icy wind WHISTLES through the huts and shacks. The wind RISES and DROPS. RISES and CRESCENDOES in a symphonic rhythm.

The most decrepit hut sits alone at the end of the street. Its timbers CREAK in rhythm with the whistling wind.

INT. ZHAO'S HUT - DAWN

The wind WHISTLES through the cracks of the CREAKING hut. The door SLAPS and the hinges GROAN in the wind.

A pot suspended above an unlit fireplace swings and SQUEAKS, its chain CLINKING.

WHISTLE CREAK SLAP GROAN SQUEAK CLINK - in 4/4 timing.

Black and white photos and an old LP record cover are tacked to a wall.

ZHAO, 20, his intelligent, sensitive face all that is visible, lies cocooned in his bed of blankets and animal skins. His eyes shoot open and he listens to the symphony of sound.

Zhao sits up and sees the dirt floor, the shabby hut, the mess of crude cooking implements and broken crockery. Clothes strewn about. Zhao shakes his head - no this is not a nightmare. Zhao sees the cold grey ashes in the fireplace.

CUT TO:

Smoke. Zhao, still wrapped in blankets and skins, blows on the feeble flame, trying to coax a fire. He waves a cloth over the feeble flame. More smoke.

Twigs finally CRACKLE in the fireplace. Zhao shakes the water pot. Empty. He groans and reaches for his blanket.

EXT. GANBOLO'S HUT - DAY

Zhao, swathed in blanket and animal skins, marches from the hut with his water urns.

Ganbolo's wife, QORIN, 40, SHARPENS a hunting knife on a foot-pumped whetstone. The BLADE SCRAPES and sparks shower. She hauls a chicken out of the cage at her feet.

Zhao stops and watches Qorin lay the SQUAWKING chicken on a block. She swings her blade and deftly decapitates it. Zhao GASPS. Qorin is distracted and the headless chicken escapes.

It charges Zhao. Zhao back pedals. The headless chicken keeps charging. Zhao keeps back pedalling.

Qorin chases the bird, cursing. She snatches it up, its neck pumping blood, its wings BEATING. Qorin waves the bloody knife at Zhao, cursing under her breath.

ZHAO
(still retreating)
Sorry. Sorry.

EXT. SHANGMAO WELL - DAY

Zhao watches the lovely ALTANT, 18 here, pump water from the well and his breath is taken away. Zhao smiles at her but she shyly ignores him.

Zhao discreetly watches her go and steps into an icy puddle in his Western-style black leather Oxford shoes.

ZHAO
Grrraagghh.

INT. ZHAO'S HUT - DAY

The fire CRACKLES. The water BUBBLES. Zhao empties the old tea leaves from the teapot into a bin.

WHISTLE CREAK SLAP GROAN SQUEAK CLINK CRACKLE BUBBLE.

Zhao opens the can of tea. Empty.

Zhao shakes his head in disbelief. He rummages through the cabbage leaves and peelings in the bin, scrapes off the used tea leaves and drops them in the teapot.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

An icy wind blows off the plains which stretch to distant mountains. The Shangmao men ride ponies and camels and carts.

Zhao sits alone on the back of a pony-drawn cart.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Zhao and MONKHBAT, 21 hack at a tree with crude axes. THWACK.

The slim Zhao, is stripped to his formerly elegant but now dirty and torn, Western-style shirt and trousers and black Oxford shoes. He busts a gut to keep up with the muscular Monkbat, comfortable in his peasant's garb.

CUT TO:

Zhao and Monkbat cut the tree trunk into logs with a two-handed saw.

Zhao struggles to match Monkbat's punishing speed, but grits his teeth and keeps up.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

The Village men eat lunch and chatter amongst themselves.

Zhao sits alone. He scrapes at a callus with his pocket knife. He digs at the callus and RIPS a strip of skin. He winces as the raw flesh bleeds RED on the white snow.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Zhao struggles to lift a heavy log.

Shangmao mayor, GANBOLO, 45, Monkhat (his son) and the other men watch. Ganbolo gestures and Monkhat moves to help Zhao, but Zhao shakes his head defiantly.

Zhao heaves the log onto his back and staggers, then falls flat on his back. The men SNICKER. Zhao glares at them.

Zhao rises to his knees and sees HUNDREDS, THOUSANDS of LOGS scattered around. His heart sinks.

EXT. TRAIL - DUSK

The Shangmao men ride their ponies and camels into the setting sun.

Zhao jolts, alone and exhausted on the sawn logs in the back of the lurching cart.

EXT. PARTY OFFICE, SHANGMAO - NIGHT

The Chinese flag flutters atop the newly-built wooden shack.

INT. PARTY OFFICE, SHANGMAO - NIGHT

The one room shack/office is clean and spruce, spartan but modern. A portrait of Chairman Mao gazes benevolently from the rough wood wall.

Zhao sits opposite WU, 22, bespectacled, thin-bodied, thin-lipped, boyish, almost adolescent looking. He wears the Red Guard uniform of Mao shirt, armband, cap and trousers.

WU

You have been with us six months, Zhao. The mayor reports that you are diligent. You work hard. You never complain.

Zhao stays silent.

WU

You do credit to yourself and to the revolutionary ideal.

Zhao shrugs - thanks.

Wu's imposing but sullen and slovenly henchman, FUNG, 25, also in Red Guard uniform, sits in the corner, and scowls.

WU

I have made a special report -
(indicates document)
- to the District Committee holding
you up as testament to the
Revolution's success.

Zhao bows his head - thank you.

WU

However, I'm told you are a loner.
You have no friends. You don't
assimilate.

ZHAO

Assimilate?

WU

And you are arrogant. You don't
involve yourself with anyone. Or
anything.

Zhao considers the charge.

WU

Comrade Fung, will you fetch the
jeep?

Fung looks suspiciously at Wu, but lumbers out. Wu waits for the door to close.

WU

(consults file)
You went to the best schools. The
very best College in Beijing. It
says here you are the finest
musician in all China. The best.
Ever.

ZHAO

I was. I am.

WU

My parents are peasants. My
grandparents were peasants. I come
from a long line of peasants. But I
was number one in my elementary
school. The brightest. The best. I
dreamed of going to university in
Beijing. The cut and thrust of
intellectual debate. Alas.

Zhao stays silent, uncertain what to say.

WU

I know you miss your College. But you're here to learn from the workers. To see how the other half lives. To sacrifice yourself for the good of others. One day - perhaps - you will play your music again. In the meantime, my door is always open. I would very much like us to get together.

Zhao is wary of the invitation.

WU

To discuss politics and economics and other intellectual concerns. The cut and thrust of intelligent debate.

ZHAO

(doubtful)

Ummm... yes, I would like that.

Wu beams.

EXT. PARTY OFFICE, SHANGMAO - NIGHT

Wu climbs in the jeep beside Fung. They watch Zhao head off.

WU

You look doubtful, comrade.

FUNG

He's a musician. He's soft.

WU

You think he'll crack? Aah, Fung, cynicism is reserved for intellectuals and revisionists. You're not a revisionist, are you, Fung?

FUNG

No, sir.

WU

Because, you're certainly no intellectual.

EXT. SHANGMAO - NIGHT

The jeep CHUGS past Zhao traipsing down the dirt main street. SNOW falls lightly.

Zhao hears TRADITIONAL MUSIC coming from the village hall. He turns toward his hut, then sees Qorin and her daughter, the lovely Altant, approach the hall. Zhap stops in his tracks.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

Monkhat and other LOCAL LADS, including the village WOODCARVER, 23, and the village BLACKSMITH, 22, play a tune on guzhangs, pipas, erhus and drums.

Ganbolo and the OLDER MEN play mahjong. Qorin, BAT-ERDENT, 70, (Qorin's mother, Altant's grandmother) and the OLDER WOMEN cut home-made felt and sew it into caps and clothes.

Zhao sits alone and watches Altant and the LOCAL GIRLS dance joyfully. She's so lovely, he can't help but smile.

The music finishes. The musicians preen like pop stars. The girls CLAP and sigh lovelorn-ly at their idols.

Monkhat approaches Zhao, sporting a nasty grin.

MONKHAT

First time we've seen you in here.

ZHAO

I'm assimilating.

Monkhat looks at him blankly - assimilating???

MONKHAT

I hear you're a musician.

Monkhat thrusts the morhin at him.

MONKHAT

Play us a tune.

ZHAO

I'm not allowed to play.

MONKHAT

You're not allowed to play Western music. Play something traditional.

ZHAO

I don't know any.

MONKHBAT

You think it's peasant music.
Beneath you.

The other musicians circle threateningly.

ZHAO

Haven't you heard? I'm arrogant
too.

Ganbolo pauses from his mahjong.

GAMBOLO

Don't waste your time.

MONKHBAT

It's all Beijing bullshit. I bet he
can't even play.

Zhao feels the sleek instrument in his hands. He glances at
Altant, watching him silently.

ZHAO

OK.

Zhao plays a couple of notes. Tunes it. Plays a tentative
scale and a couple of arpeggios to get a feel for it.

Monkhat slow claps mockingly.

Zhao plays a simple, but beautiful, melodic tune. All eyes
turn to watch. Zhao finishes. Silence.

MONKHBAT

Western music.

ZHAO

I don't know. No. I made it up.
Well, a kind of variation on a
Chopin piece.

MONKHBAT

Chopin?

Ganbolo slams down a mahjong piece.

GANBOLO

It's not our sort of music.

ZHAO

No, I don't suppose it is.

The men resume their dominoes. The women gossip. The
musicians put their instruments away.

Altant approaches and offers Zhao tea.

ZHAO

Thank you. I'm sorry, I don't know your name.

Altant ignores him.

ZHAO

Excuse me. I said, I don't know your name. Are you deaf or something?

MONKHBAT

She is deaf.

ZHAO

What?

MONKHBAT

She can't speak either.

ZHAO

Can she read? Or write?

Monkhat shakes his head - no. Altant moves to go. Zhao grabs her wrist and indicates - stay.

Zhao fetches a scrap of paper and pencil off a table. He sketches a stave and a few notes. He sits Altant down and hands her the morhin. Eyes turn toward them.

Zhao points to the written note. Then places her finger on the morhin. Holds her hand as she plays it. Then the second note, third note.

GANBOLO

She's deaf and she's dumb.

ZHAO

So was Beethoven ... You can feel it, can't you?

Silence. All eyes are on Zhao as he continues through the five or six notes of a simple tune. Zhao gets her to play the sequence, slowly. Then faster. Altant laughs joyfully.

Zhao sees everyone staring at them.

ZHAO

Perhaps I could teach her to read and write.

GANBOLO

And what's the point of that? No
one else can read or write.

Zhao has no answer to that.

INT. ZHAO'S HUT - DAY

The fire CRACKLES. The water pot BUBBLES merrily. Zhao glowers at a mouldy cabbage leaf. He hurls it at the wall. He sees the FISHING LINE and NET, gathering dust in the corner.

EXT. SHANGMAO STREAM - DAY

Ganbolo, Monkhat and the villagers fish in holes in the ice.

Snow falls on Zhao sitting alone and forlorn, his fishing line hanging in the water below.

Zhao sees Monkhat reel in a fish.

AN HOUR LATER:

Snow falls gently. The wind picks up. Zhao sees Monkhat reel in another fish.

AN HOUR LATER:

The snow falls more heavily. Zhao sees Monkhat and the other men head for home. Zhao grits his chattering teeth.

He puts his rod down to clap his freezing hands. The line surges as a fish bites. The rod slithers toward the hole. Zhao grabs it, slips on the ice and tumbles into the hole. He SHOUTS for help.

EXT. STREAM, BANK - DAY

Monkhat sees Zhao disappear into the hole.

MONKHAT

(to the other men)

Hey!

EXT. UNDER ICE - DAY

Zhao grabs at the edge of the ice hole with one hand. But the raging current sweeps him away. He hammers frantically at the solid ice above him.

EXT. STREAM, BANK - DAY

Monkhat sprints along the bank, a pick-axe in his hand. The others follow him. Monkhat points to the bend in the river and sprints toward it.

EXT. UNDER ICE - DAY

Zhao feebly punches and kicks at the ice above him.

EXT. SHANGMAO STREAM - DAY

Monkhat hacks a hole in the ice. He peers in. Grimaces. Then drops into the icy water.

EXT. UNDER ICE - DAY

Monkhat holds onto the edge of the ice with one hand and peers through the current for Zhao. He spots him, caught limply in the current, unconscious. Closer. Closer. Just out of reach.

Monkhat lets go of the ice. The current drags him along. He reaches for the limp Zhao, but the current sweeps Zhao away. He reaches again and grabs a handful of jacket. He strikes for the shore. He kicks at the ice. Again. It CRACKS.

EXT. STREAM, BANK - DAY

Monkhat hauls Zhao through the ice and onto solid ground. Ganbolo thumps Zhao's chest. Again. Zhao throws up water.

INT. GANBOLO'S HUT - DAY

Zhao sits in front of the fire, wrapped in blankets, teeth chattering. Monkhat thaws beside him.

Altant and Bat-Erdent lay the humble table for supper. Qorin hands Zhao a bowl of steaming soup.

ZHAO

Th-th-thank y-you.

QORIN

(whispers)

Can you really teach her to read and write?

Ganbolo guts fish in the corner.

ZHAO
What about Ganbolo?

BAT-
(hisses)
You leave Ganbolo to us.

EXT. ANIMAL CORRAL - DAY

Zhao heaves himself onto a pony and clings to the reins.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Zhao bounces on the trotting pony, holding on for dear life.

EXT. MINGLIAO, SCHOOL - DAY

Zhao slides gratefully off the pony and onto solid ground. A hand bell RINGS.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Zhao wades through a swarm of SCHOOLKIDS, eager to get home.

INT. ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM - DAY

Childlike drawings line the walls. A female TEACHER, 25, sits at her desk.

TEACHER
I don't have enough books for my
own students.

Zhao stands before her.

ZHAO
I only want to borrow them.

TEACHER
Are you qualified to teach?

ZHAO
No.

TEACHER
She really needs a special school.

ZHAO
There is no special school.

TEACHER

Not around here. There's a store
room at the end of the corridor.
There's a box of old books.

INT. STORE ROOM - DAY

Zhao takes a dusty old box of books from a cupboard. He
leafs through the picture books.

FOOTSTEPS. Zhao looks at the wizened face of the JANITOR, 75.

JANITOR

What are you doing here?

ZHAO

Picking up some books.

The Janitor GRUNTS suspiciously.

EXT. MINGLIAO MARKET - DAY

The market bustles - fruit and vegetable stalls, live
chickens, pigs.

Zhao, with his box of books, passes Ganbolo and other VILLAGE
MEN who inspect a litter of PIGLETS. They pool their money
and the PIG FARMER hands Ganbolo a SQUEALING piglet.

Zhao moves on and sees Bat-Erdent at a tinker's stall:
recycled junk, bales of wire, locks, pots and pans. The
TINKER inspects the hole in Bat-Erdent's pot.

TINKER

Fifty.

BAT-ERDENT

Twenty.

TINKER

Forty.

BAT-ERDENT

Twenty.

TINKER

Thirty.

BAT-ERDENT

Twenty.

The Tinker curses under his breath and snatches her pot.

EXT. MINGLIAO MARKET - DAY

Altant and Qorin sit at a stall selling raw felt and felt jackets and caps. Zhao approaches and shows Qorin and Altant the box of books.

CUT TO:

Zhao and Altant sit at an outside table. Zhao offers her a skewer of candied crab apples. She smiles her lovely smile and Zhao melts. Zhao takes a book from the box and shows her.

ZHAO
Tales of the Arabian Nights.
Scheherezade. Rimsky-Korsakov set
the story to music.

Zhao smiles when he remembers she can't hear him. Altant caresses the pictures in the book.

INT. GANBOLO'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Zhao sits at the table and draws a character. He points to Qorin, who is sewing felt.

ZHAO
Mother.

Altant, sitting beside him, copies the character. Zhao writes another character and points to Bat-Erdent.

ZHAO
Grandmother.

Altant points to Zhao. Zhao writes the character.

ZHAO
Friend.

Altant writes the character. Then she opens the "Tales of the Arabian Nights". She gestures - read it to me.

Ganbolo enters. He sees Altant, Zhao and the books.

GANBOLO
What's going on here?

