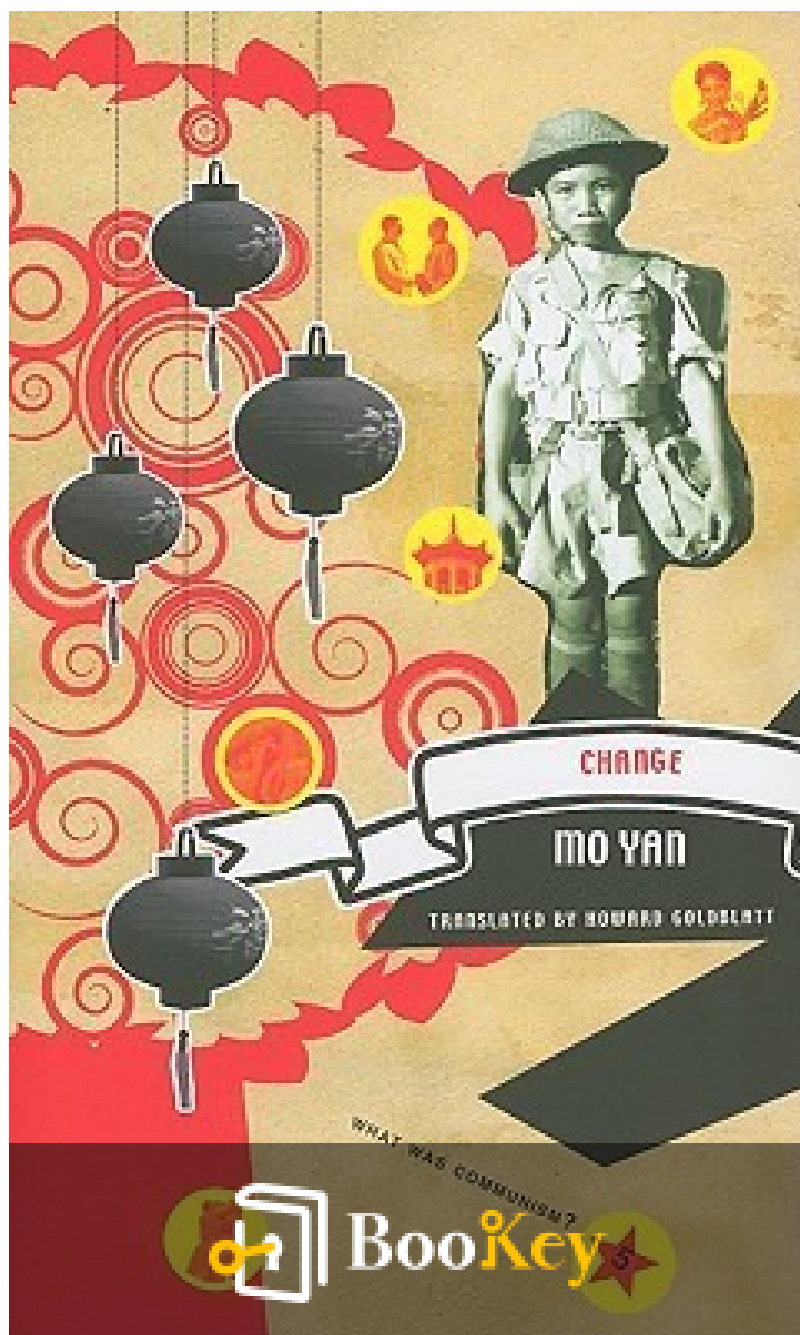


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Change Summary

"Exploring Life's Transformations Amidst a Rapidly Shifting China."

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About the book

In "Change," Mo Yan seamlessly intertwines the personal and the historical, offering readers an evocative exploration of transformation on both intimate and grand scales. Set against the sprawling canvas of China's meteoric rise over the decades, this novella traces the journey of one man's life, swayed by the tides of political upheaval and shifting societal norms. Through a lens both nostalgic and critical, Yan delicately peels back the layers of the enigmatic interplay between fate and choice, tradition and modernization. Echoing with universal themes of survival, identity, and the relentless march of time, "Change" captivates with its lyrical prose and poignant storytelling, beckoning readers to contemplate the perennial question of what it truly means to evolve. Dive into Mo Yan's masterful narrative and discover a tale that is at once a personal reminiscence and a profound commentary on the human condition.

