

A series of seven vertical black lines of varying heights, with the tallest line on the left and the shortest on the right, creating a stepped effect.

CHIMERICA

BY LUCY KIRKWOOD



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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CHIMERICA was first produced by Almeida Theatre in a co-production with Headlong on May 20, 2013 and transferred to the Harold Pinter Theatre, London, on August 6, 2013. It was directed by Lyndsey Turner, the set design was by Es Devlin, the costume design was by Christina Cunningham, the lighting design was by Tim Lutkin, the sound design was by Carolyn Downing, and the video design was by Finn Ross. The cast was as follows:

JOE SCHOFIELD	Stephen Campbell Moore
FRANK/HERB/DRUG DEALER	Trevor Cooper
MEL STANWYCK	Sean Gilder
TESSA KENDRICK	Claudie Blakley
ZHANG LIN	Benedict Wong
ZHANG WEI/PENGSI	David K.S. Tse
YOUNG ZHANG LIN/BENNY	Andrew Leung
LIULI/JENNIFER	Elizabeth Chan
BARB/DOREEN/MARIA DUBIECKI/ KATE/JUDY	Nancy Crane
DAVID BARKER/PETER ROURKE/ PAUL KRAMER/OFFICER HYTE	Karl Collins
MICHELLE/MARY CHANG/DENG	Vera Chok
FENG MEIHUI/MING XIAOLI	Sarah Lam

CHARACTERS

JOE SCHOFIELD

FRANK

MEL STANWYCK

TESSA KENDRICK

ZHANG LIN

ZHANG WEI

YOUNG ZHANG LIN

LIULI

HERB

BARB

DOREEN

PAUL KRAMER

WAITRESS

MARIA DUBIECKI

DAVID BARKER

MARY CHANG

WOMAN

MICHELLE

OFFICER HYTE

DEALER

FENG MEIHUI

JENNIFER

PENGSI

PENGSI'S WIFE
KATE
MING XIAOLI
DENG
PETER ROURKE
DAWN
JUDY
GUARD
BENNY
PUBLIC SECURITY GUARD
NURSE

KEY

/ indicates an overlap in speech; / before a line of dialogue indicates characters speaking simultaneously
— indicates an abrupt interruption
, on its own line indicates a beat

A beat doesn't always mean a pause but can also denote a shift in thought or energy. When lines are broken by a comma or a line break it's generally to convey a breath, a hesitation, a grasping for words. Actors are welcome to ignore this.

CHIMERICA

ACT ONE

Scene 1.1

*An image of a man with two shopping bags in a white shirt, standing in front of a line of tanks. It is important he is Chinese...but we cannot see this from the photograph. It is important it was taken by an American...but we cannot know this simply by looking at it. It is a photograph of heroism. It is a photograph of protest. It is a photograph of one country by another country.**

Scene 1.2

June 5th, 1989. A hotel room overlooking Tiananmen Square. Split scene, Joe Schofield (20) is speaking on the landline phone with his editor, Frank (45), in the newsroom of a New York newspaper. Joe has his camera slung round his neck, watching the square below. It's around ten A.M. for Joe, eleven P.M. for Frank.

FRANK. We're trying to get you on the ten fifteen out of Beijing tomorrow morning, but the airport's in chaos, the BBC might have a spot on their charter, did you meet Kate Adie yet?

JOE. No, I don't think so.

FRANK. She's a doll. Underneath, you sure you're not hurt?

JOE. I told you, I'm fine.

* See Note on Songs/Recordings, Images, or Other Production Design Elements at the back of this volume.

FRANK. I should never've sent you overseas, not so soon, not on your own, a situation like this, you need experience—

JOE. It was a student protest, didn't know it was gonna turn into a massacre, / did we?

FRANK. You're not even old enough to drink chrissakes, what was I—don't go out again, okay? You stay there, in the hotel, just focus on getting those films back to us.

JOE. You gonna give me a front page Frank?

FRANK. Yes Joey, I think three hundred Chinese people being gunned down by their own government warrants a little more than a hundred words on page six, don't you?

JOE. It was more than that. I was down there Frank, it was—three hundred, is that what they're saying? I don't know, but it was a lot more than—

Joe freezes, looking out of the window.

Oh fuck.

Joe moves to the window, crouches down, watching the man who has walked out.

FRANK. Joe?

JOE. Oh fuck, what is he doing? What is he—Jesus, get out of the road you stupid—

Joe realizes the man's actions are entirely intentional.

Oh my God.

FRANK. What's going on there? Joey, talk to me what are you—

JOE. This guy. He has these...bags, like grocery bags and he...he just walked out in front of the tanks, and he's just standing there like—I mean they could just run him right over. But he won't move, he *won't move*, he's, he's incredible, I wish you could...

Joe stares, transfixed, breathless. Unconsciously copies the Tank Man's movements, as if he were holding two shopping bags.

FRANK. Okay Joe, don't worry, we're going to get you / out of—

JOE. Will you just shut up a second?