BAT-ERDENT
My granddaughter is learning to
read and write.

GANBOLO

And what good will come of that?
It's going to be hard enough
finding her a husband as it is.
It'll be impossible if she starts
getting ideas above herself.

BAT-ERDENT

Maybe she's better off without a
husband, if he's anything like you.

Ganbolo grunts, sits in his chair by the fire and takes out his pipe and tobacco.

Qorin gestures to Zhao - read. Zhao reads, pointing out the pictures and the characters to Altant.

ZHAO

When his Queen took a secret lover,
the King of Persia executed his
faithless wife.

Altant listens, enraptured. Qorin and Bat-Erdent stop preparing dinner and listen.

ZHAO

The King took another wife and on
their wedding night, he beheaded
her. Every night the King married a
new bride and every night he would
behead her.

Ganbolo grunts contemptuously, but is secretly listening.

ZHAO

He had executed five hundred women
when the beautiful young
Scheherezade volunteered to become
his wife, knowing she would die the
following morning.

INT. ZHAO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao stares at the B & W photos of himself on the wall - as a toddler, a teen, playing piano at home and on stage.

Zhao sighs. He sorts through the old picture books in the box.

Zhao freezes. He blinks. And stares at a dusty old manuscript with a portrait of CHOPIN and the title: Frederick Chopin - Lieder - Voice and Piano.

Zhao gazes at the LP record cover of his handsome FATHER at the piano and his beautiful chanteuse MOTHER beside him.

MR AU (V.O.)

There was a terrible storm in
Paris. The plane should never have
taken off.

OVER: Zhao's mother's sweet soprano SINGS the Chopin lieder.

Zhao follows his mother's voice note by note in the manuscript. Zhao spots a faint, hand-written name on the manuscript.

ZHAO

Li Li Han.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Snow layers the forest and the distant mountains. Zhao chops a tree with the crude axe as -

- his mother's soprano and his father's piano soar, majestic above the still, immense beauty of the mountains and plains.

Monkhat, The Woodcarver and The Blacksmith approach.

MONKHAT

That music you played. Can you
teach me?

ZHAO

No.

Monkhat frowns.

ZHAO

It was made up. A variation. An
improvisation.

MONKHAT

We can learn.

ZHAO

No you can't.

MONKHAT

You think you're so far above us.

The three men glare at Zhao, but shrug and move off.

ZHAO

No. You don't understand. It took me years to learn to play that kind of stuff.

The three men ignore him, pick up their axes and saws and angrily chop and saw wood.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

The Teacher sits at her desk, with a pile of exercise books. Zhao stands before her.

TEACHER

Li Li Han? Never heard of her. Those books were sitting in that cupboard for years. I've no idea where they came from.

Zhao nods - disappointed.

TEACHER

But I know someone who might know.

INT. JANITOR'S CUBBY HOLE - DAY

The Janitor's eyes narrow in suspicion.

JANITOR

Li Li Han?

ZHAO

Her name was on one of those old books. I was just curious.

The Janitor sips his tea thoughtfully.

EXT. MINGLIAO, STREET - DAY

Zhao strolls beside the shuffling old Janitor.

JANITOR

The Hans were the biggest landowners in the district. Family went back to the Warlord days. Old Man Han fought with Chiang Kai Shek. He was executed in the war. The land was given to the people. The old farmhouse was burnt down.

ZHAO

And Li Li?

JANITOR

She died years ago. They had a house here in town. Grand it was. I used to work there.

EXT. PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO - DAY

Zhao and the Janitor approach the grand, old, but run-down Han mansion. A red Republic flag flutters from the flagpole. RED ARMY GUARDS enter and exit the building.

ZHAO

(heart sinks)

Party Headquarters.

JANITOR

Yes.

ZHAO

What happened to everything inside?

JANITOR

The Party kept the useful stuff. Sold anything valuable. We burnt a lot of stuff.

A jeep emerges from the back of the building. Fung and Wu. Zhao shrinks back as the jeep accelerates past.

But Wu spots Zhao. The jeep SCREECHES to a halt.

WU

Comrade Zhao? You wish to see me?

ZHAO

No. No, I'm just seeing the sights.

Wu looks suspicious. The jeep chugs off. Stops.

WU

My door is always open. For a little chat. An intelligent debate.

The jeep drives off. Fung glances suspiciously back at Zhao.

ZHAO

You burnt everything.

JANITOR

Mostly. Stuff we didn't know what
to do with, we threw in there.

The Janitor points to an annexe.

EXT. PARTY HQ/ANNEXE - NIGHT

A NEW MOON beams down on -

- Zhao, checking the door of the storage building. Locked. He moves to a shuttered window and tests it. Loose. He WRENCHES it open. He crouches down, fearful of guards. Silence.

INT. ANNEXE - NIGHT

Zhao climbs through the window and lights a candle. Old furniture. Rubbish. He steps forward. And DROPS out of sight.

ZHAO

Aaargh.

SFX: A body tumbles down stairs.

INT. CELLAR - NIGHT

Darkness. Zhao groans in pain. He scrabbles around, and lights his candle. More rubbish. Rotting cardboard boxes. A rusty bird cage.

An old STEAMER TRUNK. Zhao forces open its rusty clasps. The hinges CREAK. Papers. Zhao paws through the papers eagerly. No sheet music. He finds a faded photo of a twenty year old girl at a piano.

ZHAO

Li Li Fan.

PITTER PATT. Rats.

Zhao stifles a SHRIEK, trips and drops the candle. It gutters and goes out. He scrambles about, hits his head on something. THUMP.

ZHAO

Shit. Shit. Shit.

Zhao lights the candle and finds himself face-to-face with a piano. Shocked, he falls backward, dropping the candle. It goes out again.

Zhao lights the candle. The piano is still there. He shakes his head but it's no hallucination.

Zhao sees an upturned piano stool. He lifts it on his feet. He opens the stool's lid. Sheet music pours out. Mozart. Tchaikovsky -

ZHAO

- Chopin.

Zhao studies the dusty, filthy piano. Scratched, mutilated. Keys are gone, the ivory stolen - as ugly as pulled teeth.

Zhao caresses the piano's mutilated body, the wrecked keyboard. He plays a couple of notes. Nothing. A couple more - horrible. Discordant.

INT. WU'S OFFICE - DAY

Wu sits at his desk and studies a file.

WU

I was looking forward to some intellectual stimulation, Zhao. I was hoping we might have got together over the last few months.

Zhao sits opposite him, shifts uncomfortably.

ZHAO

I'm sorry. There's so much work.

WU

Still, plenty of time for us to catch up.

ZHAO

Plenty of time?

WU

It is the arrogance that concerns me. Your inability to assimilate.

ZHAO

I have been assimilating.

WU

Good. That is progress. However, I have recommended that you stay with us a little longer.

Zhao freezes. Fung smirks in the corner.

ZHAO

How long?

WU

As long as it takes.

ZHAO

Six months? A year?

WU

Perhaps longer. It is left to my discretion. Whatever, plenty of time for our little chats.

OFF: Zhao's fearful look.

INT. GANBOLO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao sits with Altant, "Tales of the Arabian Nights" before them. Qorin and Bat-Erdent sew felt and listen. Ganbolo smokes and listens.

ZHAO

To pass the long night Scheherezade told him a story. The King listened with awe and spared her life for one day. On the second night Scheherzade told him another story. And he spared her life again.

Zhao looks into Altant's eyes. He pauses and writes on a piece of paper - "I'm sorry".

Altant looks at him - puzzled.

ZHAO

(whispers)
I'm sorry.

EXT. GANBOLO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao stands and stares at the darkened hut. He carries his bags over his shoulders.

Zhao places "Tales of the Arabian Nights" by the front door.

EXT. ANIMAL CORRAL - NIGHT

Zhao harnesses a pony. He anxiously leads the pony, fearful of its CLATTERING hooves in the silent night. He climbs awkwardly aboard and grips the reins.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

Zhao awkwardly rides the trotting pony. The pony breaks into a canter. Zhao tries to rein it in. The pony breaks into a gallop. Zhao holds on for dear life.

A wolf HOWLS. The pony bucks and throws Zhao. He slams into the icy, rock-hard ground.

ZHAO

Fuck. Fuck!

The pony stops. Zhao clammers painfully to his feet. He stumbles toward the pony. The pony trots off. Zhao chases it. The pony gallops off.

Silence. A starry, starry night. Zhao hesitates, struck by the steppes' vast beauty.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

Zhao hobbles painfully along the trail.

EXT. MINGLIAO TOWN, OUTSKIRTS - DAWN

Zhao limps along a street, trying to look inconspicuous.

EXT. MINGLIAO, TOWN SQUARE - DAWN

Zhao marches through the town square. TOWNSFOLK stare at him, but he keeps his head down.

A train WHISTLES. Zhao breaks into a run.

EXT. MINGLIAO, TRAIN STATION - DAWN

Zhao races toward the station. He stops in his tracks.

Wu, Standing at the station entrance. Waiting.

Zhao edges into an alleyway. He sees the train CHUNTER into the station. Stop. A HISS of steam.

EXT. END OF TRAIN PLATFORM - DAWN

Zhao sneaks to the end of the platform. He sees nervous, frightened STUDENTS alight from the train. One GIRL openly weeps. Zhao sees Wu and Fung meet them. He sees them collect their bags.

Zhao sees them wait on the platform. He sees the GUARD blow his whistle. A HISS of steam and the train chugs toward Zhao.

The locomotive passes him. Finally, Wu, Fung and the students head for the exit.

Zhao chases the train. He leaps onto -

EXT. TRAIN, THE RAILS - DAWN

- the rails beneath the carriage. He gets himself into some sort of comfort straddling the rails. He sighs in relief. He opens his pack and takes out a dried rice cake.

The train hits points. The carriage jack-knives, almost jolting Zhao onto the tracks below. He loses his grip on the rice cake. Then his pack.

The train's wheels CRUSH the backpack. Zhao white knuckles the rails.

EXT. BEIJING RAIL YARDS - EARLY MORNING

The train rattles into the yards, jolting Zhao awake.

EXT. TRAIN, THE RAILS - EARLY MORNING

Zhao sees the approaching station. He leaps off the rails and hits the ground HARD. A RAILWAY POLICE OFFICER spots him.

RAILWAY POLICE OFFICER

Hey!

Zhao clambers to his feet. He's badly winded but hobbles toward a fence. The Railway Police officer closes in fast. He blows a WHISTLE. Zhao scrambles over the fence.

EXT. BEIJING CONSERVATORIUM - MORNING

Zhao approaches the conservatorium entrance - home at last.

INT. BEIJING CONSERVATORIUM, LOBBY - DAY

Zhao enters the hallowed hall of academia. He breathes in its traditions.

Silence.

INT. BEIJING CONSERVATORIUM, HALLWAY - DAY

Zhao frowns as his footsteps ECHO in the deserted hallway.

INT. CONSERVATORIUM AUDITORIUM - DAY

Zhao enters the auditorium. Empty. Silent.

FLASHBACK BEGINS:

Zhao is on stage, playing the Chopin Piano Concerto #1, with the Conservatorium orchestra. A table of TROPHIES sits at the side of the stage.

A packed audience of DIGNITARIES and PROFESSORS, all formally attired, watch.

PROFESSOR SUN, 65, watches, rapt in Zhao's playing. MR AU, 75, in an old, rarely-worn suit watches proudly.

Zhao looks up from his keyboard and GLARES at First Violinist, BINGSUN, 20.

ZHAO
(hisses at Bingsun)
Can you stick to the right tempo?

BINGSUN
(mouths through his grin)
Fuck you.

Zhao GLOWERS at Violist CHEN, 20, studious, bespectacled.

ZHAO
And can you at least play in tune?

Chen falters - humiliated.

BINGSUN
You want to play a concerto on your own, superman - be my guest.

Zhao grits his teeth and keeps playing.

Professor Sun shakes his head in wonderment at Zhao's exquisite playing.

PROFESSOR SUN
He's in a class of his own, that boy.

PEI, 20 and MINGFAN, 20 burst in with a platoon of youthful RED GUARDS.

PEI
Stop. Stop now.

The audience murmurs, some rise to their feet.

Zhao, oblivious, plays on. The orchestra falters and stops. Pei marches onto the stage and slams the lid down. Zhao moves his hands out of the way in the nick of time.

PROFESSOR SUN
Pei, what's the meaning of this?
We're in the middle of our
competition.

PEI
The Competition is cancelled.

PROFESSOR SUN
You have no right. You're a mere
student, Pei. Zhao, play on.

PEI
No.

Pei climbs down from the stage. He nods at his Red Guards. Two of them grab Professor Sun. Mr Au pushes them away.

MR AU
Show some respect.

Pei slaps Mr Au. Zhao leaps off the stage and punches Pei. The Red Guards jump on Zhao and beat him, kick him.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

Zhao stares at the empty stage, fingers his scarred eyebrow.

INT. BEIJING CONSERVATORIUM, HALLWAY - DAY

Zhao approaches a door ahead, which almost beckons him. Zhao smiles at some happy memory.

INT. MR AU'S WORKSHOP - DAY

Zhao steps in and closes the door - the world - behind him. He gazes fondly at dismembered pianos and skeletons and parts of pianos. A shelf full of piano manuals. A workbench with esoteric tools.

MR AU
Zhao? What are you doing here?

He slides out from a piano like a mechanic from under a car.

ZHAO

I'm back. Time off for good behavior.

(change of subject. Re
dismembered pianos)

What's wrong with these?

MR AU

I had to cannibalise them, to keep the other pianos going. There's an embargo on all imports. No strings. No keys, no sound boards. No nothing. This was one of your favorites, remember?

Zhao caresses the ivories of a gutted baby grand.

ZHAO

Yes it was.

MR AU

Not that you really cared. As long as it was tuned and set up right they were all the same to you.

ZHAO

A good musician can play any instrument.

MR AU

Maybe so, but - Time off for good behavior? There's no time off for good behavior.

ZHAO

Got lucky I guess. Where is everybody?

MR AU

Sent away.

ZHAO

Everyone?

MR AU

Just about. Professor Sun comes in. I potter about. But I don't work here any more. Truth is, I've got nowhere else to go.

ZHAO

But this is the Conservatorium. The Beijing Conservatorium. They can't shut us down.

INT. WU'S FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

Wu, his MOTHER and his FATHER sit around the humble kitchen table in a peasant's hut, eating supper.

MOTHER

Is it good?

Wu shrugs indifferently.

FATHER

Try the dumplings. We thought we'd celebrate you coming home and buy some pork.

WU

Is that a good example to set the village?

FATHER

It's the first meat we've bought in weeks.

WU

I'm a respected man. This places you in a very special position.

FATHER

Your mother and I have always been respected.

(with an edge)

And well-liked.

WU

My talents and abilities are being recognized. I do not need doubts cast because of you.

A KNOCK on the door.

EXT. WU'S FAMILY HOME - DAY

Wu and Fung climb into the old jeep.

FUNG

He didn't turn up for work and all his stuff is gone.

INT. CONSERVATORIUM, CORRIDOR - DAY

Zhao and Mr Au march along the corridor, their FOOTSTEPS RINGING and ECHOING. They pass an office. An ACADEMIC sits in her chair staring through the window.

MR AU

Some of our teachers are working in factories. Or sweeping streets. Some have been denounced as traitors and have taken their own lives. They let some faculty in. But they can't teach. They can't play.

Zhao and Mr Au pass another office. Three hollow-eyed MUSIC TEACHERS sit silently.

Zhao and Mr Au approach an office door.

MR AU

I'll fetch Professor Sun.

INT. PROFESSOR SUN'S STUDY - DAY

Zhao studies the portraits of Beethoven and Mozart on the walls. He smiles as he picks up the bust of Chopin.

He sees Professor Sun's old Bosendorfer piano.

FLASHBACK BEGINS:

Professor Sun, 55, Zhao's matinee-idol handsome FATHER, 35, in a tailored Western suit and his glamorous MOTHER 32, watch Zhao at the piano.

Zhao adopts a tragic pose. He forces a COUGH. A second COUGH.

ZHAO'S FATHER

(whispers to Sun)

His hero's Chopin.

PROFESSOR SUN

And Chopin died of consumption.

Zhao's father shrugs - kids.