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About the author

****Mo Yan****, a revered voice in Chinese literature, was born on February 17, 1955, in Gaomi County, Shandong Province, China. Among China's most celebrated contemporary writers, Mo Yan, a pseudonym meaning "Don't Speak," reflects his nuanced approach to the harmony and tension of expression. With a distinctive voice characterized by magical realism and profound historical narratives, Mo Yan's writing seamlessly blends reality with fantasy, capturing the multiplicity of China's socio-cultural landscapes. His ability to breathe life into multifaceted characters and his keen exploration of complex themes have earned him international acclaim, culminating in the 2012 Nobel Prize in Literature. Despite his global fame, Mo Yan frequently grounds his stories in rural China, offering a unique lens into the resilience and adaptability of everyday life amidst rapid societal changes and upheaval. His works, including "Red Sorghum" and "Big Breasts and Wide Hips," remain influential, resonating deeply with readers worldwide.

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Chapter 1 Summary: 1

The narrative takes us back to a vivid autumn afternoon in 1969, capturing the ambience of a school playground filled with activity and nostalgia. The protagonist, a young boy expelled from school due to a misunderstanding, finds himself irresistibly drawn to the schoolyard. He's characterized by his ingenuity and mischief, often leading to trouble, which ultimately results in his expulsion for a nickname he supposedly coined for his math teacher, Liu Tianguang, based on his prominently large mouth. Liu, nicknamed "Toad Liu" by the protagonist's peers, becomes a central figure in the boy's expulsion, highlighting the complex dynamics between teachers and students and the seemingly harsh education system.

The boy reflects on his prolonged affection for the school, its environment, and particularly a girl named Lu Wenli, whose father drives a prestigious state farm truck, making her a subject of admiration among students. The boy's recollections paint a picture of social hierarchies and aspirations prevalent at the time, as evidenced by the awe surrounding Lu Wenli's father and the reverence for speed and authority symbolized by his truck.

The narrative drifts further into past events, detailing a classroom incident involving He Zhiwu, an older student with a rebellious flair, who theatrically protests a teacher's criticism by rolling out of class. This defiant act cements his status as an anti-hero and has a profound impact on the protagonist and



his classmates. Zhiwu's stance against the norm highlights the discord between youthful impulsiveness and institutional authority, making him memorable and revered among peers.

The protagonist recounts an unforgettable Children's Day event marked by He Zhiwu's audacious appearance wearing a military-inspired outfit, which he claims to have obtained from Lu Wenli's father. His bold presence and parody of authority during a flag-raising ceremony encapsulate the youthful rebellion and disdain for conformity, further endearing him to peers while frustrating school authorities.

In another striking recollection, a ping-pong game between Teacher Liu and Lu Wenli takes a dramatic twist when Wenli inadvertently lands the ball in Liu's gaping mouth. The ensuing chaos humorously critiques Liu's mannerisms and sets the stage for a frantic rescue attempt led by a rightist teacher with medical training.

Through these vivid narratives, the protagonist's reflections weave a rich tapestry of childhood memories, school dynamics, aspirations, and rebellion during a politically charged era, where each character's actions and circumstances are imbued with broader social and cultural themes. The protagonist's journey from innocence and chaos toward a reflective adulthood captures the essence of growing up in such transformative times.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: embracing individuality

Critical Interpretation: When you dare to embrace your individuality, as seen in He Zhiwu's rebellious acts, it awakens a profound sense of authenticity and courage within you. Life continuously presents you with opportunities that challenge the norms and conventions, much like Zhiwu's theatrical defiance in the classroom. By embodying his audacity, you can inspire others and yourself to question societal structures and define what success and authority mean on your terms. Let your unique perspectives and bold choices illuminate your path, much like Zhiwu's influence on his peers, overcoming the fear of judgment, and creating a lasting impact in your world.



Chapter 2 Summary: 2

Chapter 2 follows the narrator as he navigates his journey from rural life to joining the army in 1973, against the backdrop of China's socio-economic environment in the 1970s. Feeling stuck as a temporary worker in a cotton processing plant, our protagonist longs for an escape from his peasant status. Though he possesses a measure of literary talent and some education, opportunities seem elusive due to systemic constraints that favor the offspring of influential families for college admissions. Thus, he perceives the army as the only realistic path for social mobility.