Frank, this guy, he's my age.

I think I'm about to watch him get shot.

Silence. Joe picks up his camera. Starts taking pictures.

FRANK. Well did they do it yet?

JOE. No. Not yet. I'm gonna put down the phone for a second.

Joe lays the receiver down. Takes pictures. Suddenly, banging on the door.

(Sotto.) Shit.

He gently hangs up the phone.

FRANK. Joe? What's happening—

Lights down on Frank. Joe quickly winds his camera film to the end. Takes the film out, grabs more used films from his bag, empties dirty underwear out of a plastic bag, puts the films in, ties a tight knot. The phone rings. Joe makes a silent gesture at it, runs off to the bathroom. The phone stops ringing. The banging ceases. Joe returns without the films. Listening. He goes to the door, puts his ear to it. Puts a new film in his camera, takes shot after shot of the carpet. Shaking with adrenaline. Gathers his camera bag, film. Pulls on his jacket. The phone rings, he dives for it, whispers:

JOE. Frank?

Lights up on Frank.

FRANK. Jesus Joey, what are you trying to do to me!

JOE. There were fucking guards outside the door!

FRANK. Well, are they gone? Are you okay?

JOE. Yeah! My heart's fucking, like, you know?

FRANK. Yeah, what about your films?

JOE. I put them in the toilet tank—

FRANK. Good boy. You get a good frame of that guy?

JOE. I don't know, I was just spraying and praying, listen, Frank, I'll call you back—

FRANK. You will not call me back, you stay on this line, / you hear me!

JOE. Frank, I lost him, I / have to—

FRANK. What d'you mean you lost him?

JOE. I mean I can't see him anymore, I have to go down there, see if I can—

The door smashes open. A swarm of Chinese soldiers enter. Joe drops the phone, stands, puts his hands up, backs away.

FRANK. Joe? JOEY!

Lights down on Frank as the soldiers shout at Joe in Mandarin. Joe remains frozen with his hands up as one soldier steadily aims at him while another grabs his camera, takes the film out, throws the camera against the wall. Punches Joe in the stomach, Joe sinks to the floor. Chaos, violence, shouts in Chinese dialects as we travel forward twenty-three years to...

Scene 1.3

A plane. Joe is 43 years old. Mel Stanwyck (45) to his right, Tessa Kendrick (English) to his left, reading a magazine, knocking back a cocktail. Joe and Mel have beers.

MEL. It's a seven-star hotel Joe. Why wouldn't you want to stay in a seven-star hotel?

JOE. I told you—

MEL. The website says it has an “auspicious garden.” An auspicious garden, Joe.

JOE. Yeah but I haven't seen Zhang Lin / for—

MEL. Sure, right, your friend.

An air hostess enters. Tess speaks quietly to her, she takes Tess's empty glass and goes.

JOE. First time I went back to Beijing, Mel, I was so green you wouldn't believe it, Zhang Lin asks to meet me, offers to teach me Mandarin, he bought me a *suit*—I ever tell you that, he bought me

a fucking Armani suit! We only have two days, I just want to hang out with him a little. And Frank won't sign off on your expenses, staying in a place like that.

Joe shows Mel some photographs on his phone.

MEL. Ah, I'm gonna haggle them down. I gotta spend two days in a Chinese plastics factory, I want a seven-star minibar to fall asleep with. *(The photos.)* What's this?

JOE. Somalia.

MEL. You see Greg out there?

JOE. You didn't hear?

MEL. Dead?

JOE. Only from the waist down. Thirteen-year-old sniper.

MEL. Man, that sucks. I have to find a new racquetball partner.

PILOT. *(Voiceover.)* Welcome to Flight 9012 from New York JFK to Beijing, approximate landing time in fifteen hours.

Mel hands the phone back. The hostess brings Tess a fresh drink.

MEL. *(Sotto.)* You know, that's her third since we sat down?

JOE. *(Looks, shrugs.)* Complimentary, isn't it?

MEL. I'm just saying, fifteen hours next to Zelda Fitzgerald, could be a bumpy ride.

Tess looks at them. Mel immediately grins, friendly, raises his beer.

Cheers!

Tess looks back down at her magazine.

TESS. A pansy with hair on his chest.

JOE. Excuse me?

TESS. *(Turns a page.)* That's how Zelda Fitzgerald described Hemingway.

Pause. Joe and Mel look at each other.

MEL. Switch seats with me.

JOE. No. *(To Tess.)* So is this your first time in Beijing?

She looks up from the magazine. Smiles.

TESS. Yes.

Tess looks back down at the magazine. Mel leans across Joe.

MEL. Business? Pleasure?

TESS. (*Still reading.*) Are you asking or offering?

MEL. Oh, honey, I'm a recently divorced journalist, I'm no good for either, hey listen, I got a tip for you: *Don't eat the chicken.*

JOE. Don't listen to—you can eat the chicken, the chicken / is fine—

MEL. The average piece of Chinese chicken, if you were an athlete, and you ate this chicken, I tell you the steroids they pump into that shit, you would fail a doping test.