Professor Sun smiles indulgently as Zhao plays a beautiful Chopin nocturne.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

Zhao picks up the EBONY baton with the BLOOD RED characters.

Zhao glances out the window and sees Pei, Mingfan and four other Red Guards marching toward the front entrance. Zhao scopes the room, looking for an escape.

Professor Sun, 65, enters with Mr Au.

ZHAO
Professor Sun.

Zhao stares at Professor Sun's filthy janitor's uniform.

PROFESSOR SUN
Zhao. Welcome back. Not that
there's much to come back to.

ZHAO
This is my home.

PROFESSOR SUN
Why did they let you back?

ZHAO
They didn't. Please, Professor, I
can't go back. You have friends.
Influence.

SUN
Not any more, Zhao. Times have
changed.

They hear the CLATTER of footsteps. Zhao charges towards the -

INT. CONSERVATORIUM, CORRIDOR - DAY

- door and barrels through the surprised Red Guards. He bounces off one Red Guard, lands on his back, but springs to his feet and legs it.

The Red Guards clamber to their feet and chase.

INT. CONSERVATORIUM, VARIOUS - DAY

Zhao clatters down the stairs, along a hallway, the Red Guards hot on his heels.

He heads for the front entrance. A Red Guard. He cannons into the Red Guard, knocking him off his feet.

EXT. CONSERVATORIUM - DAY

Zhao races across the courtyard.

EXT. BEIJING STREETS, VARIOUS - DAY

The Red Guards chase Zhao along a street. Through a market.

Zhao turns down an alleyway. Dead end. The Red Guards arrive. They advance slowly. Zhao catches his breath. He hums a few rousing bars from the 1812 Overture. And charges them. He fights tigerishly, punching, kicking, forces a way through.

But Pei reaches out an arm and grabs his ankle, tripping him. The Red Guards pounce.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

Zhao sits in his seat, flanked by Pei and Mingfan.

The train pulls into Mingliao station. Wu and Fung wait.

INT. WU'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Wu sits at his desk.

WU

I had to report your escape. It reflected very badly on me.

Zhao sits opposite, silent.

WU

I felt as if I had failed. Failed myself. Failed the revolution. It's a terrible, terrible feeling.

Zhao remains silent.

WU

But then I realized - it wasn't me who failed. I offered you my friendship and your refused it.

ZHAO

No, I -

WU

I shall wait in the vehicle. Comrade Fung, will return you to your hut.

Fung nods from his corner chair. Wu rises and exits. The door closes. Fung smiles malevolently.

EXT. PONY CORRAL - DAY

A PONY defecates. Zhao, cheek cut, eye blackened, shovels the shit into a wooden wheelbarrow.

Ganbolo, Monkhat and the other village men depart on horses and camels and carts for the forest. They ignore him.

EXT. PIG STY - DAY

The piglet is growing fast. It grunts at Zhao. Zhao shovels pig shit into the wheelbarrow. He wheels the barrow and slips in a pig pat. He tries to wipe the pig shit off his clothes.

He wheels the barrow to a slurry/fertilizer pit and upends the animal pats. He stirs the slurry with a paddle.

THROUGH THE WIRE: Altant, Qorin and Bat-Erdent move by with bags of felt.

ZHAO

Altant?

Qorin and Bat-Erdent scowl and hustle Altant away.

INT. ZHAO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao tosses limp cabbage leaves into the boiling pot. He watches the leaves boil. A thought hits him. He lifts his thin mattress. Li Li Fan's music.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

The Chopin nocturne SOARS above the vast moonlit steppes. Zhao bounces on his pony beneath the starry sky.

EXT. PARTY HEADQUARTERS, MINGLIAO - NIGHT

Dark and deserted. Zhao steps out of the shadows.

INT. CELLAR - NIGHT

A shadowy Zhao shuts the cellar door above him. He lights a candle. Zhao moves down the stairs, holds the candle aloft and sees his piano.

CUT TO:

Zhao sits on the piano stool and rubs away the grime on the front case. A gold lyre logo and gold letters gradually appear: S.T.E.I.N.W.A.Y AND SONS.

Zhao takes a deep breath and SOFTLY plays the Chopin nocturne. Out of tune. Discordant notes. Or dead notes.

MR AU
 (V.O., as if reading from
 the Steinway manual.)
 Heinrich Engelhart Steinweg built
 his first piano in his kitchen in
 1836.

Zhao pounds a few chords. Ugly, dissonant.

A leg buckles and the piano collapses. CRASH. Zhao holds his breath and waits for the ECHOES to finish. No one comes.

CUT TO:

Zhao strains under the weight as he lowers the legless piano corner onto a box.

CUT TO:

Zhao opens the lid and peers into the piano. SQUEAK. SQUEAK. Zhao grabs a mouse and releases it.

ZHAO
 (V.O, reading)
 The piano should be equally
 attractive inside -

Zhao stares at the tangled wires, rotted felt and dirt, dust and mouse shit.

CUT TO:

Zhao blows away a puff of dust from the body and inspects the mutilated wood.

ZHAO
 (V.O, reading)
 - and outside. The finish should be
 free from nicks and marks. The
 grain even, elegant.

INT. PARTY HQ MINGLIAO, PHONE OFFICE - DAY

Zhao is at the head of a long line. A surly PARTY HACK sits at the desk. A PHONE CALLER finishes her call and departs.

PARTY HACK
Identification.

Zhao shows him his ID.

PARTY HACK
Telephone number.

ZHAO
Beijing 492984.

Party Hack notes the number.

PARTY HACK
This telephone for important calls
only. Who is the call for?

ZHAO
My father.

PARTY HACK
What is the nature of the call?

ZHAO
He's seventy-six years of age.

PARTY HACK
Important calls only.

ZHAO
He's ill.

The Party Hack shrugs.

ZHAO
Dying.

Party Hack reluctantly dials the operator.

PARTY HACK
Four nine two nine eight four.

The Party Hack passes the phone to Zhao.

INT. PROFESSOR SUN'S OFFICE - DAY

Professor Sun is on the phone.

PROFESSOR SUN
Are you there, Mr Au?

INT. MR AU'S WORKSHOP - DAY

Mr Au is on the phone.

MR AU
Yes. Yes. Zhao?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CADRE HQ, MINGLIAO, PHONE OFFICE - DAY

Zhao turns away from Party Hack and lowers his voice.

ZHAO
Mr Au? I've found a piano.

MR AU
What?

ZHAO
I've found a piano.

MR AU
Someone lost a piano? How could
anyone - ?

ZHAO
No, it's in a cellar. Vandalised.
It doesn't work.

MR AU
What's wrong with it?

ZHAO
Everything. Some notes don't play,
some are flat or hum.

MR AU
I can't get up to Mingliao, Zhao.

ZHAO
I want to fix it.

MR AU
You? Fix a piano?
(laughter)
Do you know how many parts there
are under that lid?

ZHAO
Ummm.

MR AU
Twelve thousand.

ZHAO
Twelve? Thousand?

MR AU
Twelve thousand. Do you know how many moving parts activate every time you hit a key?

ZHAO
Um ...

MR AU
Piano players! You don't even know your instruments. Fifty-six.

ZHAO
Can't we just fix it?

MR AU
(sighs)
What sort of piano is it?

ZHAO
A Steinway.

MR AU
A Steinway? What sort of Steinway?

ZHAO
I don't know.

MR AU
Well find out.

INT. CELLAR - NIGHT

Zhao cleans the front of the piano case with a damp cloth. The gold letters - Steinway and Sons - shine. But no more information.

Zhao rubs the filth from the plate. Letters and figures appear: Steinway and Sons. New York. No. A 3542.

INT/EXT. ANNEXE - DAY

Zhao squeezes through the shuttered window. Dawn light.

ZHAO
Shit.

EXT. MINGLIAO, STREET - DAY

Zhao bounces along on his pony. He rounds a corner, a moment before -

- The jeep bearing Fung and Wu trundles toward Party HQ.

EXT. PARTY HQ/ANNEXE - DAY

Wu frowns.

WU

Stop.

Fung pulls up. Wu stares at the trail of footprints to and from the annexe in the snow.

INT. PARTY HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Wu confronts a MALE and FEMALE CADRE.

WU

Does anyone have any business at the annexe?

The Cadres shake their heads.

FEMALE CADRE

No, comrade.

EXT. ANNEXE - DAY

Wu watches Fung unlock the door to the annexe.

INT. ANNEXE - DAY

Fung holds up a kerosene lamp and Wu and Fung scan the room. Nothing but rubbish.

They miss the hatch/door to the cellar which is shut and seems part of the floor.

FUNG

There's been a report of beggars. Maybe they're sleeping here.

WU

Post a guard.

EXT. RICE FIELD - DAY

The snow is melting.

The Chopin music soars over -

Ganbolo and the villagers plow the field.

Zhao, bent almost double, bears a pair of huge buckets, brimming with liquid manure on a pole across his shoulders. He HUMS the Chopin to keep his spirits up. Zhao pours the manure in the furrowed soil, breathing ragged breaths.

Zhao sees Altant tilling the soil. He approaches her. Monkhat steps between them.

MONKHAT
Stay away from her.

ZHAO
I just want to help -

MONKHAT
You're a deserter. She doesn't want to see you.

She ignores him. Zhao's heart bleeds too.

INT. PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO - NIGHT

The surly Party Hack reluctantly hands Zhao the phone.

PARTY HACK
Still dying?

Zhao nods.

ZHAO
(whispers into phone)
Mr Au? It's a Steinway. Model
Number A 3542.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MR AU'S WORKSHOP - NIGHT

Mr Au is on the phone. He rifles through the manuals on his shelf and finds a glossy manual with a photo of the piano.

MR AU
Polished finish. Or satin?

ZHAO
Polished. Black.

MR AU
Model A Steinway. Empire Revival.
Beautiful. A 3542 - built in
Hamburg. 1890. OK. First thing, you
gotta remove every single part. All
twelve thousand of them.

Zhao's heart sinks.

MR AU
Then you clean the body. And then
check the sound board. You know the
sound board?

ZHAO
Ummm ...

Zhao rummages in his satchel and finds a pen and pencil. He
writes "sound board" on his hand.

MR AU
The big piece. Piano shaped. If the
sound board is OK - and you better
hope it is - take a look at the pin
block. You know the pin block? The
one with the holes in it.

ZHAO
Of course.
(writes "pin block" on his
other hand)
Everyone knows the pin block.

Mr Au sighs.

Fung enters. He sees Zhao, his back turned, on the phone.

MR AU
Dead notes you say? Probably, the
bridle straps.

Mr Au gazes at his cannibalized pianos.

MR AU
I'll scrounge a set together and
send it to you.

Fung approaches the Party Hack and gestures at Zhao.

PARTY HACK
His father. Very ill. Dying.

Fung nods, still suspicious, but slouches off.

ZHAO
Is that it?

MR AU
No. Then you clean every single
part. All twelve thousand of them.
List what's faulty and what's
missing.

Zhao's heart sinks further.

MR AU
And then you put it back together
again.

INT. WU'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Fung stands before Wu at his desk.

WU
He has no father. His father is
dead.

INT. COOPERATIVE - DAY

A COOPERATIVE CLERK takes an old screwdriver and a mallet
from the tool collection and drops them on the counter with a
handful of pliers and other tools. He points at a document.

CLERK
Sign for it.

Zhao signs the document.

ZHAO
And candles. I need candles.

CLERK
(suspiciously)
More candles?

INT. CELLAR - NIGHT

Zhao dampens the cloth in a bucket of water and wipes the
dust and dirt and shit from the body of the piano.

ZHAO

(V.O, reading from manual)

"The piano is a monster that screams when you touch its teeth."
Andre Segovia.

CUT TO:

Zhao lies on his back under the keyboard. He reaches for the wooden mallet and hammers the side case. Dust cascades into his eyes.

ZHAO

Oh, damn. Oh, shit.

He hammers again. The piano CREAKS, GROANS. Zhao hammers again. His leg kicks the box/makeshift leg. The piano collapses. CRASH.

The ECHOES die, but the piano pins him. Zhao pushes. The piano rises. Zhao strains, it falls. He's still pinned.

He heaves again and rolls. The piano crashes, missing his hand and fingers by millimeters. Zhao waits anxiously. No footsteps. No guard.

CUT TO:

The piano is propped on its three legs and a stack of bricks.

MONTAGE:

A. Zhao unscrews the action from a key. Rotten hammer felt falls apart in his hand. He coughs. Sneezes.

ZHAO

(V.O, reading from manual)

The action is a series of fifty-six moving parts, exquisitely crafted -

B. He pulls the action apart piece by piece - wire, flange, down-screw, agraffe, hammer. It sticks. He pulls harder and rips the action from the piano in a cloud of dust.

ZHAO

(V.O, reading)

- and must function with perfect harmony, ease and precision.

C. He pulls apart the action from a second key. It gets tangled. Then tangled in the wires of a third key. He pulls them both out and tangles himself in the wires.

D. Zhao rips out wires, straps, hammers, hinges, flanges.

Zhao hears a FOOTSTEP above. He blows out the candle. More footsteps. Through a crack in the roof he sees a torch light. The footsteps pause right above him. Zhao holds his breath.

INT. ANNEXE - NIGHT

A SECURITY GUARD sweeps the annexe with his torch. A SOUND. He swings the torch. A RAT scurries away.

INT. CELLAR - NIGHT

The footsteps above finally move off.

Zhao lights his candle. He gazes at the guts of the piano - a pile of twelve thousand tangled wires, hammers, straps, flanges, and rods on the floor. He sighs.

EXT. ASBESTOS MINE - DAY

Fung drives Wu in the jeep, through the asbestos mine. Filthy primitive machines. Mounds of dirt and waste and slag. Dust clouds hover heavily as asbestos pours from chutes into waiting trucks.

The jeep pulls up at the Manager's Office. Wu alights, like Napoleon in Russia, and surveys the New China before him.

INT. ASBESTOS MINE TUNNEL - DAY

Wu, Fung and the MINE MANAGER creep along a shadowy tunnel, dimly lit by naked light bulb.

MINE MANAGER

Congratulations on your promotion,
comrade. A well-deserved promotion,
I might add.

Wu accepts the praise with a nod and a tight smile. They hear the SLAP and CRACK of pickaxes against rock.

They hear HACKING COUGHS.

The Mine Manager puts a handkerchief across his nose. He gestures and Wu and Fung put handkerchiefs to their mouths.

They come to the working seam and see twenty MINERS, stripped to the waist, bent double in the low tunnel swinging pickaxes, some coughing in the thick dust.

Wu rubs at his eyes and coughs.

INT. MINE MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

The Mine Manager glances at the PHOTOS of his SMILING FAMILY on his desk, and listens to Wu coughing opposite him.

MINE MANAGER

I shouldn't have taken you down there. Appalling. Not fit for a leader like yourself. My apologies. I hope you won't mention it to -

WU

The mine is dangerous.

MINE MANAGER

(wary)

The conditions are very primitive, comrade, er, sir. And we have no money to -

WU

Over a hundred deaths from accidents last year.

MINE MANAGER

(nervous)

I do my best with limited resources. The asbestos, it gets into their lungs.

WU

These men are heroes of the Revolution. Martyrs to a noble cause.

MINE MANAGER

(relieved)

Yes. Yes. Martyrs, martyrs.

INT. PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO - NIGHT

The surly Party Hack watches Zhao, on the phone.

ZHAO

Mr Au.

INT. MR AU'S WORKSHOP - NIGHT

Mr Au is on the phone.

MR AU
Zhao? Someone called me from
Shangmao. They wanted to know why
you were calling?

INT. PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO - NIGHT

Zhao - GRIPS the phone.

ZHAO
Who was it?

INT. PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO, WU'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Wu sits at his desk, phone pressed to his ear.

EXT. PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO - NIGHT

Zhao moves down the driveway. He pauses and looks back. He
sees Wu at an upstairs window, watching him.

EXT. GANBOLO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao knocks on the door, workbooks in his hand. Altant opens
the door. She stands there - uncertain. Qorin joins her.

ZHAO
I want to help Altant.

QORIN
You promised to help her and then
you deserted her.

ZHAO
I wanted to go home. But now I'm
here and I want to teach her.

QORIN
And the next time you leave?

ZHAO
I'm not sure there's any way back.