The narrator persistently applies to join the People's Liberation Army, ultimately succeeding in 1976 with the aid of influential contacts. His excitement is palpable as he receives his enlistment notice and begins basic training at the Ding Family Compound—only to find out years later during a 1999 visit that the once-imposing estate had become a modest museum, reflecting his growth and changed perspectives.

Assigned to an outdated intelligence unit, which is, in reality, a soon-to-be-phased-out radio-monitoring station, he faces disappointment rather than glory. The unit's poor reputation, labeled '263', frustrates the local brigade commander to the point of exasperation. The narrator's tasks include mundane duties divided between farming and sentry work. His one comfort is the antiquated Gaz 51 truck used by the unit, reminiscent of the one driven



by his childhood neighbor, Lu Wenli's father. The driver, Technician Zhang, is a distinctive character with a colorful personality and a peculiar son named Qinbing who adds eccentricity to their routine.

Zhang, with his rebellious manner and a penchant for storytelling and car maintenance, becomes somewhat of a mentor to the narrator. The truck holds a storied past, serving in the Korean War and carrying legacies of its past drivers, recounted by Zhang. The narrator harbors dreams of mastering driving the truck, linking it symbolically to a similar one from his past and imagining a spiritual reunion between the "twin" trucks.

Zhang and the narrator embark on a mission to deliver produce to Beijing, encountering mechanical setbacks along the way. Their journey is marked by humorous interactions and candid conversations that reveal both Zhang's skills and his flaws. Troubles with the truck, temporarily anchored by a faulty earthenware filter cap left by a well-meaning mechanic, are eventually resolved. This episode exemplifies the combination of adventure and resourcefulness typical of the narrator's army experience.

Their journey highlights both the mundanity and fascination of life in military service. In Beijing, the narrator's awe and introspection upon seeing the capital city underline the contrast between his origins in Northeast Gaomi Township and the rapidly modernizing nation. His reflections capture the youthful spirit of ambition and longing for significance in a



transformative era for China.

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Chapter 3 Summary: 3

Chapter 3 Summary:

The journey from the city continued northward through the Juyong Pass, bringing us to the military headquarters after an hour's drive. The delivery of apples and onions was traded for various supplies, and we gained a new companion, Tian Hu, a fresh recruit and driver from Yishui, Shandong. His youthful appearance stood out, reminding me of the fleeting opportunity I might have missed in passing through Beijing.

As we prepared to leave, the chance to witness the city for a few days, including a visit to Tiananmen Square, presented itself. Graciously granted a three-day pass with the necessary bureaucratic papers, we embraced the adventure to explore notable landmarks such as Beihai Park, the Temple of Heaven, the Forbidden City, and more. My reflections were stirred as we paid respects at Chairman Mao's Mausoleum, contemplating the illusion of immortality and the resilience of China since his passing.

During our visit, a shopping excursion included purchasing gifts like backpacks for my comrades and a pink scarf for my fiancée, arranged through a distant relative hoping to leverage family ties into job security. The memory of machine-made dumplings from a Xidan Bazaar shop



contrasted past celebrations of mechanization with modern preferences for handmade authenticity, showcasing shifting societal values.

The return journey began with Tian Hu taking over the driving, signaling the end of my ambitions to become a truck driver. Yet Zhang, my companion, offered encouragement to strive for something greater than mere driving. Dreams of gloriously returning to my village in a convoy were disrupted by reality, but were revived in my imagination, where playful dreams of trucks interacting symbolized deeper yearnings and camaraderies.

On the way home, a compassionate gesture from Zhang allowed me to visit my family after two years apart, a welcome break from military life. Riding the train back, I recounted my previous train journey excitement to Qingdao and observed the disheveled camaraderie among fellow passengers.

Arriving in Gaomi at dawn, the nostalgic strains of Maoqiang opera filled the air, stirring emotions as I enjoyed local fritters and soymilk. The vibrant yet humble market scene conveyed the rise of private enterprise amidst the decline of old state-run institutions.