JOE. Don't freak her out.

MEL. True story.

JOE. You speak Mandarin?

MEL. And don't eat the beef either, 'less you're sure that's what it is.

TESS. I can read it a bit.

MEL. They have this *paint*, okay, they paint the chicken, so it looks like beef, but it ain't beef. It's the Lance Armstrong of the poultry world.

JOE. Mel, tell her about the place.

MEL. What place?

JOE. The place, our place, with the baozi and the asshole waiter.

MEL. Oh my God, yeah, okay, you have to go to this restaurant—

JOE. Write it down for her.

MEL. I'll write it down for you, you like spicy food?

TESS. I have an asbestos mouth.

,

JOE. So what are you working on out there?

TESSA. I can't really say.

JOE. No, sure but?

,

Joe and Mel look at her, expectant.

TESS. I categorize people. By, well, anything, purchasing habits, political affiliations, sexual politics. I'm refining the profiling system that...this company uses, we have a Western model but it has to be adapted to the Chinese market.

JOE. So I'm not the special little snowflake my mom always told me I was?

TESS. Sorry to be the one to break it to you. No such thing as an individual.

MEL. Sure, well, maybe not in China, man, I hate this shit.

TESS. Excuse me?

MEL. This "if you picked mostly As, you're a summer wedding kind of girl!" schisse, this insistence people are some...bovine breed, self-selecting themselves into bullshit constellations, tell me what my *future* is off the back of whether I take sugar or sweetener in my coffee. I know Democrats who play golf with Donald Trump, I've met dirt poor Polish guys who can recite the works of Walt Whitman by heart, millionaires who don't know how to hold a fucking fish knife, you're going to a country of one *billion* people to make some nice boxes to put them in?

Tess stares at him. Drains her drink.

TESS. Okay, I've had like, four of these now, but I'd say, let's see, I'd say you're probably a...Group O, with Group B characteristics.

MEL. Group O, Group O, I mean, what a *sad*, what a really *prosaic* way to view / your fellow humans!

TESS. Within that, I'd place you as an Anti-Materialist. At some point you were probably Urban Cool with a bit of Bright Young Thing, but I think that ship has sailed, don't you? You see your work as a career rather than a job, you identify yourself as international rather than national, you have no brand loyalty, your favourite movie is *Goodfellas*, you believe cannabis should be legalized, that contraception is a woman's responsibility, that little can be done to change life, that children should eat what they're given, and that real men don't cry.

I'm sorry, that's quite a limited, I'd need to ask a few more questions.

JOE. She's a witch.

MEL. No, okay, because okay a) that thing about the contraception is just plain wrong, because *I* had a vasectomy, b) *Goodfellas* isn't even in my top ten.

TESS. *Singin' in the Rain?*

MEL. (*Takes out his book.*) I want to read now.

TESS. I know, it's awful isn't it? No one likes to know they're unremarkable. (*To the hostess, her glass.*) Scuse me? when you get a sec? Cheers.

JOE. You gonna do me now?

TESS. I'm not a machine.

PILOT. (*Voiceover.*) Ladies and gentlemen, we are now approaching takeoff. The time is eight fifty-two P.M. local time and the skies are clear.

The plane starts takeoff. Tess shuts her eyes.

TESS. (*Sotto.*) Oh, shit. Oh, shit.

JOE. (*Grins.*) What's the matter? It's only China, coming towards you at five hundred miles an hour.

TESS. Stop it!

JOE. Are you okay?

TESS. No. No, I'm scared we're going to crash and die.

JOE. Takeoff's the worst. You'll be okay once we get in the air.

MEL. You know why they tell you to adopt the brace position? So your teeth don't smash and they can identify your body by your dental records.

JOE. Mel! Leave her alone, she's scared.

MEL. Aren't we all, sweetheart. Aren't we all, listen to this: "I like to kiss very much," she said. "But I do not do it well."

Joe takes Tess's hand.

JOE. Hi. I'm Joe Schofield.

TESS. Tessa Kendrick.

MEL. (*Looking at the book cover.*) This guy. This fucking guy.

Joe and Tess look at each other as the plane soars into the sky.

Scene 1.4

Tiananmen Square. A huge image of Mao. Joe shakes Zhang Lin's hand.

JOE. So you haven't changed one bit.

ZHANG LIN. No, I have two more inches here. (*His stomach.*) It's rude of you not to notice.

JOE. That's the hotel I was staying in, over there. I can see my window—

ZHANG LIN. Yes, yes, I know, you told me. Fifteen up, four across, it's strange they haven't renamed it after you yet. Have you eaten?

JOE. (*Makes a face.*) Factory cafeteria food.

ZHANG LIN. Right, your trip. Did it go well?

JOE. Terrifying. You ever been to one of those places?