Altant takes "1001 Arabian Nights" from Zhao. She caresses
the cover and smiles.

INT. GANBOLO'S COTTAGE - DAY

Zhao and Altant sit at the table, "Tales of the Arabian Nights" open before them. Over, we hear Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherezade".

Qorin and Bat-Erdent prepare supper. Ganbоло sits by the fire and scowls at Zhao.

GANBOLO
Men don't like smart women.

BAT-ERDENT
Ain't that a fact.

QORIN
Maybe she wants more than a husband. And maybe her country wants more of her.

Qorin gestures to Zhao - read.

ZHAO
And so the King kept Scheherezade alive day by day, as he eagerly anticipated a new story. At the end of 1,0001 nights, and 1,001 stories, Scheherezade had saved 1000 lives.

Qorin and Bat-Erdent stop preparing the rice, and listen, frozen in suspense.

Ganbоло sees Altant's face light up with joy as she follows the pictures. Their eyes catch and Ganbоло's heart melts.

ZHAO
But then Scheherezade told the king she had no more tales to tell him.

Monkhat enters.

MONKHBAT
What's he doing here? He's a deserter, an enemy of the people.

BAT-ERDENT
Does he look like an enemy of the people? Very scary.

MONKHBAT
It's dangerous even talking with a revisionist.
(to all his family)

Do you want to be branded
revisionists?

Monkhat looks to Ganbolo for support. Ganbolo looks at his daughter's joyful face and shakes his head.

GANBOLO
Let him teach her.

Monkhat snorts in disgust and heads back out slamming the door behind him.

Rimsky-Korsakov's music soars again.

ZHAO
During these 1,001 nights, the king
had fallen in love with
Scheherezade, and he spared her
life, and made her his Queen.

EXT. ZHAO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao approaches his hut. He sees a light inside. SMOKE billowing from the windows and cracks in the walls.

And music - ROCK MUSIC.

INT. ZHAO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao rips open the door. Smoke everywhere. Bingsun, the First Violinist and Chen the Violist from the Conservatorium Orchestra play beautifully and sing atrociously.

Zhao listens, astonished.

BINGSUN & CHEN
She loves you yeah yeah yeah/She
loves you yeah yeah/With a love
like that you know it can't be bad.

Bingsun and Chen finish playing and burst into laughter.

ZHAO
What the hell is going on here?
(double take)
Bingsun? Chen?

BINGSUN
Oh no. Of all the crummy huts in
all of China, we came to yours.

ZHAO

What was that? Music?

Bingsun holds up the folio with a photo of the grinning mop-tops - The Beatles.

BINGSUN

They've banned Western music. My brother's in the merchant navy. I asked him to bring me back some Beethoven.

CHEN

And he brought back the Beatles.

Bingsun and Chen break in to peals of laughter.

ZHAO

Maybe they were right to ban it.

Chen retunes his viola.

BINGSUN

Maybe, he's got a point. What's the difference between a viola and a lawn mower?

CHEN

(groans)

No more viola jokes.

BINGSUN

You can tune a lawnmower.

Bingsun almost collapses with laughter.

ZHAO

Western music is banned. If they hear you or find that songbook you are in deep shit.

BINGSUN

Who's going to hear us out here?

ZHAO

You'll find out. Can't you two light a fire?

Zhao waves away the smoke.

BINGSUN

Not being content with being
China's greatest living musician,
Maestro Zhao is also China's
greatest fire starter.

CHEN

Make way for the giver of light.

ZHAO

Ha ha, very funny.

Zhao rearranges the fire. Bingsun and Chen wrap themselves in animal skins.

BINGSUN

These savage beasts, did you slay
them with your bare hands?

CHEN

And eat their still-beating hearts?

ZHAO

Do you want a fire? Or do you want
to freeze to death?

The twigs burst into flame. Bingsun and Chen warm their hands by the fire.

ZHAO

What are you two doing here anyway?

BINGSUN

Rehearsing "The Marriage of Figaro"
- what does it look like?

CHEN

We've been sent here.

ZHAO

Where are all the other students?

BINGSUN

Scattered. There'll be no students
left soon. No orchestras.

CHEN

You better face facts, Zhao.
There's no more college. No more
music. We might be out here
forever.

BINGSUN
 What's there to do round here?
 Except kill animals and freeze to
 death.

ZHAO
 Chop wood.

BINGSUN
 Any pretty girls?

Zhao hesitates.

CHEN
 There must be some ... A couple?
 ... One?

ZHAO
 No.

Zhao prepares tea. Bingsun points to an old crystal radio.

BINGSUN
 What about that?

CHEN
 You're kidding. It's ancient, like,
 Ming Dynasty or something.

BINGSUN
 Does it work?

ZHAO
 No aerial.

Bingsun considers. He grabs Chen's viola, unwinds a string.

CHEN
 (tries to take it)
 Hey!

Bingsun fends him off and removes the string.

BINGSUN
 One less string to go out of tune,
 Chen.

EXT. ZHAO'S HUT - NIGHT

The viola string pokes through a crack in the hut's roof.

INT. YURT - NIGHT

Chen sits precariously on the wobbling Bingsun's shoulders and wiggles the viola string through the roof.

Zhao adjusts the crystal radio dial. STATIC.

ZHAO

Hold on. Hold on. Don't move.

Bingsun wobbles. Staggers. MUSIC: Jimi Hendrix. Bingsun recoils from the screeching guitar, stumbles and falls. Chen drops to the floor. Hendrix fades.

BINGSUN

What was that?

ZHAO

Beats me.

Zhao fine tunes - but only static. He adjusts, retunes. An ANNOUNCER'S VOICE.

BINGSUN

What's he saying?

CHEN

It's Russian.

ZHAO

Must be blowing in from over the border.

BINGSUN

What's he saying now?

CHEN

Chopin. Piano Concerto Number One.

Zhao's eyes light up. The majestic Piano Concerto #1 plays.

ZHAO

I need a pencil. Paper. Paper!

Zhao scrambles around for a pencil. Finds one. Zhao spots toilet rolls in Chen's bag. He snatches one and unrolls it.

CHEN

Hey!

BINGSUN

Mummy gave them to him. Thinks he'll need extras out here.

Zhao listens to the music and notates on the toilet paper.

ZHAO
Write your parts.

They furiously write the music they hear on the toilet rolls.

MORNING:

STATIC on the crystal radio set.

The three boys are fast asleep. The door opens and Monkhat pokes his head in.

Dozens of notated toilet roll streamers hanging, fluttering from the ceiling.

MONKHAT
We're waiting for you.

The three wake up, groaning.

MONKHAT
What's this?

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen scramble for clothes. The wind outside suddenly picks up. A snatch of music plays on the radio set.

MONKHAT
Music. Western music.

Silence.

MONKHAT
You'd better hope Wu doesn't find it. We're still waiting.

Monkhat exits.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen chop wood in rhythm with the Chopin they hear in their heads.

EXT. FOREST GLADE - DAY

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen sit upright, formally on upturned logs. Zhao plays "air piano" and Bingsun and Chen play "air violins" to the Chopin that RESOUNDS in their mind's ear over the steppes.

Monkhat pauses from his chopping and stares at them.

The music crescendoes and Zhao, Bingsun and Chen rise and bow to the applause ringing in their ears.

Monkhat shakes his head - students! - and keeps chopping.

INT. PARTY OFFICE, SHANGMAO - DAY

Wu sits across his desk from Monkhat.

WU

We are building a new China,
comrade. And I will play my role. I
need capable young men to help me.
You can seize the opportunity,
comrade. Or you can remain a
woodchopper, a rice farmer the rest
of your life. Think about it.

Monkhat considers. Wu nods, dismissing him. Monkhat moves to the door. He exits as Fung and Zhao enter. Zhao and Monkhat nod uncertainly at each other and Monkhat exits. Zhao waits anxiously for Wu to finish writing on a document. A BOX sits on Wu's desk.

WU

Comrade Zhao. It came on today's
train.

Zhao swallows his nerves.

WU

From Beijing. Your "father",
perhaps. ... Aren't you going to
open it?

Wu gestures to Fung who passes Zhao a knife.

Zhao slices open the box. He finds a letter. Wu gestures - give it to me. Zhao hands it over. Wu scans it and hands it back. Zhao takes a bag of tea from the box. Candy bars.

ZHAO

Would you like one?

Wu shakes his head curtly. Fung looks at the candy greedily. He catches Wu's stern eye and shakes his head.

Beneath the candy bars - a bag labelled "Rice". Wu nods - OK, nothing there.

Fung take his knife back from Zhao. And plunges it into the package. Zhao holds his breath. Nothing but rice.

INT. ZHAO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao reads the letter.

MR AU (V.O.)
Dear Zhao, The College is now
officially closed.

INT. PROFESSOR SUN'S OFFICE - DAY

Professor Sun sits and gazes from the window at the empty Conservatorium grounds.

MR AU (V.O.)
Professor Sun sits in his office
all day. He is lost without his
students. He lives for the day the
College reopens and his one wish is
that the music never dies. That
once again he hears the secret
harmonies.

Zhao looks at the letter thoughtfully. He scrabbles around in the rice and pulls out a packet.

ZHAO
Bridle straps.

He rummages again and finds the GLOSSY STEINWAY MANUAL with the piano on the cover.

Zhao pulls the manual out of the rice sack. Zhao admires the glossy photos by the flickering candle light. He caresses the image of the beautiful piano on the cover.

ZHAO
(reads from manual)
The A series, like the music it
plays is a work of art, a
masterpiece.

Bingsun and Chen enter.

BINGSUN
What's that?

ZHAO
Nothing.

CHEN
What do you mean, "work of art"?

ZHAO
Have a candy bar.

Zhao throws them candy bars. He tries to replace the manual.

BINGSUN
A manual. A Steinway manual.

Chen looks at the package.

CHEN
Mr Au sent it.

BINGSUN
Why would Mr Au send you a Steinway
manual?

ZHAO
I tell you it's nothing.

BINGSUN
Nothing, huh?

Bingsun snatches the manual and holds it over the fire.

ZHAO
No! ... I found a piano.

Bingsun and Chen stare at Zhao in disbelief.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

Three ponies trot across the steppe. Zhao, bouncing a little.
Bingsun - bouncing a lot. Chen, bouncing like a rag doll.

EXT. ANNEXE - NIGHT

Zhao pulls on the shutter. Locked. He wrenches the shutter -
the timber CRACKS. It echoes in the night air.

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen freeze. Silence. Zhao opens the
shutter and climbs in. He helps Bingsun in.

SECURITY GUARD (O.S.)
Hey, who's there?

Chen dives through the window and Zhao closes the shutter as
the SECURITY GUARD approaches.

INT. ANNEXE - NIGHT

A torchlight shines through the shutters. Zhao, Bingsun and Chen hold their breath. The torchlight snaps off. FOOTSTEPS finally move off.

INT. CELLAR - NIGHT

Bingsun and Chen gaze at the innards - thousands of mechanisms - tangled in piles on the floor.

BINGSUN
You're kidding.

CHEN
I am so glad I play the viola.

ZHAO
Twelve thousand parts.

BINGSUN
I believe you.

MONTAGE:

A. Bingsun and Chen stand ten feet apart, holding up, and untangling a pair of wires and actions.

ZHAO
(V.O, reading from manual)
Each piano is hand-crafted, one at a time, taking about a full year to complete.

B. Zhao is flat on his back. No piano pedals. He consults the manual, then unscrews the pedal mechanism from the piano.

C. Bingsun and Chen scrape the rotting felt from the hammers.

D. Zhao disconnects the moving parts of the pedal mechanism.

E. Bingsun and Chen collect the flanges and count them.

F. Chen holds up a mechanism.

CHEN
What's this?

Zhao consults his manual. Scratches his head and flicks through a couple more pages.

ZHAO

Whippen.

CHEN

(facetious)

Of course. A whippen.

BINGSUN

What the hell is a whippen?

Zhao writes it down in his work book.

F. Chen dismantles a mechanism and puts the tiny screw in a cup.

G. Bingsun counts the hammers.

BINGSUN

Thirty-nine. Forty. Forty-one hammers.

Zhao notes it in his work book. They all gaze at the mechanisms and parts laid out neatly on the floor.

CHEN

How many parts are missing?

ZHAO

We've got maybe half a piano.

Bingsun and Chen sigh. Zhao looks at the delicate wooden hammers and the rotten felt, puts them aside.

ZHAO

OK. We need to lift the pin block out. Ready.

Zhao signals and they lift out the wooden pin block.

ZHAO

Over here. Gently.

Chen and Bingsun lay the pin board on the floor. Zhao checks his manual and feels the bridge.

ZHAO

(reads from manual)

The bridge is made from hard rock maple, with a wonderfully close grain, quarter sawn, so the grain runs along the length of the bridge. Nothing comes close to the acoustical qualities of this wood.

CUT TO:

They heave the sound board from the piano's belly.

ZHAO

((V.O, reading from manual)

The sound board is flat-grained spruce, a 47% improvement of vibrational characteristics over cross-grained wood.

The sound board gets stuck. Zhao reaches for a mallet and hammers it. They lift it out. They place it by the pin block.

CUT TO:

They heave out the cast-iron plate.

ZHAO

(V.O, reading)

The plate is cast from bell-quality, high-tensile iron, and is able to withstand string tension of up to twenty tons.

Chen staggers and trips and crashes into the pin block. It cracks in two.

CHEN

Oh, man. I'm sorry.

ZHAO

You fucking idiot. I don't believe it. That's the pin block, man. Where am I gonna get a pin block from around here?

CHEN

I said I'm sorry.

ZHAO

Fucking incompetence. Just like your fucking playing.

BINGSUN

Fuck you. He said he was sorry.

ZHAO

That's right. You second-raters
stick together.

BINGSUN

You know what? Fuck you. We were
doing you a favor. You want to play
solo? Fine. Fix your own fucking
piano.

Bingsun and Chen head for the stairs. Zhao picks up the
broken pin board and hurls it at the wall.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

Bingsun and Chen "jam" on a traditional tune with The
Woodcarver, The Blacksmith and other musicians.

Zhao sits with Altant. He points to the book and writes a
character.

ZHAO

Beautiful.

Altant writes the character "beautiful".

ZHAO

(points to book)

Love.

Chen keeps playing, but watches Altant write ("love").

ZHAO

Wife.

Altant writes "wife".

The musicians keep playing.

CHEN

(re Altant)

She's beautiful.

BINGSUN

Zhao's teaching her to read and
write. Zhao helping someone - can
you believe that?

Zhao checks Altant's written characters and smiles at her.
She smiles back and keeps writing.

The musicians finish playing. They laugh and slap each other on the backs.

Zhao rises and moves toward them. Bingsun and Chen scowl.

ZHAO
I'd really like to play with you.

BINGSUN
You don't want to play with second raters like us, Zhao.

CHEN
We're far below you, O Gifted One.

Zhao looks to The Woodcarver and The Blacksmith.

ZHAO
Do you still want to learn that music?

The Woodcarver and The Blacksmith consider. Nod.

ZHAO
Where's Monkhat? He wanted to learn too.

The Village Musicians shake their heads - we don't know.

ZHAO
(to Bingsun and Chen)
Do you remember The Kalendar Prince? From Scheherezade.

BINGSUN
Rimsky-Korsakov.

ZHAO
The main melody is pretty simple.
And it's only forty-eight bars.

A LITTLE LATER:

Bingsun and Chen teach the individual musicians their parts. They play raggedly. Tentatively. Bum notes.

Zhao admires a morhin.

ZHAO
Who made this?

THE WOODCARVER
Me and my dad.

ZHAO
It's beautiful ... OK. Let's try it
again.

Zhao and The Woodcarver play.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The jeep with Wu, Fung and Monkhat approaches Shangmao.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

Zhao waves his arms, conductor-style - one, two, three, four.
The boys and the Village Musicians play - slowly,
tentatively. Twelve bars. They stop.

ZHAO
How was that?

THE WOODCARVER
Hard.

ZHAO
One more time.

One, two, three, four. A little more fluently. The Woodcarver
and The Blacksmith nod and smile - that feels good.

OUTSIDE: A jeep ENGINE.

The musicians all look at each other. Bingsun and Chen
quickly gather the hand-written sheet music.