Finally reaching home, the sight of my aged parents in contrast to our dilapidated house was a bittersweet reminder of unfulfilled aspirations. The conversation with my father turned practical, encouraging perseverance and party membership as a path to dignity and a future—a testament to enduring



resilience despite life's challenges.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Resilience and Perseverance

Critical Interpretation: In Chapter 3, the narrative centers around the steadfast encouragement you receive from your companion, Zhang, to aim higher than the immediate dream of becoming a truck driver. This sparks inspiration to consider your untapped potential, stirring dreams of returning triumphantly to your village. This message of resilience paints a vivid tapestry in your life, reminding you that setbacks and unrealized dreams are not endpoints but stepping stones. By embracing perseverance, you can navigate the challenging terrain between reality and aspiration, understanding that the power of enduring resilience equips you to face life's transient adversities with grace. The underlying message here transforms a simple metaphorical journey into a powerful call to action to embrace growth beyond the obvious—the call to press on with dignity and purpose, despite life's unpredictability.



Chapter 4: 4

In this chapter, the protagonist, a young soldier, is unexpectedly selected by his commanding officer to take an entrance exam for the PLA Engineering and Technical College in Zhengzhou. This opportunity is both thrilling and daunting for him because, although he is seen as a promising candidate due to his assumed high-school education, he hasn't actually completed more than primary school. Despite feeling confident about the language and politics sections, his knowledge of math, physics, and chemistry is virtually nonexistent. The exam's focus is on computer terminal repair, a field far beyond his current abilities.

A fellow radio technician, Ma from Hunan, informs him that the exam might just be a formality, a token gesture since their outstation received the exam slot. Reassured by Ma's words and his offer of tutoring, the protagonist decides to attempt the seemingly impossible task of catching up academically within six months. He writes to his family for his elder brother's middle and high school textbooks. His brother had set family prestige by being the first from Northeast Gaomi Township to attend college, fueling the protagonist's lifelong dream of higher education.

With permission from the camp leadership, the protagonist begins an intense study routine, transforming Technician Ma's quarters into his nightly study room. For concentration, a new recruit temporarily takes over his duties as



deputy unit commander. Studying tirelessly, he fills the storeroom walls with mathematical and scientific formulas, fluctuating between hope and desperation as he tries to memorize what he cannot fully comprehend.

In August, the political instructor delivers discouraging news: the promised

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Chapter 5 Summary: 5

Chapter 5 of the narrative is set against the backdrop of 1979, a pivotal year both nationally and personally for the protagonist. Early in the year, the protagonist hears news of China's counterattack against Vietnam, where soldiers, including some acquaintances, experienced the harsh realities of war. Amidst this tension, the protagonist reflects on their own desire for glory and the peculiar mindset of viewing heroism and martyrdom as escapes from a mundane existence.

The sudden end of the war marks a return to normalcy for the protagonist and their unit. Soon, personal life takes a significant turn as the protagonist receives permission to return home for marriage. Despite the rainy backdrop of the wedding day, the event is bittersweet, with the protagonist longing for the war-time glory experienced by peers who returned as decorated heroes.

A personal journey brings the protagonist to the Jiao River State Farm to meet Master Lu, a figure from the past associated with an incident involving a Gaz 51 truck—a moment tinged with youthful mischief and nostalgia. Though Master Lu views the truck with sentimental attachment, the protagonist learns of friend He Zhiwu's surprising interest in buying the old vehicle, signaling perhaps a mix of nostalgia and eccentricity on Zhiwu's part.



Later, the protagonist's life progresses with a transfer to the Baoding Training Regiment where they foster new responsibilities and develop budding literary aspirations. This newfound role as a trainer, coupled with a growing interest in writing, leads to the protagonist's gradual recognition, marking the beginning of a literary journey. The birth of their daughter and the selection of her name, influenced by personal and literary achievements, add another layer of family significance.

As the 1980s progress, the protagonist's literary career starts to bloom with notable publications that catch public attention. In 1986, 'Red Sorghum' is turned into a film directed by Zhang Yimou in the protagonist's hometown. Initially greeted with curiosity and skepticism, the film eventually gains international fame, transforming perceptions of its stars, particularly Gong Li, from ordinary to exceptional.

These events reflect broader societal changes, including shifts in attitudes towards personal freedom and privacy. The narrative's evolution from a young soldier longing for wartime heroism to a recognized writer parallels China's own journey through rapid social and cultural changes during this period.

Through these interconnected stories, Chapter 5 weaves a tapestry of personal growth against the backdrop of national transformation, capturing the essence of ambition, cultural shifts, and the pursuit of identity in a



changing world.