ZHANG LIN. My brother's a foreman in a factory, just outside Beijing.

JOE. Mel spoke with these women, they were earning like fifty dollars a month, working fifteen hour days, sleeping on the floor—

ZHANG LIN. Zhang Wei started like that. The one he works in now, it's much better. He earns a thousand dollars a month. His son's been studying at Harvard.

JOE. I just, I felt so guilty—

ZHANG LIN. Yes, we all blame you too. I think I read a book once, about the *Mayflower*, crossing the Atlantic. Apparently this was quite terrifying also. You've heard of this ship?

JOE. Yes Zhang Lin, I have heard of the *Mayflower*. But they're not travelling to a whole new country—

ZHANG LIN. Of course they are. It just occupies the same part of the atlas as the old one.

JOE. You should've been a lawyer, you know that?

ZHANG LIN. I like teaching. I teach Crazy English now, did I tell you?

JOE. Yeah, you said, I thought it was like a metaphor or—

ZHANG LIN. No! I take my students to the roof, we yell, English

into the sky. You shout, you learn. Conquer English to make China stronger! It's got a sort of fascist aspect but it helps with conjugation. You look tired, Joe.

JOE. Thanks.

Herb, an American tourist from Boston, approaches Joe, spying a white face.

HERB. Scuse me, you're American right?

JOE. Désolé, monsieur, je ne peux pas vous aider.

ZHANG LIN. Joe, behave yourself. My friend is having a joke with you sir.

HERB. Huh. So I was wondering if you could take a picture of me and my wife—where the hell has she—honey!

Barbara comes over. Herb puts his arm round her. Passes his camera to Joe.

ZHANG LIN. You're honoured. This man is one of the world's finest photographers.

HERB. Barb, you hear that? You famous?

JOE. No, / Zhang Lin, don't—

HERB. No, I mean you in galleries?

JOE. You ever heard of the Museum of Modern Art?

HERB. Sure. Sure I have—

JOE. Well sir, they never heard of me. You want to shuffle in a little bit?

Herb and Barbara shuffle closer to each other.

HERB. Barb's a history nut. She wanted to see Tiananmen Square. Right hon?

BARBARA. I like to expand my horizons. Pull in your gut Herb.

Herb sucks in as Joe takes the picture. Joe grins. Hands the camera back.

JOE. You guys have a good trip now.

The tourists go. Joe takes up his camera, turns back towards the hotel, taking pictures. Zhang Lin looks, nervous, at a casually dressed man holding an umbrella as he wanders closer.

ZHANG LIN. Joe.

JOE. Can't believe they haven't pulled it down yet. Every time I come back, I get surprised it's still here.

ZHANG LIN. Joe, put your camera away.

Joe goes to take a picture. The man opens his umbrella in front of Joe, obscuring his shot. Joe looks at Zhang Lin. Understands. He puts his camera down.

You want to drop your bag at the apartment, get a beer?

JOE. Sure.

ZHANG LIN. My brother is coming round. He wants to buy us dinner.

Lights up on Zhang Lin's apartment. Zhang Lin and Joe with beers. They've been drinking awhile, and are muffled against the cold. Every time Zhang Lin takes a sip of his beer, he clinks his bottle with Joe's. Joe stands, acting out the scenario he describes.

JOE. So okay I'm standing there, my editor's on the phone having a fucking conniption, and the Tank Man just walks out, he just walks right out, and my heart is / just—

ZHANG LIN. I know, you said, then the guards come, and you put the films in the toilet / tank

JOE. Right, and then he's just...gone, he's just. This guy. Zhang Lin, this fucking guy, I can't, I still can't...because how does a guy like that just disappear? To come out of a massacre, to have the fucking wherewithal to, to, to stand up, to say this is wrong. This is wrong and, and someone has to say so.

He is lost in thought, captivated by his memory for a moment.

ZHANG LIN. Didn't you meet Nelson Mandela?

JOE. People always say that but, it's a politician's job to stick his head over the parapet, they have a whole fucking machine around them, what did the Tank Man have? Nothing. Plastic grocery bags, is all.

ZHANG LIN. And you only have a camera.

JOE. Sure, and in twenty-three years I never did a thing that came close to half a minute of that man's life. Ah, shut up Joe.

You know, you should come to the States.

Zhang Lin laughs.

JOE. I'm serious.

ZHANG LIN. It's not possible.

JOE. Sure it is. Cos of the green card you mean? Listen, you know how many Upper East Side assholes want their spawn speaking Mandarin? You could clean up.

ZHANG LIN. Clean up what? Public bathrooms?

JOE. Very funny. I mean it, you should come to New York.

ZHANG LIN. What for? Starbucks? Cockroaches? I can get both of those here.

JOE. Sure, and Walmart and McDonalds, / I know, it's turning into America, but—

ZHANG LIN. You have Walmart. Why are we not allowed Walmart?