EXT. VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

Wu, Fung and Monkhat alight.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

Wu, Fung and Monkhat enter. The musicians play a traditional
folk tune. Wu senses they're hiding something.

Fung spots Altant and leers at her. She looks away. Wu waits
for the music to stop.

WU
How wonderful to see our friends
from Beijing learning traditional
ways. We honor our traditions, but
we must also look to the future.

We are building a new China. This requires bold and courageous young men and women to realize our vision. A new broom sweeps clean. I am appointing Comrade Monkhat Mayor of Shangmao.

Ganbolo leaps to his feet.

GANBOLO
I'm the Mayor.

WU
Not any more you're not.

Ganbolo glares at his defiant son.

INT. WOODCARVER'S WORKSHOP - DAY

The Woodcarver and his DAD study the snapped pin block.

THE WOODCARVER
Spruce. Does it have to be spruce?

ZHAO
Yes.

THE WOODCARVER
No spruce around here.

ZHAO
Oh.

WOODCARVER'S DAD
There's a small spruce stand. The other side of the mountains.

ZHAO
How far?

WOODCARVER'S DAD
A day's ride.

EXT. TRAIL - DAWN

Zhao rides his pony across the steppes.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - EVENING

Above the snowline. Zhao scans the forest. A wisp of smoke.

EXT. SPRUCE FOREST - EVENING

A TIMBER CUTTER indicates a spruce log. Zhao studies it.

ZHAO
 (V.O, reading from manual)
 The spruce is air-seasoned for a
 full year to prevent warping.

EXT. RICE FIELD - DAY

Bingsun, Chen and the villagers toil in the field. Altant approaches with baskets of seed.

CHEN
 Let me take that.

Chen takes the heavy basket. Altant smiles her thanks.

BINGSUN
 Careful. Those glasses of yours are
 steaming up.

Monkhat approaches. He mentally counts the workers.

MONKHAT
 Where's Zhao?

GANBOLO
 Not here.

MONKHAT
 Where is he?

GANBOLO
 Doing something useful.

EXT. TIMBER YARD - NIGHT

A crude timber yard in the forest. The Timber Cutter checks out stacks of cut logs. He finds a single old log at the bottom of a stack.

Zhao caresses the wood. He grins.

ZHAO
 Flat-grain yields a 47% improvement
 of vibrational character over cross-
 grain. Did you know that?

The Timber Cutter looks at him blankly.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Zhao rides his pony across the steppe, the spruce log strapped to the pony's back. Zhao sees Shangmao approaching and smiles and gees the pony.

INT. WOODCARVER'S WORKSHOP - DAY

The Woodcarver starts carving the spruce log. His Dad finishes carving a piano hammer.

THE WOODCARVER

OK.

EXT. MARKET PLACE, QORIN AND BAT-ERDENT'S STALL - DAY

Zhao watches Qorin and Bat-Erdent study the rotting felt. Qorin offers Zhao a length of felt.

ZHAO

Too thick.
 (feels a second length)
 Too light.

Bat-Erdent offers him a third length.

ZHAO

Perfect.

EXT. TINKER'S STALL - DAY

Zhao shows The Tinker a drawing of the piano pedals.

ZHAO

(V.O, reading from manual)
 The pedals are a work of art in themselves, artisan-crafted from one hundred per cent brass.

The Tinker shakes his head.

TINKER

Brass? Are you kidding? Best I can do is melt these down.

Tinker indicates a box of old pots and pans.

EXT. STREAM - DAY

Altant and Qorin stand ankle deep in the water and stuff fur pelts into a wooden box. Water sluices into the box. Qorin hammers the cloth with a kind of wooden piston in the box.

ZHAO

(V.O, reading from manual)
Felt is 100% natural fibers, highly compressed to withstand the repeated striking of the strings.

EXT. STREAM - EVENING

Altant, Bat-Erdent and Qorin lay the damp, mulched cloth on a flat boulder. They pound the mulched cloth with flat rocks.

INT. WOODCARVER'S WORKSHOP - DAY

The Woodcarver drills holes in the carved spruce/pin block with a hand drill. His Dad carves another delicate wooden piano hammer.

Monkhat ghosts in and peers at the pin block.

MONKHBAT

What are you doing?

THE WOODCARVER

Helping a friend.

The Woodcarver keeps carving. Monkhat scowls at Dad, who watches him stony-faced.

INT. TINKER'S FORGE - DAY

The Tinker removes molten metal from the furnace and pours it into a clay mold.

EXT. SHANGMAO - MORNING

Qorin and Altant hang the length of soaking felt on a line. It billows in the breeze.

Monkhat watches them from a distance.

INT. COOPERATIVE - DAY

Zhao passes a piece of paper to the Cooperative Clerk.

CLERK
(reads the list)
I've got the screws. And the tacks.
I'll have to order the rest.

INT. TINKER'S STALL - DAY

The Tinker looks furtively left and right, then takes the pedals from under his counter and shows them to Zhao.

ZHAO
Nice.

TINKER
I used to work at the Han's. You know, the landowner.

ZHAO
Yeah?

TINKER
The daughter had a western instrument. A piano. I repaired it a couple of times.

A wary Zhao shrugs - what do you want?

TINKER
These look like piano pedals to me.

ZHAO
We agreed on a price.

TINKER
That was then.

ZHAO
How much?

TINKER
Double.

ZHAO
(considers)
All right. But if you breathe a word I'll tell them who made them.

EXT. MARKET PLACE, QORIN AND BAT-ERDENT'S STALL - DAY

Qorin cuts a short length of felt. Bat-Erdent brushes glue on The Woodcarver's newly-carved hammer and applies the felt.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Zhao and the Schoolteacher watch Altant writing at a school desk. The Schoolteacher examines her work.

SCHOOLTEACHER
Excellent. She should really be in
a special school.

ZHAO
Where's that?

SCHOOLTEACHER
Beijing. I'd happily recommend her.

ZHAO
(doubtfully)
Beijing ...?

INT. GANBOLO'S HUT - NIGHT

Ganbolo pours a round of drinks.

GANBOLO
She's still very young. We haven't
really thought about marriage.

Fung eyes off Altant, who grits her teeth and looks away.

FUNG
She's old enough.

MONKHBAT
Comrade Fung has excellent
prospects.

GANBOLO
You do know she er -

FUNG
At least I know she won't answer
back.

Fung chuckles. The joke falls flat. Altant holds up her schoolbooks to Qorin.

QORIN
She wants to go to a special
school. To learn to read and write.

FUNG
What for? I never learnt to read
and write. No. No school.

GANBOLO

If she's accepted, she's going to school.

Fung scowls.

EXT. CORRAL - NIGHT

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen climb onto their ponies.

INT. GANBOLO'S HUT - NIGHT

Monkhat sleeps fitfully. He awakes. He hears a pony's faint WHINNY. Faint sound of HOOVES.

EXT. GANBOLO'S HUT - NIGHT.

Monkhat slips out of the hut. He sees three distant figures riding ponies.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

Monkhat trails the three riders from a safe distance.

EXT. MINGLIAO, STREET - NIGHT

Monkhat scans the deserted street from horseback. He sees the public corral, the three tethered ponies. But no riders. Monkhat continues on horseback, scoping the empty streets.

EXT. COMMUNIST PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO - NIGHT

A puzzled Monkhat stares at the Party HQ. They can't be in there. He spots the annexe.

INT. CELLAR - NIGHT

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen ease the sound board into the piano. Zhao and Bingsun lift the new pin block and carefully place it in the piano.

CUT TO:

Zhao threads a wire through the key eyelet and twists it secure. He threads the wire through the eye of the key rod. He plays a key and the rod rises and falls. It works!

Zhao passes the wire to Bingsun who feeds it through a flange to Chen who threads it through the hammer eye and twists it secure with pliers.

Zhao looks at Chen and Bingsun dramatically. He raises his hand to strike the key.

CREAK. A FOOTSTEP above. Zhao and Chen blow out the candles.

More CREAKS. More FOOTSTEPS. Right above them.

ABOVE:

Monkhat scopes the room. Nothing but rubbish.

BELOW:

The boys look upwards, holding their breath.

ABOVE:

Monkhat COUGHS.

BELOW:

Zhao mouths - "Monkhat".

ABOVE:

A puzzled Monkhat.

BELOW:

The boys hear the FOOTSTEPS recede. They wait a couple of beats. Zhao tiptoes to the stairs and slowly climbs them. He carefully raises the trapdoor.

ABOVE:

The trapdoor rises a couple of inches.

ZHAO'S POV: the coast is clear.

BELOW:

Bingsun reads the manual.

BINGSUN

Each piano has its own distinct voice, determined by its age, condition, and maintenance.

Zhao raises his hand dramatically. He plays the key.

INSIDE THE PIANO:

The key rod rises. The wire tautens and the flange rotates. Fifty-six moving parts rise, fall, turn. A hammer strikes -

A SINGLE note rings out and echoes. Flat. Discordant.

BINGSUN

Well, it's distinctive all right.

CHEN

Call it a voice? Sounds more like a death rattle.

Zhao plays it again. Chen winces. Bingsun groans. But nothing can wipe the grin off Zhao's face.

ZHAO

Beautiful.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

Tables of food and drink. The villagers chat. Zhao, Bingsun, Chen and the musicians tune up. Ganbolo takes center stage.

GANBOLO

Friends. Friends. I have a special announcement.

(quiet)

I'm not one for speeches.

WOODCARVER'S DAD

Oh yes you are.

Laughter all round.

GANBOLO

(bursting with pride)

In case you didn't know, my beautiful daughter Altant has been accepted into Special School in Beijing.

Joyous APPLAUSE. Altant blushes and smiles shyly.

GANBOLO

She leaves us in the spring. I wish all my family was here to help us celebrate but at least our friends are here. I'm sure you'll join with us and wish her the best.

The village toasts.

GANBOLO

There is plenty of food and drink.
And music.

The villagers clap Ganbolo off center stage. The musicians take up their instruments.

ZHAO

This is the story of Scheherezade.
A young woman of great beauty and
courage.

Altant smiles at Zhao and he realizes how truly, deeply he loves her. He's dumbstruck for a moment.

Chen watches the look of love pass between them.

BINGSUN

She's in love with him, Chen.

Chen nods sadly. The musicians wait, instruments poised.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

The jeep with Wu, Fung and Monkhat motors along the trail.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

Zhao shakes himself from his reverie. He counts them in and they play their simple version of "Scheherezade".

EXT. SHANGMAO - NIGHT

The jeep approaches Shangmao.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

The Villagers listen, rapt in the music.

EXT. VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

The jeep pulls up. Fung kills the engine. They hear the music.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

The musicians keep playing. The Villagers watch - engrossed.

No one notices Wu, Fung and Monkhat enter. Finally the Villagers spot them. The music finishes. Silence.

WU
Western music.

The musicians see Wu, Fung and Monkhat.

ZHAO
Not Western music. Not Chinese music. Music.

Wu points at Zhao, Bingsun and Chen and silently beckons them. Bingsun and Chen nervously follow Zhao.

A fearful Altant follows but Qorin restrains her. Ganbolo grabs Monkhat's arm.

GANBOLO
You'd ruin your sister's celebration?

Monkhat looks guilty. He falters, then follows Wu and Fung and Zhao, Bingsun and Chen from the hall.

INT. ZHAO'S HUT - NIGHT

Fung and Wu turn the place upside down. The three boys watch anxiously.

Monkhat finds Li Li Fan's sheet music. He hands it to Wu.

ZHAO
It's mine.
(re Bingsun and Chen)
They know nothing about it.

WU
(reads the music)
Chopin.

Fung picks up the LP record of Zhao's parents.

ZHAO
No.

Zhao tries to snatch it, but Fung backhands him across the jaw and Zhao collapses. Fung smashes the record to pieces. He is about to rip up the cover -

ZHAO
Please, they're my parents.

Wu holds up his hand - no. Fung tosses the LP cover at Zhao.

EXT. SHANGMAO - NIGHT

The entire village watches Fung and Monkhat shove Zhao, Bingsun and Chen into the jeep.

ZHAO

Where are you taking us?

Wu doesn't answer. The jeep takes off. Zhao watches Altant recede in the distance.

EXT. ASBESTOS MINE - NIGHT

The jeep roars toward the mine through a cloud of dust. Zhao, Bingsun and Chen fearfully watch the wire and razor wire perimeter fence looms.

INT. JEEP - NIGHT

Zhao clutches the record cover to his chest as they pass through the grim prison-like fence.

Zhao's father's piano and his mother's singing the Chopin LIEDER soar over the slag heaps and the smoke and dust and GRINDING machinery.

EXT. ASBESTOS MINE - DAY

Zhao, Chen, and Bingsun in their raggedy student clothes march with a FOREMAN and a gang of MINERS past the slag heaps and rusty mining machinery and equipment.

They pass a loudspeaker on a pole.

MINE MANAGER (THROUGH SPEAKER)

We should be modest and prudent,
guard against arrogance and
rashness and work as one -

They approach a corrugated iron, barn-like building.

INT. MINE, ENTRANCE - DAY

OVERSEERS herd Zhao, Bingsun, Chen and the miners into an elevator cage in the corrugated iron barn.

MINE MANAGER (THROUGH SPEAKER)
- to serve the Chinese people.

A SUPERVISOR slams the door of the cage closed and the elevator lurches downwards.

INT. MINE, TUNNEL - DAY

If the steppes had a heavenly beauty, this is hell ... Naked light bulbs dimly light Zhao, Bingsun, Chen and the miners through a miasma of asbestos dust.

They wear no helmets, no protective clothing and hack the walls of the tunnel with pick-axes. The SLAPS of pick-axes and the HACKS of coughs ECHO through the tunnel.

Zhao hums the Chopin, trying desperately to buck his spirits. The Foreman marches toward Zhao, Bingsun and Chen.

FOREMAN
Music students, huh! Playing a piano concerto, are you? Or playing with yourselves.

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen heave their pickaxes. The Foreman scowls at them. They all pause as the MINE MANAGER and two ENGINEERS - helmeted and wearing protective vests - approach.

MINE MANAGER
Comrades, I have last month's production figures and we are down on our quotas.

A muffled BLAST. The walls shake, dust and rocks fall. The Mine Manager sees a support buckle.

MINE MANAGER
(nervous)
It's all right, everyone.

The Mine Manager looks to the Engineers.

ENGINEER
Perfectly safe. We checked these supports ourselves.

The buckled support GROANS.

MINE MANAGER
(more nervous)
We must increase productivity.

The Mine Manager scurries off, the Engineers in his wake.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

Zhao lies on his thin mattress, too exhausted to move. Chen and Bingsun lie on their thin mattresses, exhausted. Forty other miners lie or sit around on their thin mattresses, playing cards or mah jong. Silence except for hacking COUGHS.

An OFFICE WORKER moves past the bed, handing out mail. He flicks a letter at Zhao. A puzzled Zhao rips it open, scans it and breaks into a grin.

ALTANT (V.O.)

Dear Zhao, This is my first letter.
I love my school. The teachers are
kind. Beijing is so big and I am
often lost. I hope to see you soon.

ZHAO

Love Altant.

Zhao sees Chen staring at him. He realizes Chen is in love with Altant.

ZHAO

(kindly)

Do you want to read it?

Zhao passes the letter to Chen. Chen reads it and passes it back to Zhao.

CHEN

Thank you.

Zhao lies back on the hard mattress and reads it again.

INT. MINE, TUNNEL - DAY

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen hack at the tunnel wall with their pickaxes. An exhausted Chen stops and stares at his raw and bloody hands. Zhao looks at him sympathetically, but holds up his own wrecked hands.

ZHAO (V.O.)

Dear Altant, I cannot tell you how
much I miss you. I have no idea how
long I will be here. We are not
allowed any time off. But they
cannot stop me thinking about you.
And when I think of you, suddenly,
all is not as bad as it seems. And
they cannot stop me seeing your
face and dreaming of you.

The Foreman approaches. They slam their pickaxes in the wall.

INT PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO - NIGHT

The surly Party Hack looks at the front, then the back of a letter. He hands it to Fung.

INT. PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO, WU'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Fung balls the letter and throws it in the fire.

INT. MINE TUNNEL - DAY

The three boys pause. Zhao rips the callus from his hand. Blood drips on the dusty floor.

The boys hear FOOTSTEPS and swing their picks. The Foreman and the Engineers approach. The Engineer sees the seam and nudges the Foreman.