Theme	Description
Setting & Temporal Context	The events take place in 1979, a significant year both in Chinese history and for the protagonist personally, amidst the backdrop of the China-Vietnam conflict.
War & Personal Reflections	The protagonist grapples with the war's harshness and reflects on aspirations of heroism, contrasting the desire for glory with a mundane life.
Return to Normalcy	Post-war, life normalizes with the protagonist receiving permission to marry and the event taking place under a rainy sky, symbolizing bittersweet emotions.
Connection to Past	Visits to the Jiao River State Farm and interactions with Master Lu stir nostalgia tied to a youthful incident with a GAZ 51 truck.
Professional Development	Transition to the Baoding Training Regiment enables the protagonist to take on new responsibilities and explore budding literary aspirations.
Family Growth	The birth of a daughter and the selection of her name reflect a blend of personal and literary achievement, deepening family bonds.
Literary Achievements	The 1980s see the protagonist's literary career flourish, highlighted by 'Red Sorghum' being adapted into a film by Zhang Yimou.
Societal Change	Reflects broader societal transformations, encapsulating shifts in individual freedom, privacy, and cultural dynamics.
Overall Narrative Arc	Chronicles personal ambition and self-discovery against a backdrop of national change, capturing ambition, cultural shifts, and identity pursuit.



Chapter 6 Summary: 6

In 1988, I was admitted to a prestigious joint graduate program by Beijing Normal University and the Lu Xun Literature Institute. This achievement, though significant, didn't carry the same excitement as my earlier acceptance into the PLA Arts Institute in 1984, which had fulfilled my dreams of pursuing higher education and writing. By now, having established myself as a writer, I realized that literary success depended on the quality of one's work, not academic credentials. My initial impulse was to decline, but a friend's advice to learn English, foreseeing its future utility, persuaded me otherwise. Despite studying diligently and memorizing hundreds of words, my resolve faltered with the eruption of the student movement, which caused widespread unrest and diminished the academic focus. Unfortunately, my neglect of English increasingly proved to be a regret, especially during foreign visits. Over the years, I abandoned the idea of learning English, clinging to the hope that technology might eventually bridge the language gap easily.

In 1990, I returned to my hometown county to embark on a demolition and construction project, erecting new houses within a month. Despite several school reminders to return to my studies, I found myself encouraged to drop out by the authorities, a suggestion I immediately accepted. Fortunately, classmates and Professor Tong from Beijing Normal supported my continuation. I attended a hasty graduation ceremony aligned with the onset



of the Gulf War, marked without celebration. A film department student gave me a ride home on his motorbike, as I couldn't find dormitory lodging and had to reside in a rodent-infested scrap warehouse. Chairman Mao statues, arranged strategically, served as symbolic guards against the rat menace. Despite these challenging conditions, this community dubbed me China's top creative genius. For two years, I lived there until the unit finally allocated me a two-room apartment, leaving me with a sense of nostalgia for those simpler times.

In the spring of 1992, He Zhiwu resurfaced after years without contact. He had secured work in a government office in Inner Mongolia but wished to return to Gaomi to care for his ageing parents. I assisted by writing a letter to the Gaomi County head, which facilitated his return. During our conversation, I discovered his father's Gaz 51 truck had featured in a film, creatively modified by Zhang Yimou's crew to serve as a cinematic prop. This revelation amused us both, highlighting our inadvertent contributions to cultural productions.

By early 1993, back in Gaomi for the lunar New Year, He Zhiwu informed me of his posting to the Qingdao Gaomi affairs office, crediting my letter for his successful transfer. Over time, he visited Beijing frequently, suggesting substantial professional success, and often treated me to extravagant meals. His invitations to Qingdao, where he expanded into thriving business ventures, were constant.



He Zhiwu updated me on our former classmates and teachers, revealing that our writing mentor Zhang retired from a political instructor role, one son ventured into a lumber business, and the other held a key Youth League position. Navigating surprising twists, Big Mouth Liu ascended to Deputy Head of Education and remarried Lu Wenli, whose unfortunate marriage ended tragically with her first husband's untimely death. The dynamic accounts served as a reminder of life's unpredictability and humor, leaving us marveling at the serendipitous nature of human connections and worldly affairs.