JOE. Sure, but seriously, this country—

ZHANG LIN. This country owns you. You don't get to lecture us anymore. I subscribe to this website, for my teaching, it sends me new American slangs and phrases each week. You know what phrase I learnt this week? Fiscal cliff.

JOE. I just, I remember being here in 1989 and there was hope, on the streets, in the square, people, like...imagining a, a, a future or whatever / and where has that—

ZHANG LIN. I don't want to talk about this.

JOE. Yeah I know, only I saw it too—

ZHANG LIN. Yes, up in your hotel room, taking pictures. Behind your camera, plane ticket in your pocket, I was there. Down there, in the square, bullets the size of your thumb, yes? Dum dums, they open up inside you. They turned the lights out on us

JOE. Zhang Lin—

ZHANG LIN. They turned the lights out to scare us and then... I don't know. Maybe they did not come back on again for me.

Zhang Lin holds up his empty bottle.

Shall we have another?

Zhang Lin takes another beer from the fridge. Searches for the opener.

JOE. I'm sorry. It's just. I don't know, you type Tiananmen Square into a search engine here, you get three pages from the Tourist Board, the Tank Man is dead in more ways than one, and what for?

ZHANG LIN. The Tank Man? What are you—you want to reduce this to one man? There were a hundred thousand of us Joe, we're not dead! We just made some choices you don't approve of! Have you seen the opener? I can't—anyway, who told you that?

JOE. What?

ZHANG LIN. Who told you the Tank Man was dead?

JOE. I don't know. I just assumed...sorry, what are you?

ZHANG LIN. (*Searching.*) Things have feet in this apartment.

JOE. So where is he?

ZHANG LIN. Who?

JOE. The Tank Man.

ZHANG LIN. I don't know.

JOE. No but what are you saying?

ZHANG LIN. Nothing. I've been drinking all afternoon, I shouldn't have.

Zhang Lin gives up searching. Tries to take the cap off with his teeth.

JOE. Shouldn't have what? Don't do that—you'll break a tooth.

ZHANG LIN. (*Laughs.*) You can't handle the tooth!

JOE. Are you saying he's / still alive?

ZHANG LIN. You know this movie?

JOE. But, but is that what you're saying?

ZHANG LIN. Jack Nicholson, / it's pretty good—

JOE. Oh my God. Oh my God, is he alive? Zhang Lin, please, you have to—

ZHANG LIN. Jack Nicholson?

JOE. The Tank Man, is he alive? Yes or no? Zhang Lin, please, you have to—please—

ZHANG LIN. It was twenty-three years ago.

JOE. Yes or no?

ZHANG LIN. Joe.

JOE. Yes or no?

ZHANG LIN. He went to America, I believe. New York, probably. Many of the organizers went to New York. After. By August, most of my friends were gone.

JOE. You never mentioned this before.

ZHANG LIN. You never asked.

JOE. Did you know him?

ZHANG LIN. No. Not well.

JOE. But—so you know his name?

ZHANG LIN. What does it matter? You know he probably *is* dead, he probably went to America and got hit by a Cadillac on Route 66.

JOE. Do you know his name?

ZHANG LIN. Or his heart exploded, from all the beef.

JOE. What is his name?

ZHANG LIN. He'll have changed it. He'll be called Brian Simpson / or—

JOE. So just tell me. Please.

ZHANG LIN. I think it was Wang Pengfei.

JOE. Wang Pengfei?

ZHANG LIN. Anyway, don't you have other things to worry about? Your country, it's—what's the word? Fucked?

JOE. Okay: You can have my vote. You pick my candidate and I'll vote for them.

ZHANG LIN. Okay. I like Clinton.

JOE. Okay, well you're four years late for that. Or four years early, I don't know, she just resigned. You got two choices, Obama or Romney.

ZHANG LIN. Romney hates the Chinese. I like Clinton.

JOE. Why?

ZHANG WEI. (*Off, Mandarin.*) Is he here? Is he here?

ZHANG LIN. Women hold up half the sky.

Zhang Wei enters, with two shopping bags. He wears neon Nikes, is delighted to see Joe.

ZHANG WEI. (*Mandarin.*) He's here!

Zhang Wei dumps his bags. Shakes Joe's hand enthusiastically.

ZHANG LIN. This is my brother, Zhang Wei. (*Mandarin.*) This is Joe. He just gave me his vote.

ZHANG WEI. (*Mandarin.*) An election every four years. No wonder they can't get anything done.

ZHANG LIN. He speaks Mandarin.

JOE. (*Halting Mandarin.*) Not very well.

ZHANG WEI. (*English.*) My boy. My boy Benny. Harvard University.

He gestures to Zhang Lin, "tell him."

ZHANG LIN. My nephew, he just graduated from Harvard. Very smart kid. He's about to move to New York, we'd appreciate it if you looked him up.

JOE. Sure, I'll do that.

ZHANG WEI. (*Mandarin.*) My shoes, tell him about my shoes, dog face.

ZHANG LIN. He bought Zhang Wei those ugly shoes.