FOREMAN

Stop. Stop!

The miners stop and the Engineer studies the whitish seam.

CUT TO:

Zhao watches the Engineers set dynamite in pockets in the wall and roof.

The Engineer casually wires dynamite caps to detonator.

ENGINEER

Get back. Get back!

Everyone stands back or takes cover. The MINER next to Zhao raises his head to peek.

The Engineer plunges the detonator's handle. KERBOOM!

Rocks and debris hurtle through the air. The roof collapses. Asbestos dust plumes the air.

BINGSUN

Wow. Some bang, huh?

The Miner collapses, a rock as big as a football embedded in his chest. The Miner's limbs spasm.

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen stare, motionless, in shock. Beat.

ZHAO
Man down! Help! Medics! Over here!

Zhao kneels beside him. He takes his hand.

ZHAO
You're gonna be all right. Help's
on its way.

Other Miners crowd around.

ZHAO
Medic!!! Where's the medic?!

SECOND MINER
What medic? There is no medic.

The dying Miner's eyes lock with Zhao's.

INT. MINE, TUNNEL - DAY

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen watch Miners load the Dead Man's body onto a trolley packed with raw asbestos.

Foreman nods and the train of asbestos-laden mine trolleys trundles off.

Zhao hums a raggedy Chopin. Chen is still in shock.

ZHAO
C'mon you two. You know this piece.

Zhao hums. Bingsun joins in.

ZHAO
C'mon, Chen.

Chen joins in. The Foreman approaches. He stares at the students - still in shock himself.

FOREMAN
(forced)
Hey, you! No slacking on my shift.

Chen feebly swings his pick-axe.

EXT. MINE, MAIN AREA - DAY

Zhao, Chen, Bingsun and the miners trudge toward their barracks. Foreman grabs Zhao by the arm.

FOREMAN

You've got a visitor.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

Zhao, dusty, torn clothes, enters. Bingsun and Chen follow.

Altant sits at a table, radiant, even in her peasant's garb. Zhao's face lights up. He sits and they clasp hands.

Bingsun hauls Chen back.

BINGSUN

Leave them be.

Chen nods and Chen and Bingsun slip back out.

ZHAO

You look so beautiful.

Altant beams.

ZHAO

If you only knew how much I wanted
to kiss you. How much I want to -

Altant blushes. She points to her lips and signs.

ZHAO

You've learned lip reading?

They laugh.

EXT. SLAG HEAP - DAY

Zhao and Altant sit on the mountain of rock and slag. The industrial desolation of the mine lies before them, and beyond the vastness of China stretches to the horizon.

A humble picnic is laid out before them. Altant writes in an exercise book and mimes words.

ZHAO

(reads)

My brother and my father are still
not talking.

Altant is clearly heartbroken. Zhao takes her hands. Altant remember something. She opens up her textbook and inside is the Steinway manual. She writes.

ZHAO
 (reads)
 You left it in the cellar.

Zhao caresses its glossy cover.

ZHAO
 Thank you.

Altant signs "thank-you".

ZHAO
 Thank you?

Altant smiles and squeezes his hand. Their eyes lock. And they kiss. They break and Altant blinks back tears.

ZHAO
 Tears of happiness, I hope.

Altant bites her lower lip.

ZHAO
 Altant? What's wrong?

Altant steels herself and writes. Zhao reads.

ZHAO
 Comrade Fung has proposed marriage.
 My father says we will marry in
 three months when I finish school.
 No, Altant, no.

Tears trickle down Altant's face. She clings to Zhao. And they kiss, desperately.

EXT. MINE, MAIN AREA - DAY

Zhao watches Altant climb into a giant mine truck. The truck takes off. They wave to each other.

Zhao runs to the chain link fence to catch a last glimpse of the truck. Altant leans out the window and waves and waves.

INT. WOODCARVER'S WORKSHOP - DAY

The Woodcarver carves the piano's missing leg. Monkhat appears.

MONKHBAT
 Still helping out your friend?

WOODCARVER

Yeah.

INT. GANBOLO'S HUT - NIGHT

Monkhat, Ganbolo, Qorin and Bat-Erdent eat dinner. Tension. Monkhat pushes his plate away.

QORIN

What's wrong with it?

MONKHBAT

I'm not hungry.

GANBOLO

Eat it.

MONKHBAT

I know you're up to something with those students.

GANBOLO

Your mother prepared that food.

MONKHBAT

(to Ganbolo)

Tell them, tell all the villagers they have to stop.

GANBOLO

Or what?

MONKHBAT

I'll report them.

QORIN

Monkhat, we're your family.

MONKHBAT

Some family. This is my one chance. To make something of myself. And you're going to ruin it for me.

Monkhat storms out.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - MORNING

Zhao is fast asleep. He clutches his manual to his chest. The loudspeaker in the top corner CRACKLES.

MINE MANAGER (THROUGH SPEAKER)
 My fellow workers, hard work is
 like a load placed before us,
 challenging us to shoulder it. Some
 loads are light, some heavy.

Zhao wakes and hurriedly hides the manual in his pillow.

INT. CAGE - DAY

The cage door CLANGS shut on Zhao, Bingsun, Chen and the other miners.

MINE MANAGER (THROUGH SPEAKER)
 Some people prefer the light to the
 heavy. They pick the light and
 shove the heavy on to others.

The elevator shudders downwards. Zhao stares at the WOUND WIRE cable supporting the elevator cage.

ZHAO
 (V.O, reading from manual)
 Wire is solid high tensile steel
 for optimal stress load.

INT. MINE, CAVE - DAY

Zhao and Bingsun hack out the raw asbestos with their picks. Bingsun shovels up the asbestos and tosses it in the trolley.

Zhao "conducts" the boys in a rousing symphony, but Chen cannot lift his pick.

ZHAO
 C'mon, Chen. You can do it.

Foreman lumbers up. He points to Chen's half-empty trolley.

FOREMAN
 We've got a quota to fill. And it's
 my ass on the line too. Move it!
 Move it!!

ZHAO
 We'll help him. All right?

Foreman shoots Chen a withering look and stumps off.

Zhao hacks out asbestos. A shower of fine dust. Zhao COUGHS. He COUGHS again.

INT. MINE, CAVE - DAY

The miners take a break and pass around a can of water and a ladle. Chen holds out his raw and blistered hands.

CHEN
I'm never going to play again.

ZHAO
Yes, you will.

CHEN
The College is closed.

ZHAO
It'll open again.

CHEN
We're gonna be here forever. We
will die without ever hearing
another note of music.

ZHAO
We will play again. We will play
together. I promise you.

He holds out his calloused hand. Chen and Bingsun add their raw and blistered hands.

ZHAO/BINGSUN/CHEN
I promise.

They grip each other's hands.

INT. MINE OFFICE - DAY

A bland featureless office. Wu sits behind a plain table, empty except for a sheaf of documents. Zhao sits before him.

ZHAO
I thank you, Comrade Wu, for this
priceless opportunity to purge
myself of decadent thought.

WU
It fills me with great joy when a
young man tries so hard. But
decadence is a pernicious drug and
addicts are so hard to cure.

ZHAO
I am cured, Comrade Wu. Ready to
return to Beijing a new man.

Zhao beams his enthusiasm. Wu is stony-faced.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Zhao emerges from the office. Chen and Bingsun look up hopefully from their chairs. Zhao shakes his head - no.

INT. MINE, TUNNEL - DAY

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen shovel asbestos into trolleys.

CHEN

They'll never let us go, Zhao.

ZHAO

We've just got to get on with it.

The Foreman strides toward them.

FOREMAN

What's this? Slacking off again.

The Foreman grabs Zhao by the scruff of the neck and tosses him around like a rag doll.

Zhao throws feeble punches and kicks out. The Foreman laughs and flings Zhao at the trolley train of empty wagons.

FOREMAN

You're not leaving here till this train is full. You understand.

He grabs Zhao's throat and hauls him to his feet.

CHEN

Leave him alone.

Foreman spins around.

FOREMAN

What?

CHEN

You touch my friend again and I will kill you.

ZHAO

(warningly)
Chen.

FOREMAN

You and who else? The Red Army?

Foreman advances on Chen. Chen swings his pickaxe and hits the Foreman right between the eyes.

The Foreman collapses. Zhao and Bingsun stare, horrified at the Foreman, his limbs twitching.

Chen sprints along the tunnel.

ZHAO

Chen!

Zhao chases him.

INT. MINE, ELEVATOR STOP - DAY

Zhao races to the elevator. Too late. The cage rises. Zhao hammers on the call button.

EXT. MINE, BARN - DAY

Zhao races out of the barn. He sees Chen leap into a giant truck. Asbestos pours from a chute into the truck's bed.

Chen fires up the engine and the truck lurches off. Asbestos cascades from the chute onto the ground.

MINE MANAGER (THROUGH SPEAKER

We must never be wasteful or
extravagant; on the other hand we
must actively expand production.

The TRUCK DRIVER throws away his cigarette and gives chase.

TRUCK DRIVER

Hey!

TRUCK DRIVERS and MINE WORKERS shout. The CONVEYOR BELT/CHUTE OPERATOR closes off the machine. An emergency siren WAILS.

Zhao, the Truck Driver and Mine Workers chase the truck.

INT. MINE MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

The Mine Manager stands at his window, microphone in one hand, cigarette in the other.

MINE MANAGER

We must do our utmost, in the
course of our struggle, to preserve
all useful means of production.

The Mine Manager sees the men chasing the truck which lurches and bunny hops -

MINE MANAGER

We must take resolute measures
against anyone's destroying or
wasting them, and pay attention -

- and side swipes a jeep

MINE MANAGER

(faltering)
- to thrift and economy.

EXT. MINE, MAIN AREA - DAY

Zhao jumps on the running board, wrenches open the door and leaps in.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Chen wrestles with the steering wheel and gear shift. The truck lurches and sways.

CHEN

Have I ever told you how much I
like Ravel, Zhao?

ZHAO

Chen, we've gotta stop. Now.

CHEN

And Faure? And Delius? Do you like
Faure and Delius, Zhao?

ZHAO

They're OK, I guess.

CHEN

I love those French guys, Zhao.

EXT. MINE, MINE MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

The Mine Manager steps out to investigate the commotion. He sees the truck careering around the mine, Truck Drivers and Mine Workers dive out of the way.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Chen takes his hand off the wheel to make a point.

CHEN

I get sick of those Russian guys.
They're so miserable. The French
guys are happy. All that wine and
cheese and all those prostitutes.
Freedom, Zhao! Don't you want go to
Paris, Zhao?

ZHAO

Not in a mine truck, Chen.

Zhao grabs the wheel. Wrestles it. Chen tries to wrench it
back. The truck sways and swerves.

Zhao sees, ahead: the tower/structure supporting the conveyor
belt/chute.

ZHAO

Chen!

CRASH! The truck SMASHES into the tower.

The tower COLLAPSES. Asbestos pours from the broken chute
over the truck.

CHEN

I'm in love with Altant.

The asbestos keeps pouring over the truck.

ZHAO

I know. I'm sorry.

INT. MINE MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Zhao and Chen sit opposite the Mine Manager.

MINE MANAGER

Stealing a government truck.
Damaging - destroying government
property. There is only one
punishment.

ZHAO

Sir -

A HAMMERING on the door. The Secretary pokes her head in -

MINE MANAGER

Not now.

SECRETARY

Sir, there's been a -

INT. MINE, TUNNEL - DAY

The Engineers, Zhao, Bingsun, Chen and the Miners gather around the Foreman's body. The Mine Manager shudders.

MINER #1

It was an accident. The rocks fell from the roof here.

The Miners all nod. The Mine Manager is about to throw up.

INT. MINE MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Zhao and Chen stand before the Mine Manager, who wipes his mouth with a handkerchief.

MINE MANAGER

The penalty for stealing a government truck and destroying government property is death.

ZHAO

It was shock, sir. The foreman's death was too much for a sensitive man like Chen.

MINE MANAGER

I have no idea what Comrade Wu will make of this.

ZHAO

Comrade Wu will not be impressed, sir. He won't understand. It may reflect badly on you, sir. Very badly. Which isn't fair at all.

Mine Manager ponders.

EXT. SLAG HEAP - NIGHT

The stars shine down on Zhao, Bingsun and Chen who sit on the slag heap and idly toss rocks at rusty old cans.

CHEN

I don't know what's wrong with me. I killed a man. Me. Chen. Viola player at the Beijing Conservatorium. Yes, that Chen.

Chen throws a stone and it hits a rusty can.

CHEN

And I don't feel bad. I don't feel
bad at all.

EXT. CELLAR - NIGHT

The Blacksmith and The Potter watch The Woodcarver screw the
new, unpainted leg to the piano.

CREAK. FOOTSTEPS above. The Blacksmith blows out the lamp.

DARKNESS. CREAK - the trapdoor lifts. FOOTSTEPS descend the
stairs. A blinding torchlight shines on their faces, on the
piano, back on their faces.

MONKHBAT

You are all counter-
revolutionaries.

THE BLACKSMITH

Monkhat?

MONKHBAT

Revisionists. There's no place for
you in the new China.

THE WOODCARVER

Cut the crap, Monkhat, it's us.

MONKHBAT

Ever wondered what it's like in a
labor camp? Or prison?

THE WOODCARVER

There's three of us, Monkhat. And
only one of you.

Monkhat holds up a whistle.

MONKHBAT

There'll be guards here before you
get out of the building.

THE BLACKSMITH

You'd send your pals to labor camp?

THE WOODCARVER

Monkhat, we've been buddies since,
forever.

MONKHBAT

(agitated)

I asked you not to help those students.

THE WOODCARVER

What are you going to do after you arrest us? Arrest your family? Arrest the whole village?

MONKHBAT

(re the piano)

Get rid of it. I'll be back here at seven a.m. And if it's still here, you'll be joining your buddies down the mines.

EXT. ANNEXE - NIGHT

The Woodcarver, The Potter and The Blacksmith heave and push the piano up planks and onto the back of a cart.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

The moon shines on the three boys, driving the cart across the trail with the piano strapped on the back, hidden under a tarpaulin.

Headlights approach. Fast. A jeep with RED GUARDS. The jeep slows. The Red Guards peer suspiciously at them. The boys hold their breath. The jeep finally speeds off.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen play mah jong at a table. A MINER shows The Woodcarver in.

WOODCARVER

Zhao.

ZHAO

Hi. What are you doing here?

Zhao rises and The Woodcarver embraces Zhao, grins at Bingsun and Chen.

WOODCARVER

Monkbat found the piano. He was going to arrest us.

ZHAO
And my piano?

WOODCARVER
It's all right. We brought it here.

BINGSUN
Here?!

ZHAO
You brought the piano here?!

CHEN
What about the guards?

WOODCARVER
It's outside. A mile down the road.

EXT. PERIMETER FENCE - NIGHT

Zhao finishes cutting the wire fence with wirecutters.

The six boys pull, push and heave the piano through the fence and up a steep slope.

INT. MINE ROAD, CREST - NIGHT

The six boys heave the piano onto the bitumen road at the crest of the incline. They pause to catch their breath. They embrace each other.

ZHAO
Thank you.

The Blacksmith grins and nods.

The three villagers wave their goodbyes and retreat down the slope to the cut fence. Zhao, Binsung and Chen keep waving goodbye and catching their breath.

The boys turn and see the piano rolling down the hill.

EXT. ROAD, HILL - NIGHT

The piano rolls down the hill - and the three boys chase it.

EXT. MANAGER'S OFFICE BLOCK - NIGHT

The piano races down the hill, scoots across the forecourt and heads for the office block.

The boys' hearts enter their mouths. The piano pulls up before the Mine Manager's office - there's a light on inside.

The boys creep toward the piano. They see the Mine Manager through his window. They push the piano across the forecourt. Oops. Security Guards approach. They slip between buildings.

EXT. PASSAGE BETWEEN BUILDINGS - NIGHT

They push the piano toward the end of the building. Reach it.

EXT. OPEN SPACE, MINE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

They heave the piano into the open space. Oops. A gang of MINERS emerges from the mine entrance.

They schlepp the piano back into the passage.

EXT. PASSAGE BETWEEN BUILDINGS - NIGHT

They catch their breath.

CHEN

Why couldn't you play, like, an oboe, Zhao?