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Chapter 7 Summary: 7

In August 2008, the narrator travels to Qingdao to meet an old friend, He Zhiwu, who promised intriguing stories for a novel. Zhiwu is a colorful character with a rich history, including the owing of a ten yuan favor. To repay this, he reserved a luxurious suite at the Huiquan Imperial Hotel and started recounting his life's adventures over food, drink, and a scenic drive along the coast.

Despite his health issues preventing him from eating much, Zhiwu drinks, smokes, and talks non-stop, even while driving. He confidently compares himself to Wu Song, a legendary figure in Chinese lore known for his heroism and strength despite heavy drinking, asserting that alcohol improves his abilities, though the police aren't likely to appreciate this if caught driving under the influence.

Zhiwu shares tales from his past, such as evading stringent train ticket inspections with the help of a trusting PLA soldier, a testament to his quick thinking and ability to exploit character judgments he learned under Wang Gui, a master of physiognomy.

He nostalgically recounts his entrepreneurial beginnings in post-1978 China. Spotting opportunities in the country's significant rural reforms, he capitalizes by trading horses and oxen between Inner Mongolia and the



south of the Great Wall, earning considerable profits. This streak of success led him to fantasy about marrying his childhood crush, Lu Wenli, but her engagement to a local deputy Party secretary's son dashed his hopes.

Never one to stop, Zhiwu adapted, building his fortune through legitimate and occasionally dubious trades, including smuggling cashmere and buying indulgence with gifts and charm. As his wealth grew, he married Julia, a woman of mixed Russian descent, famous for her striking figure that overshadowed her pockmarked face. The marriage brought him social and legal advantages, like being able to have more than one child, which Zhiwu had meticulously considered.

Despite his material successes, Zhiwu's love for Wenli lingered. Even after her husband's death, despite her visiting him to discuss rekindling a relationship, her rejection of his offer to be a kept woman revealed the limits of what money could buy. Zhiwu's realization was profound, recognizing the intrinsic decency in Wenli that he hadn't seen because of his mercenary view of the world.

On the last evening of the visit, Zhiwu serves a meal prepared by his affectionate wife, Julia. Late into the night, he shares a mysterious yet trivial anecdote, reflecting bronze coin patterns visible only on the kitchen window, unexplained but somehow central to his contentment—his ultimate sense of peace being in his home, free from the grasp of materialism.



Upon returning to Beijing, the narrator receives a call from Zhiwu, excited about a land deal in Longkou, encouraged by a mutual acquaintance from their youth. Despite the opportunity, the narrator bristles at the idea, letting history and connections alone drive his friend's ongoing chase after success.

This chapter is a portrait of Zhiwu, a man driven by ambition yet grounded by the immutable truths of human relationships and self-reflection. It captures his colorful past, present contentment, and indomitable spirit that persist even against the unpredictable and sometimes harsh tides of life.

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Chapter 8: 8

In May, Gaomi County's Departments of Culture and Radio-TV launched their inaugural Maoqiang performance contest, a significant event as Maoqiang—an opera form native to the Shandong region—had been recognized as a living national cultural heritage three years earlier. This designation aimed to preserve this art form for future generations, prompting government and Party involvement, including the establishment of a Youth Maoqiang Troupe. Forty children were to be trained at the prestigious Weifang Art Academy and guaranteed career placements post-graduation, a move that sparked high interest, resulting in over five hundred applications.

I was invited by Chief Lu of the Department of Culture to serve as a judge for the contest, a request I felt obliged to accept despite my personal reservations. The position thrust me into an overwhelming social web; friends, acquaintances, and relatives bombarded me with requests to help their children gain admission to the troupe. To evade this pressure, Chief Lu relocated me to a different hotel. However, persistent appeals continued, evidenced by a message from an old classmate, Lu Wenli, seeking a brief meeting.

During our meeting in the hotel bar, Lu Wenli—an old schoolmate with whom I shared many memories—revealed a personal plea. Over drinks, we caught up on life, reminiscing about Teacher Liu, her late husband. Despite



the sadness woven into our conversation, the meeting took a hopeful turn as Wenli presented a photograph of her daughter, Liu Huanhuan, who was vying for a spot in the Maoqiang youth troupe. She shared her daughter's progress in the selection exams and confided about the competitive atmosphere among the parents.

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