JOE. Very nice, what did he call you? Just then, he called you dog... something—

ZHANG LIN. Oh. Dog Face, yes. It's a family name. When babies are small, we give them a milk name, words that make them sound disgusting. To stop the King of Hell stealing them away. Mine got stuck to me. Let's eat.

JOE. Where are we going?

ZHANG LIN. Somewhere very special, I've been saving up, it's called "the Pizza Hut."

JOE. Oh. Sure. Great. I just need to make a call.

Beat. Then Zhang Lin cracks up.

ZHANG LIN. *(To Zhang Wei, in Mandarin.)* Did you see his face!

ZHANG WEI. What did you say?

ZHANG LIN. I told him we were going to Pizza Hut!

Zhang Wei laughs.

ZHANG WEI. Just let me change my shoes.

Scene 1.5

Lights up on Frank in his Manhattan corner office, with Joe and Mel. He is the editor of a major American newspaper. In his late fifties, beautifully dressed. A large, impressive desk.

FRANK. The Tank Man is dead, you don't think your friend is, let's be civil about this, you don't think he's maybe you know feeding you a crock / of—

JOE. No, but look at how it actually happened:

Doreen, Frank's PA enters. Joe positions two chairs and a pot plant to represent the tanks.

Okay so here, these are the tanks, and this...

He looks around, sees Doreen.

Doreen, can I grab you for a second? Thanks, okay, so—yeah, hold those, that's great, so Doreen is the Tank Man. And she's, he's holding his ground...

Joe hands her Frank's briefcase and a backpack to represent the Tank Man's shopping bags.

Then this guy on a bicycle comes gliding out. Mel, you wanna—

Mel acts the man on the bicycle. He does a jerky circling motion with his right leg.

What the hell are you doing?

MEL. I'm on a bicycle!

JOE. Then there's a couple other guys (*Points to himself.*) They motion him, they guide him...into the crowd...and he disappears.

Joe guides Doreen behind a drape. She disappears. Beat. Joe looks to Frank. Ta-dah.

FRANK. Into the arms of the Public Security Bureau where he's shot at point-blank range in the head and thrown in an unmarked mass grave.

JOE. No, but the PSB, they're violent you know? They bend your arm back, they rough you up. I don't know. The bicycle, the way they...guided him. It was gentle.

DOREEN. (*From behind drape.*) Are we done here?

JOE. Sure. Thanks, Doreen.

Doreen comes out from behind the drape. Puts the file on Frank's desk.

DOREEN. I need you to sign off on these.

FRANK. Can it wait? I'm kind of in the middle of... (*To Joe.*) just, give me a minute, okay?

Frank quickly opens the file, zips through the couple of contact sheets within.

No...no...definitely not...maybe this one if you crop it, give me a pen—

Doreen hands him a pen, he circles the shot. Joe's eye is caught, he moves closer to the desk.

JOE. What's this? Are these mine?

FRANK. We can't use this. / (*To Doreen.*) See if Dina got anything we can go with.

JOE. Frank, this is two weeks' work, why can't you—

Frank picks up his cup of coffee and takes a gulp.

FRANK. Don't play the ingénue with me, you know why, this is not the first time we have had this conversation, they are, without exception, ghoulish. / (This is cold. Doreen? This is cold.)

He hands Doreen the cup. She exits. Mel rests his feet against Frank's desk.

JOE. If it bleeds, it leads. That's what you said to me. First day on the job that's what you said to me, what about this one?

FRANK. No faces. (To Mel.) Feet.

Mel takes his feet off the woodwork.

JOE. It's a corpse you can hardly see / his—

FRANK. *No faces. (Hollering off.)* / Doreen? Coffee? Thank you!

MEL. Leave it Joe. Butter him up you said, not / nail his balls to the wall.

FRANK. And my pill, I forgot to take my pill! Why am I being buttered?

Doreen comes in with a cup of coffee and a pill. Frank takes the pill.

DOREEN. (As she leaves.) You have a meeting with the lawyers at ten.

JOE. So, okay. We were thinking, we do a special. On China. Its history, its future. The centrepiece is a shot of the Tank Man, sitting in Central Park. Alive and well.

FRANK. And where do I put this special?

JOE. In the magazine.

FRANK. That's not really the kind of story sits well / in the—

JOE. It used to be.

FRANK. And I used to have a prostate, shit happens. Lifestyle and leisure, that's the magazine's remit, and this is hypothetical anyway. It's a great idea boys, I can see why you're excited, but I don't have the money for this.

JOE. You don't have money for one of the great heroes in twentieth-century history?

FRANK. I don't even have the money for our food critic to review anywhere you don't BYOB. Our revenues are down eleven percent, what am I supposed to do, keep you on payroll, file your expenses, while the pair of you gallivant round the / city—

MEL. Gallivant?