BINGSUN

Where are we gonna hide a fucking piano?!

EXT. ABANDONED MINE SHAFT - NIGHT

Zhao wrenches open the rusty gate.

EXT. MINE, CAVE - NIGHT

The three boys catch their breath. Zhao caresses the piano's unpainted leg, scratches and gouges.

BINGSUN

That's one ugly piano, man.

ZHAO

It's beautiful.

Zhao opens the lid and they all stare inside at the brand new pin block, the newly carved hammers and felt - and the neatly rolled wires. Steinway & Sons gleams on the sparkling plate.

CHEN
What's missing?

ZHAO
Key wire A-8 through G-36. Pulley
rods - forty one. Pivot spools and
flanges - one hundred and seventy
six -

BINGSUN
Where are you gonna get them?

ZHAO
- Piano wire. Pedal wire.

BINGSUN
Piano flanges? Good luck with that.

Zhao gets an idea.

ZHAO
Wire.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen lie on their mattresses.

ZHAO
Are you sure you're up for this?

Chen holds out his callused fist. Bingsun holds out his
callused fist. Zhao adds his fist.

EXT. MINE, YARD - NIGHT

A pair of SECURITY GUARDS stroll past.

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen emerge from behind a building. They
scurry into the elevator barn.

Chen lurks in the shadows - on lookout.

INT. MINE, BARN/ELEVATOR CAGE - NIGHT

Zhao and Bingsun clamber onto the top of the elevator cage.
Zhao fits his wrench to the huge nut which secures the pulley
plate to the wire.

Zhao heaves but the nut won't budge. Zhao and Bingsun heave
mightily. It loosens. It shifts. They loosen the second nut.

The cage shudders. And tilts.

EXT. MINE, BARN - NIGHT

Chen sees the Security Guards returning. He tries to whistle - but his lips are too dry.

The Security Guards approach - closer. Chen scurries away. The Security Guards reach the doorless opening.

INT. MINE, BARN/ELEVATOR CAGE - NIGHT

Zhao and Bingsun hear FOOTSTEPS. They hear the Security Guards quietly chatting. They see them light cigarettes - just outside the entrance.

The cage slips. Zhao and Bingsun cling to the wire cable.

The Security Guards finally move off. Zhao and Bingsun gulp.

BINGSUN

The nut - it's the only thing holding it.

Zhao looks down through the cage into the black depths below.

ZHAO

There's too much weight.

The cage shudders and drops a couple of feet.

ZHAO

Get off.

Bingsun leaps from the cage and crashes to the ground.

Zhao loosens the nut. The cage shudders. He loosens it more. The cage DROPS. Zhao leaps from the plummeting cage. Onto the floor. Beat. Another beat. A muffled CRASH.

EXT. MINE, BARN - NIGHT

Chen hears the ECHO of the crash. He waits with bated breath. But the Security Guards don't return.

INT. ELEVATOR MACHINE ROOM - NIGHT

Zhao and Bingsun enter the tiny corrugated iron shack with the elevator motor and the spool of wound wire.

Zhao and Bingsun hack and tear at the wire with wire cutters. They finally cut through leaving the frayed end of the wire.

INT. MINE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen, and a gang of miners watch the Mine Manager and the engineers stare at the cageless elevator shaft and the frayed wire.

MINE MANAGER

Looks like the cable snapped.

ENGINEER

Maybe. But the pulley nuts didn't snap. Someone took them.

MINE MANAGER

(to miners)

Sabotage ... Go back to your quarters until this is repaired.

The miners grin amongst themselves - a day off!

INT. MINE, CAVE - NIGHT

A lantern lights the cave. Chen measures a length of wire from the cable.

Zhao consults the manual and screws the wire to the pedal.

Zhao threads the wire around the spool. Then to the pedal.

Zhao pumps the pedal with his foot.

INSIDE THE PIANO:

Pedal depresses, spool turns, rod rises - the entire mechanism moves in harmony.

INT. MINE, MAIN TUNNEL - DAY

Zhao, Chen and Bingsun hum the Chopin concerto and attack the asbestos seam with renewed vigor.

A pair of SECURITY GUARDS patrol with batons at their hips. The three boys stop humming. The Security guards look at them suspiciously, then move on.

The boys wait a beat then continuing humming and gouging the raw asbestos.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Zhao sleeps, the manual clutched to his heart. His eyes snap open. He slides out of bed, fully clothed. He shakes Bingsun and Chen awake.

INT. MINE, CAVE - NIGHT

Zhao takes a rolled piano wire from the neat pile and threads it through the eye of the key rod.

ZHAO
(V.O, reading)
Steinweg's goal was to make the
best piano, to create music not for
years, but for generations.

Zhao passes the wire to Chen who winds it around the spool, and passes it to Bingsun who threads it through the flange.

Zhao plays a note.

INSIDE THE PIANO:

Fifty-six parts turn, rise, drop and hammer in harmony.

MONTAGE:

- A. The pile of rolled piano wire diminishes.
- B. Chen threads a wire.
- C. Bingsun screws a flange to a rod.
- D. Zhao twists the piano wire to the hammer.
- E. Zhao plays a note.

INSIDE THE PIANO:

Fifty-six parts move in perfect harmony.

CUT TO:

The pile of rolled piano wire is gone.

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen gaze at the piano.

Zhao runs his hands over the length of the keyboard. Half the notes PLAY.

BINGSUN
You've got half a piano.

Zhao pulls up an old fuel can and sits at his piano. He plays a variation of the Chopin nocturne using the notes which work. A little flat, a little strange, but haunting.

ABOVE: an air vent in the roof of the mine.

INT. MINE, TUNNEL - NIGHT

The Chopin nocturne drifts along the tunnel.

ABOVE: an air vent in the roof of the tunnel.

INT. MINE, MAIN TUNNEL - NIGHT

The miners take a break, lying around smoking, too exhausted to speak.

The faint, ghostly SOUND of a Chopin nocturne. The puzzled miners listen hard.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

Zhao snores, fast asleep on his thin mattress. The mailman moves along the rows of mattresses tossing letters. A letter lands on Zhao's chest. He opens it and reads.

PROFESSOR SUN (V.O.)
My Dear Zhao, It is with a heavy
heart I tell you that our dear
friend Mr Au has passed on.

INT. MINE MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Zhao stands before the Mine Manager seated at his desk.

ZHAO
Sir, I've served the Revolution,
I've served my country for a full
year without a day off.

MINE MANAGER
We do not grant leave here.

ZHAO
When my parents died, sir, Mr Au
became a father to me. I owe him
everything. Please let me pay my
respects.

The Mine Manager glances at the PHOTOS of his SMILING FAMILY on his desk.

ZHAO

All I ask is two days, sir.

MINE MANAGER

If you are not back here in forty-eight hours you will be reported as a deserter and you will spend the rest of your life here.

EXT. TRAIN, RAILS - NIGHT

Zhao rides the rails.

PROFESSOR SUN(V.O.)

A bunch of drunken thugs turned up yesterday. They vandalized college property -

EXT. CONSERVATORIUM COURTYARD - DAY

The DRUNKEN THUGS set fire to a piano. The gold Steinway & Sons lettering buckles and melts.

INT. PROFESSOR SUN'S OFFICE - DAY

Professor Sun blinks back tears and watches the Drunken Thugs throw folios and sheet music into the flames.

PROFESSOR SUN (V.O.)

- Mr Au tried to stop them.

Professor Sun sees Mr Au race across the courtyard and wrench folios from the Drunken Thug's LEADER's, 22, grasp.

The Leader punches Mr Au. Once, twice. The elderly Mr Au collapses, his head SMASHES into the cobblestoned courtyard.

EXT. CONSERVATORIUM COURTYARD - DAY

A pile of ashes. Professor Sun sweeps up the Steinway's metal screws, wires, agraffes and flanges and empties them into a GREEN box.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Zhao, Professor Sun and a dozen FAMILY and FACULTY stand by the grave.

The Faculty play a a sweet elegy - Mozart, perhaps on flute, piccolo, oboe, a couple of violins.

INT. PROFESSOR SUN'S OFFICE - DAY

The office is stripped of the piano and the busts of composers. Faculty and family mill around a table drinking tea and chatting quietly.

Zhao and Professor Sun stand to one side.

PROFESSOR SUN

It is my fervent hope that one day
you will play again.

Professor Sun presents Zhao with a baton - EBONY BLACK with BLOOD RED characters - Hear the Secret Harmony.

INT. MR AU'S WORKSHOP - DAY

Zhao sits on a stool and stares at the baton. He gazes at the familiar workshop - without pianos.

Zhao finds Mr Au's tool box. He opens it and sees the tuning wrenches and other tools.

He finds the GREEN box and takes out the flanges, keyboard rods, wire, agraffes.

INT. MINE, CAVE - NIGHT

Bingsun attaches the wire to the key rod. Chen feeds the wire through the flange. Zhao screws in the wire. Bingsun plays a note.

INSIDE THE PIANO:

Fifty six moving parts work in harmony.

BACK TO:

Bingsun plays a note. Zhao tightens the string with a tuning wrench. Bingsun plays the note again. Zhao fine-tunes the string with the tuning wrench.

CUT TO:

Zhao sits on the old fuel can and Bingsun and Chen silently, proudly watch him play the Chopin nocturne.

The notes echo in the cave and up to the air vent above -

INT. MINE, TUNNEL - NIGHT

The resting MINERS - and a pair of Security Guards - hear the haunting, ghostly Chopin.

INT. MINE, CAVE - NIGHT

Zhao holds back tears as the music crescendoes and finishes. Bingsun and Chen applaud - heartfelt. They lay their callused fists on top of each other.

INT. MINE MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

The Security Guards stand before the Mine Manager.

MINE MANAGER

What is it? A gramophone? A radio?

SECURITY GUARD

We don't know.

MINE MANAGER

Well, find it, man.

SECURITY GUARD

We'll never find a radio out there.
Do you know how many miles of
abandoned tunnels there are?

The Mine Manager grinds his teeth, considers the problem.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Zhao lies, wide-awake, the manual clutched to his chest. He slides out of bed, fully clothed. He sees Chen and Bingsun sleeping the sleep of the dead. Zhao slips away.

EXT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Zhao glides through the shadows. He sees a Security Guard and glides behind a building.

The Security Guard moves on - the coast is clear.

INT. MINE, CAVE - NIGHT

Zhao plays another Chopin nocturne.

INT. MINE, MAIN TUNNEL - NIGHT

The miners hear the ghostly music and smile. Two Security Guards signal each other and move off.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

The two Security Guards switch on the lights. They move along the rows of beds, hitting the sleepers with their batons, waking them up.

They come to Zhao's empty bed.

INT. MINE MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Zhao stands before the Mine Manager.

MINE MANAGER

What is it? A gramophone? A radio?

ZHAO

I don't have a gramophone. Or a radio.

MINE MANAGER

You were out of the dormitory.

ZHAO

I couldn't sleep.

MINE MANAGER

(to Security Guards)

Confiscate all radios.

(to Zhao)

As for you, my friend, the music is over.

INT. MINE, MAIN TUNNEL - DAY

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen hack at the raw asbestos with their pickaxes.

Three Security Guards approach Zhao. They gesture - come with us. A worried Bingsun and Chen watch them push Zhao down a dark tunnel.

INT. MINE, SIDE TUNNEL - DAY

The Security Guards shove Zhao into the deserted tunnel.

ZHAO

Where are we going?

Zhao stops, tried to go back. Two Guards pinion him and force his hand onto a boulder.

The third Guard smashes Zhao's hand with his baton. Again. Again. Zhao SHRIEKS.

The Guards force Zhao's other hand onto the boulder. The third Guard smashes his hand with the baton. Zhao screams.

INT. MINE, CAVE - NIGHT

Zhao plays the Chopin nocturne with his broken, smashed hands, leaving a trail of blood across the keyboard.

INT. MINE, TUNNEL - NIGHT

The resting miners and the Security Guards hear the ghostly music. The miners CHEER.

EXT. THE HOLE - DAY

The Mine Manager watches two Security Guards throw Zhao into The Hole - a six foot square wooden structure - solitary.

EXT. ASSEMBLY HALL, BEIJING - DAY

Wu and Monkhat gaze in awe at the teeming crowds, the HOOTING cars and trucks, the convoys of RED GUARDS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS and marching SOLDIERS.

WU

All my life I've dreamed of
Beijing. All the great men come to
Beijing, Monkhat.

INT. ASSEMBLY HALL - DAY

Madame JIAN, 55, (Chairman Mao's wife) addresses thousands of delegates from the stage.

MADAME JIAN

Culture is the expression of the people. Culture represents, the past, the present, and most importantly the future. Music plays a critical role in our culture.

Wu and Monkhat are in the audience, listening intently.

MADAME JIAN

Music conveys hope. Faith. Belief. Music inspires our people to work. It inspires our soldiers to fight. It forges pride in our people for their country and love and loyalty for their leaders.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE (MOVING) - DAY

Wu leans forward in his seat and taps the dozing Monkhat on the knee. Monkhat jolts awake.

WU

Madame Jian is the most powerful woman in China. She's built the Ministry of Culture into a political power. She is right, Monkhat, music is a mighty force. Harness the music and it will take us to places we'd only dreamed of.

EXT. THE HOLE - DAY

A Security Guard unlocks the door to The Hole. Zhao emerges, blinking and shielding his eyes from the sun's glare.

Zhao's eyes focus on the Mine Manager.

And Fung and Monkhat.

FUNG

You're coming with us.

ZHAO

Where?

Fung scowls. He grabs Zhao and frogmarches him to the jeep.

EXT. MINE - DAY

A weary and asbestos-caked Bingsun and Chen trudge from the elevator barn and see Fung's jeep drive off with Zhao.

CHEN

Zhao?

Zhao spots them and shrugs helplessly. A forlorn and worried Bingsun and Chen watch him disappear in a cloud of dust.

INT. PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO, WU'S OFFICE - DAY

Zhao stands before Wu in the smart and spacious new office.

WU

You are the best pianist in China.
The greatest in Chinese history.

Zhao shrugs and looks down at his broken hands.

WU

I am putting together an orchestra.
The finest orchestra in China. And
I want you to lead it.

ZHAO

Orchestra? What sort of orchestra?

WU

An orchestra that will inspire our
people. An orchestra soldiers can
march to, children can sing with.

ZHAO

What about musicians?

WU

We have plenty of local musicians.

ZHAO

Soldiers can't march to erhus.

WU

There must be traditional
instruments.

ZHAO

Fine. But you'll need brass, winds.
A full orchestra.

WU

Very well.

ZHAO
And instruments and sheet music -

INT. ANNEXE - DAY

Zhao gazes in wonderment - the annexe has been transformed - cleared of all its rubbish and scrubbed clean.

ZHAO
- and somewhere to rehearse.

WU
(sarcastic)
Does this meet with your approval?

Zhao nods - yes.

WU
I will organize instruments. And sheet music.

ZHAO
And musicians. I need trained musicians.

WU
There are music students out here in the province.

ZHAO
I want Bingsun and Chen.

WU
They're needed in the mines.

ZHAO
I won't do it without them.

WU
You want to go back to the mines?

Zhao dreads the thought. He clenches his jaw defiantly.

ZHAO
I won't do it without them.

Wu clenches his jaw. He forces himself to relax.

WU
Understand this, Zhao. This will be the finest orchestra in China. Or I will send you and your friends back to the mines.

INT. ANNEXE - DAY

TWENTY MUSICIANS, in raggedy clothes chatter excitedly with The Woodcarver, The Blacksmith and local musicians.

FLAUTIST

I heard Zhao put this together.

BASSOONIST

Zhao? The pianist?

OBOEIST

That Prima Donna? No way.

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen enter bearing music scores.

FLAUTIST

Look.

Zhao watches the chattering musicians, uncertain what to do.

BINGSUN

(whispers)

Tell them to be quiet.

ZHAO

Quiet.

BINGSUN

Louder.

ZHAO

Quiet!

A reluctant hush descends. Zhao sees the musicians' hostility.

ZHAO

Umm ...

Zhao looks at his broken hands. He feels all eyes on him.

ZHAO

I want you all to break into your sections. We only have a couple of copies of the music. You will need to transcribe your own copies.

A collective GROAN.

BINGSUN

(whispers)

Leadership.