FRANK. Gallivant, jaunt, roam the fucking city in the middle of an election, looking for a man who may or may not still be alive who most likely isn't too excited about having years of anonymity blown by two self-serving newsmen looking to make a scoop.

JOE. You're not interested in China?

FRANK. You know this dime-store rhetoric is not flattering to you. I *am* interested in China, because I am not a fucking idiot. I just *sent* you to China, didn't I?

JOE. Right, the factory story, so why can't we—

FRANK. Because that's not a story about China, that's about America; American jobs, American money, and right now, unless you can give me an angle like that on the Tank Man, I can't let you pursue it, not in the middle of campaign season.

MEL. Okay, so what about this: We take a whole "God Bless America," land of the free home of the et cetera angle on this, just a balls-out good news story. Cos they're opening their newspapers every day, and it's real wrist-slitting stuff, our national industry getting screwed over by China undercutting them at every turn—

FRANK. (*Guarded.*) Okay, so this is interesting.

MEL. Right, because, because, okay this is what it is, because this man, strike that, this *hero*, brave, noble, persecuted, he escapes from this supposedly superior country, and where does he go? Not London, not Mumbai, not Moscow. He comes to New York. To the States. Because so what if our economy's stalling, our power is ebbing, one thing won't change: America means freedom, it means rights, set down in a constitution, to speak, to protest, to be an *individual*, it is, and will always be, the homeland of heroes.

FRANK. See, that wasn't so hard, was it?

MEL. Is that a green light?

Doreen enters with a computer printout. Hands it to Frank; he doesn't look at it.

FRANK. Don't get too excited. I still want you guys in Denver for

the first debate, and you still have to find one Chinese guy in a city of—how many Chinese guys, Doreen?

DOREEN. Three hundred thousand. Give or take.

MEL. We got a name, right Joe?

JOE. Wang Pengfei.

DOREEN. And he's dead.

I searched the archive. This is by Paul Kramer, he was our Beijing correspondent at the time, the headline is quite unequivocal.

FRANK. It can't be *quite* unequivocal Doreen, it is or it isn't unequivocal, there is no scale.

DOREEN. I accessed the New York and the London *Times* too. They're all in agreement.

FRANK. Well. Okay. Thanks Doreen, that...simplifies things a little.

DOREEN. (*Shrugs.*) I mean it was right there, you only have to type it / in—

Doreen leaves, grumbling, sotto. A pause.

FRANK. Go to Colorado. There will be other Tank Men.

MEL. But—

FRANK. Mel, don't you have a deadline?

Mel goes. Joe turns to follow him. Frank rubs his eyes.

Just a minute—Joe? You never think...you're what, like forty? You never think it might be / time to

JOE. This? Again?

FRANK. settle down. Put down some roots. I mean, you don't even have a car!

JOE. I live in New York, why do I need a / car—

FRANK. I don't know. So you'll have somewhere to sleep when I fire you, why does anyone have a car? It's freedom.

JOE. (*Smiles.*) You know, there are these three new phrases they just started using in China: Fáng nú. Chē nú. Hái nú. House slave. Car slave. Child slave.

Pause. Doreen enters.

FRANK. You are a very bleak man, anyone ever tell you that? Look, I'm not saying, but there's something to be said for—starting something. Raising a family, some nurse hands you a bundle of, whatever, right there that's, that's *growth*, that's hope in your hands. Watching your kids sleep, wiping the shit from their mouths, taking care of something that's a, it is, it's a...it's a wonderful thing. Y'know?

JOE. Yeah. You're right. Your au pair was a very lucky woman.

FRANK. The Tank Man. It's probably for the best. I once spent two months chasing Bob Dylan round Europe for an interview. Closest I got was a flash of sheepskin in Kraków airport. Hippies and heroes, slippery fuckers.

JOE. Never knew you were a Dylan fan, Frank.

FRANK. Only the electric stuff.

Joe goes. Frank turns to Doreen.

I'm sorry about before. It was impolite of me to correct you like that.

Doreen surveys him, inscrutable. Frank looks at his coffee.

You spat in this, didn't you?

DOREEN. You have Senator Collins on line four.

Scene 1.6

Joe sits with Paul Kramer in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. A pram, a baby crying inside. Paul softly rocks the pram.

PAUL. The *Herald*? I haven't worked there for twenty years, (*To the baby.*) good girl.

JOE. I know. But you were their Beijing correspondent in 1989, right? I found this in the archive, / "Tank Man Executed"—

As Joe shows him a printout Paul picks up a soft toy, dances it at the child in the pram.

PAUL. Shhh...sweetie...look at Mr. Biggins! Look at him! Look at

him! Look at him! Look at him! Look at him! Look at him!

Look / at him—

JOE. How about I get us a coffee?

PAUL. We don't have much time. We have a playdate at twelve. Let me see that.

He puts his hand out of the pram. Pulls it back. Wipes his hand on his trousers. Grins at Joe.

"I measure my life in baby puke."

Paul takes the article and scans it. The baby gurgles contentedly.

Yeah, I didn't write this.

JOE. That's your name right there. Paul Kramer.

PAUL. I know. I can read. I didn't write this.

JOE. And you can be sure of that?

PAUL. There are two split infinitives here.

JOE. So someone else wrote it and put your name on it? Was that common?

PAUL. Sure. I was their man out in Beijing. You have a story like this, it looks better if it's written by the correspondent.

JOE. So who was it written by?

PAUL. Some news monkey. Happens all the time. Used to, anyway, you take a trip out of town, go to the dentist or whatever, doesn't matter who's covering you, the sub will stick your name on what they wrote. Looks better that way.

JOE. You never thought about this before?

PAUL. I never saw it before. I was out there. I didn't read the thing, I just wrote for it.

JOE. So if you didn't write this...

PAUL. Do I think it's true?

I don't know. After Tiananmen, that whole summer—they were arresting people all over the place. There were public executions on the TV every day, people who'd embarrassed the government a hell

of a lot less than this guy.

JOE. So he had to have been executed, right?

PAUL. No, that's not what I'm—hey hey hey no. No! Emily don't chew that, come on—

He reaches into the pram, pulls something free of baby teeth.

(Proud.) She's a biter. She already has three teeth. You got any?

JOE. Teeth?

PAUL. Kids.

JOE. No.

PAUL. I'm sorry.

JOE. That's okay.

PAUL. Look, you have to think about the psychology of the thing. It's a gibbet society. They like to make examples. You don't roll a load of tanks into a public square and start firing just for the hell of it, you know? You do it to scare the hell out of people, scare them out of ever trying anything like that again. But you don't make an example if no one's watching. If the PSB had him they'd make damn sure every TV viewer in China *saw* when that bullet went into his skull. And I watched a lot of TV. And I never saw that.

But that's just my opinion. This is for a story?

JOE. I'm trying to find him.

PAUL. Who?

JOE. The Tank Man.

PAUL. (Laughs.) Right.

He sees Joe is serious.

Oh, okay, well. Good luck with that. I'm gonna have to go change this one.

JOE. No problem. Thanks for your time.

Paul exits, pushing the pram. Joe takes out his cell phone, dials.

It's me. Put down the burrito, Mel.

Lucky guess, brush your teeth. I'm coming over.

Scene 1.7

A Chinese restaurant in Manhattan. Tess and Joe at a table in the dining area. A Chinese couple sit behind them, waiting for carry-out. Young and in love.

TESS. So he's not dead?

JOE. Not according to Paul Kramer.

TESS. I just, I can't believe you took that. I had it on my wall when I was a student, next to Che Guevara and the Stone Roses. So that place you told me about, the restaurant in Beijing? It's gone.

JOE. What? No way, I love that place. Maybe you just got / lost or—

TESS. They built a car park on it. I was starving, I ended up in a KFC, there were all these people taking business dinners in there.

JOE. God, tell me about it, it's so depressing. Beijing's so Westernised.

TESS. I don't think so.

JOE. You kidding me? You flew seven thousand miles, had fried chicken for dinner.

TESS. No I didn't. I had a tree fungus salad and shrimp rice.

A waitress brings their food. Tess looks over it.

(Mandarin.) Excuse me, we ordered some lotus root?

The waitress replies in Mandarin and exits.

Xiè xiè.

I totally did that to show off to you, so you better be impressed.

JOE. I am. I mean your accent's terrible, but—no, that's. You're a fast learner huh?

TESS. I've been studying every night since I got back from Beijing. I've been taking a lot of caffeine pills. My piss is orange. I have to admit something terrible.

JOE. Worse than your piss being orange?

TESS. I googled you.

JOE. I googled you too.

TESS. Why?

JOE. Why d'you think? What's "netball," and why do they make you wear such short skirts to play it?

TESS. Joe, this isn't a date. This is really just a, it's a professional thing—I was just looking at your work to, the company I'm working for, it's a credit card and we want an image, to print on it and I, I thought you might be our man and.

JOE. No, sure, don't worry about it

TESS. It's really awkward now, isn't it?

JOE. No, not at all.

TESS. I don't think it helps to pretend it's not. Why did you think it was a date?

JOE. Why d'you *think* I thought it was a date?

TESS. The plane?

JOE. Yes the plane.

TESS. Oh, wow. I mean, no, but it's not exactly. I mean what would we tell our kids?

JOE. Well, I don't want kids so there's no universe in which that'd be a problem.

TESS. No, I wasn't, they're rhetorical kids, I was just. I'm sorry, I should've—

JOE. Like I said, don't worry about it.

Pause. Tess takes out a folder. A printout from the folder. Slides it over to Joe.

TESS. So this is the image we'd like to use. And this is the offer we're prepared to make:

She writes a number on a napkin, slides it over. Joe doesn't look at it.

JOE. What the hell are you doing, I feel like I'm in a high school play or something.

TESS. This would be a good thing for you.

The play doesn't end here...

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