ZHAO
You've been given the opportunity
to play again.

CHEN
(hisses)
Benign leadership.

ZHAO
To display your talent. To play
music together.

BINGSUN
Show them you're their friend.

ZHAO
We - you and I - are in this
adventure together. If there is
anything you need. Anything I can
do to help.

The musicians double-take at this new Zhao.

ZHAO
You will need to teach the local
musicians their parts. We'll start
with The Military March.

CUT TO:

Musicians play pieces. Other musicians transcribe. Other
musicians teach the locals their parts.

Wu and Fung stride in.

WU
Are they ready to play?

ZHAO
They have to learn before they can
play.

Wu nods curtly. Wu nods to Fung and they exit.

CUT TO:

The musicians take their places and watch Zhao.

FLAUTIST
(to Oboeist)
He's not conducting, is he?

OBOEIST
I hope not.

Bingsun nods at Zhao - get on with it. Zhao counts them in. The orchestra plays - badly. Embarrassing. The music falters.

ZHAO

(screams)

What are you doing? Call yourselves musicians? The tempo is written clearly on the top of the page.

(points to FRENCH HORN)

What key were you in? Do you even know?

Zhao points the Flautist and the Oboeist.

ZHAO

You. And you. Have you forgotten how to tune your instruments? Will everyone tune up? Now.

The musicians sullenly tune. The TUBA PLAYER plays a FART on his tuba. LAUGHTER. Zhao sweats - he's losing control.

ZHAO

Anyone who wants to go back to the rice fields, or the factories - go.

Zhao points to the door. The musicians finish tuning. Zhao counts them in. They play. Better. But still awful.

ZHAO

Stop. Stop.

A few musicians defy Zhao and keep playing.

ZHAO

Stop.

(silence)

Do you know how to play any more?

FLAUTIST

Do you know how to conduct?

OBOEIST

You're nothing without a piano.

ZHAO

(stung)

You're right. I've never conducted. I don't want to conduct.

(a glance at his broken hands)

ZHAO (CONT.)

Mr Steinweg wanted to build the finest piano humanly possible and all I wanted was to be the best player to play it. Now I can't. We are musicians. That's who we are. That's what we do. We play music. Together. Or we perish.

Zhao counts them in. And they play The Military March. Better.

DISSOLVE TO:

And better.

INT. ZHAO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao, Bingsun and Chen study their scores.

ZHAO

The sound's too thin. We need more musicians.

BINGSUN

The word's out. But all the musicians we know are hundreds, thousands of miles away.

CHEN

Jilin Province. Gansu.

BINGSUN

Mongolia.

ZHAO

It's because of me, isn't it? They won't play with me.

BINGSUN

They're too far away. How are they going to get here?

EXT. VARIOUS, ROADS AND TRAILS TO SHANGMAO - DAY

MONTAGE:

A. A CELLO PLAYER with his cello hitchhikes on the side of the road.

B. An OBOEIST and a FLAUTIST ride ponies with their instruments.

C. Instrument cases sit on top of a jam-packed old bus chugging down the highway.

D. MUSICIANS cycle along the road, hefting their instruments.

INT. ANNEXE - DAY

Zhao stands nervously - and very alone - before FORTY musicians. Forty pairs of eyes wait for instruction. Zhao thumbs through his score.

BINGSUN

How do you stop a viola player playing?

Chen and the two VIOLA PLAYERS groan.

BINGSUN

Put sheet music in front of them.

The orchestra ROARS with laughter. Zhao laughs. Then holds up his hands. Silence.

They play - much better.

EXT. VARIOUS, ROADS AND TRAILS TO SHANGMAO - DAY

A. A horse-drawn cart stops for three hitchhiking MUSICIANS.

B. Four MUSICIANS march along a dusty trail with their instruments.

C. A DOUBLE BASS PLAYER sits on the back of a truck with his bass.

D. A train pulls into Mingliao Station and MUSICIANS clamber out, clutching their instruments.

A MUSICIAN leaps from The Rails, grabbing his trombone case.

INT. ANNEXE - DAY

Zhao gazes in awe at SIXTY musicians. He raises his arms. They play.

Wu watches them play a Second March rousingly. He smiles a thin, pleased smile.

INT. WU'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Zhao enters. Wu writes officiously at his desk.

WU

Zhao. The rehearsals are going well.

ZHAO

There's a lot of work to do.

Wu finishes writing and looks up.

WU

You have four weeks.

ZHAO

Four weeks?

WU

Madame Jian is touring the province. I have written to her, inviting her to a special performance. She is very much looking forward to it.

ZHAO

Four weeks is not enough.

WU

You think the Minister of Culture can rearrange her schedule for you?

Zhao nods - he knows he's trapped. He heads for the door. Stops.

ZHAO

I need a piano. I cannot arrange -

WU

There is no piano in martial music.

ZHAO

- I cannot orchestrate without a piano.

WU

There's not a piano in the entire province.

ZHAO

I know where I can get one.

Wu's fists ball. He forces himself to relax.

WU
You will not play Western music.
Four weeks, Zhao.

INT. MINE, CAVE - DAY

Zhao, Bingsun, Chen, The Woodcarver and The Blacksmith gaze at the mongrel piano.

EXT. MINE TUNNEL - DAY

Monkhat and Fung scowl as the five boys heave the piano up planks of wood onto the back of an old truck.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The old truck chugs across the vast steppes, the five boys and the piano on the back.

INT. ANNEXE - DAY

The five boys wheel the piano into place.

BINGSUN
It's still one ugly piano.

LATER:

Wu and Fung listen to the orchestra play.

WU
What do you think, Fung? Have you
become a music lover?

Fung GRUNTS and looks daggers at Zhao who conducts, waving his arms dramatically to the rousing March.

The music approaches its climax. Zhao COUGHS. And again. And again as The March crescendoes. Finishes.

Wu stands. He applauds.

WU
Bravo. Bravo ... In three weeks you
will perform for the Minister of
Culture, Madame Jian. You will be
playing for your futures, your very
lives.

BINGSUN
 (whispers to Zhao)
 Like Scheherezade.

Wu nods at Zhao, scowls at the piano and leaves. Fung glares at Zhao and follows Wu out.

The orchestra look to Zhao - is it true?

ZHAO
 We are the old Conservatorium
 Orchestra and we're playing
 together again. One more time.

Zhao raises his arms. The musicians ready their instruments. Zhao counts then in and they play.

LATER: NIGHT

Zhao stands at the window and gazes across to Wu's window. The light is on.

Zhao sits at the piano and plays a Chopin nocturne. It fills the night air.

INT. WU'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Wu sits at his desk, writing a report. He hears the music. He grits his teeth.

WU
 Don't push me, Zhao.

Wu's pen SNAPS in his hand. He controls himself, takes another pen and writes.

INT. ANNEXE - NIGHT

Zhao finishes the nocturne. A FOOTSTEP. Zhao freezes. Wu? Zhao beams.

ZHAO
 Altant.

Altant smiles her radiant smile. They hug. They embrace.

ZHAO
 I've missed you so much.
 (amongst the kisses)
 There isn't a day I haven't thought
 of you. Every piece of music. I see
 you, I hear you.

Altant signs rapidly, lengthily. Finally -

ZHAO
(grins)
Nope. Didn't understand a word.

Altant points to the piano and signs.

ZHAO
Yes, it was Western music. And,
yes, Wu knows. But he needs me,
Altant. He's already invited Madame
Jian.

Altant takes his hands. Frowns. Sees the broken hands. Zhao shrugs it off.

INT. GANBOLO'S HUT - NIGHT

Altant enters, beaming. Qorin and Bat-Erdent leap to their feet and embrace her. Then Altant's face freezes.

Zhao follows her in with her bags.

ZHAO
Hello. Hello, everyone. How could
one girl have so many bags? Gifts
for everyone.

Zhao freezes.

Fung. He glares at Zhao, pure malevolence. A hassled Ganbolo joins Altant and Zhao.

GANBOLO
Comrade Fung has come to discuss
the wedding.

Altant shakes her head - distraught. Ganbolo hustles Zhao outside.

EXT. GANBOLO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao and Ganbolo stand outside.

GANBOLO
Fung is steady. He has a future.

ZHAO
The man's a moron, a thug -

GANBOLO
You're a musician -

ZHAO
- a, a, a philistine!

GANBOLO
- Will you ever play again? What if
you end up back in the mines? Will
you be able to look after my
daughter?

Zhao considers.

GANBOLO
Anyway, it's too late. She's been
promised.

INT. ANNEXE - DAY

An anguished-looking Zhao conducts the orchestra in a rousing
piece. It climaxes. Finishes.

Wu, Fung, and Monkhat watch. Wu applauds.

WU
In two days you will give the
performance of your lives. I look
forward to it.

Fung smirks at Zhao and Wu, Fung and Monkhat exit.

BINGSUN
Playing crap.

The rest of the orchestra mutters - yeah.

ZHAO
It's music.

BINGSUN
We're the best musicians in China.
And we're playing marches and folk
songs.

Chorus of YEAHS.

ZHAO
It's better than the mines or the
factories, isn't it?

FLAUTIST

Is it true they're sending us down
the mines after the concert?

ZHAO

If we play well, maybe it'll become
permanent.

Bingsun grins mischievously at a section of the musicians. He
nods at Chen. Bingsun and Chen play.

DA DA DA DAH. Beethoven's Ninth. DA DA DA DAAAH.

Zhao groans - oh no.

The rest of the orchestra plays. They're teenagers mostly, or
twenty, twenty-one years of age. Youthful. Exuberant. Joyful.

Zhao grins. He can't stop them. He conducts.

Fung returns and listens from the doorway.

EXT. PARTY HQ, MINGLIAO - DAY

Fung catches up with Wu.

FUNG

They're playing Western music.

Wu knows. And knows Fung knows.

WU

You're an expert in Western music?

Fung looks mutinous.

WU

What sort of Western music are they
playing?

FUNG

Decadent music.

WU

You're a peasant, Fung. You don't
know anything.

Fung scowls malevolently at Wu's retreating back.

INT. ANNEXE - DAY

The orchestra keeps playing Beethoven's Ninth.

Zhao keeps conducting. He coughs. And coughs. And a drop of BLOOD lands on the score before him.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Zhao sits on a makeshift hospital bench. A DOCTOR studies an X-ray. He looks at Zhao gravely.

DOCTOR
You had a lung condition when you
were a child?

ZHAO
Yes.

DOCTOR
And then you went down the mines.

Zhao nods - getting fearful.

DOCTOR
The asbestos has got into your
lungs.

ZHAO
(reflects)
Chopin was twenty when he composed
his first piano concerto. Same age
as me.

DOCTOR
Who's Chopin?

INT. ZHAO'S HUT - NIGHT

Zhao sits on the animal rugs. He stares at the LP record of his parents, the ebony baton with the blood red characters, his beloved piano manual.

Zhao unrolls the toilet rolls with the Chopin Concerto notation. He hears the concerto in his mind's ear.

A KNOCK on the door. Altant enters. Zhao rises. He smiles weakly. She blinks back tears.

They embrace. Hold each other tight. They kiss and drop to the bed.

LATER:

Altant sleeps, naked under the animal skins. Zhao caresses her hair. He hears the Chopin concerto.

LATER:

Zhao and Altant sleep. A LOUD KNOCK on the door. Their eyes snap open.

Monkhat enters. Fung loiters behind him.

MONKHBAT

C'mon. You've got a big performance. Wu is -

Monkhat spots Altant in the bed.

EXT. ZHAO'S HUT - DAY

Zhao tries to hustle Fung back to the jeep.

MONKHBAT

He's almost ready. Let's wait back in the jeep.

A suspicious Fung peers inside. He catches a glimpse of Altant as Zhao emerges, dressing, clutching his satchel.

INT. JEEP, MOVING - DAY

The jeep chugs toward Mingliao. A nervous Monkhat drives. Fung turns to Zhao in the back.

FUNG

Tomorrow, you're going back to the mines.

INT. PARTY HQ, HACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Zhao waits for the surly Party Hack to get off the phone. He spots a Beijing newspaper on a table. He sees a photo of Madame Jian and the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra.

ZHAO

(reads)

Madame Jian welcomes the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra to Beijing ... Madame Jian says there is nothing to fear in Western music. Chinese musicians can both teach and learn from Western musicians and their traditions. One day soon Chinese musicians will take their place on the world stage.

The surly Party Hack hangs up and scowls at Zhao. Zhao quickly folds the newspaper and hands the Party Hack a document.

ZHAO

The playlist for the performance.
Pass it on to Comrade Wu.

INT. ANNEXE - DAY

Zhao holds up the toilet rolls to the gathered orchestra.

ZHAO

Chopin's Piano Concerto Number 1.

INT. WU'S OFFICE - DAY

Fung stands before Wu.

FUNG

They're playing Western music. He's going back down the mines.

WU

Don't be a fool all your life. This orchestra will take us places.

FUNG

If you don't report him, I will.
You think I'm a peasant. You think you're so far above me. I'll report you too.

Fung marches out. Wu reaches for the phone.

WU

We have a counter-revolutionary.

INT. PARTY HQ, HACK'S OFFICE - DAY

The Party Hack watches fearfully as Fung waits on the phone.

Six RED GUARDS burst in, brandishing batons. Fung lashes out with his fists. The Red Guards attack, batons CRASHING and CRUNCHING flesh and bone.

INT. WU'S OFFICE - DAY

Wu watches from his office -

BELOW:

The Red Guards toss Fung into a jeep.

EXT. MINGLIAO, SQUARE - DAY

Madame Jian and Wu watch the orchestra from the VIP seats.

WU

I recognized the power of music,
Madame Jian. I put this orchestra
together myself.

Young, eager musicians. In ragged versions of black and white
orchestral uniforms.

Zhao enters. The ORCHESTRA LEADER (First Flute) and FIRST
VIOLIN (Bingsun) rise to their feet in the traditional
greeting. The orchestra raise their instruments in salute.

Zhao blinks back the tears.

ZHAO

(to audience)

The Conservatorium orchestra was
the finest orchestra in China. And
now we play - together - again.

For the first time Zhao raises the ebony baton with the blood
red characters. And conducts. The orchestra plays.

A CHOIR sings. CHILDREN march. The AUDIENCE waves flags.

Madame Jian smiles her approval. Wu preens beside her.

EXT. MINE - DAY

The jeep halts. The Red Guards haul out the struggling Fung.

EXT. MINGLIAO, SQUARE - DAY

The music reaches a rousing finale. Madame Jian leads the
applause. She looks at the concert playbill.

Zhao turns from the orchestra and faces Madame Jian.

ZHAO

This piece is an unscheduled
performance.

WU
 (nervous)
 Madame Jian, I -

ZHAO
 It is dedicated to Madame Jian who recognizes that music is not eastern or western. It is music. She understands that great orchestras must play together. And that Chinese musicians will one day take their rightful place on the world stage.

Zhao sits at his piano. He looks at Ganbolo and Qorin and Bat-Erdent in the audience. His eyes lock on Altant. He smiles.

Zhao's eyes lock on Bingsun. And Chen. He looks from Chen to Altant. Chen follows his eyes to Altant, then looks back at Zhao curiously - what are you trying to tell me?

Zhao's broken hands hit the keys. And Zhao and his raggedy-assed orchestra play Chopin's Piano Concerto Number 1.

The music soars above Mingliao. Above the great plains of Inner Mongolia.

EXT. CHATEAU DE VERSAILLES - NIGHT

Above the floodlit Chateau.

INT. CONCERT HALL, PARIS - NIGHT

The Maestro conducts - fierily. The music climaxes. Ends.

Bingsun (First Violin) and Orchestra Leader (First Flute) rise to their feet. The Conservatorium Orchestra - twenty years on - raise their instruments.

The audience applauds and cheers - CRIES of BRAVO.

The ORCHESTRA MANAGER and two GLAMOROUS WOMEN make grand entrances from either end of the stage and present the Maestro with garlands of flowers.

ORCHESTRA MANAGER
 Brilliant performance, Maestro Chen.

MAESTRO CHEN
 You never heard me play viola.

The Maestro looks at Altant and Weimin in the front row.

The audience rises and Maestro Chen raises his ebony and blood red baton in acknowledgement.

FREEZE FRAME:

FADE OUT.