

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

By

Ben Thompson

First performance
Penghao Theatre (Beijing) 15 May 2009

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Act 1
Scene 1 and only

Three women sitting on a park bench. On one side is the WOMAN READING A BOOK, in the middle is the OLD TALKATIVE WOMAN and on the other side is the WOMAN FILING HER NAILS. The old talkative woman is nattering on and on while the other two mainly look annoyed and don't pay much attention.

OLD TALKATIVE WOMAN

Save, save, save, that's what I say, turn down the lights, shorten the day, you can never have too much money in the bank, never have too much money in the bank ...

The other two nod and murmur
"yes", "quite right" etc.

OLD TALKATIVE WOMAN (CONT'D)

Stocks and shares, bricks and mortar. Nuts are a good investment, acorns especially.

WOMAN READING A BOOK

(peers over her glasses and looks surprised)

Acorns?!

OLD TALKATIVE WOMAN

Yes, nuts, acorns. Squirrels think so, anyway. Not too much light, you know, light is hard on the eyes and makes it hard to sleep. Turn down the light, shorten the day, sleep, get as much sleep as you can, twenty four hours a day is best...

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

(laconically, not looking up)

Bit too much, actually.

OLD TALKATIVE WOMAN

Well, rattlesnakes think so, and some kinds of bears, and they've been around much longer than you and they ought to know ...

At this juncture the GIRL IN
A GREEN HAT comes breezing
in.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT
(to talkative woman)

Oh, hello, haven't you gone yet?

OLD TALKATIVE WOMAN

Oh, you're here already? Don't worry, I was just going.

She gets up and shuffles off,
coughing into her fist. The
girl in a green hat sits down
between the other two.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

Well, what was that all about?

WOMAN READING A BOOK

I've no idea, and frankly, I don't want to know.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

Absolute nutcase!

WOMAN READING A BOOK

(clearing her throat loudly)

Er hem, do you mind, I'm trying to read a book.

There is a short pause while
the two women go on with
their reading and filing, and
the girl in the green hat
swings her legs impatiently
and looks around her as if
totally amazed at everything
she's seeing. Then she looks
at the two women on either
side of her as though

plucking up her courage to
speak.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

I want to have a baby!

The other two women look at
her with a rather bemused
expression, the woman with
the book looks over her
glasses like a schoolmarm,
then turns her eyes back to
the book.

WOMAN READING A BOOK

(sarcastically)

You don't say. Well, don't let me stop you.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

A little boy, or a little girl!

WOMAN READING A BOOK

(sarcastically)

Well, they usually are one or the other.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Or twins, even, I wouldn't mind twins.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

Good for you, dear.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Or even . . . triplets!!

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

You want to be careful you don't get octopuses.

WOMAN READING A BOOK

Octuplets is what you mean, an octopus lives in the sea and
has tentacles and a beak.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

Oh yes. You don't want an octopus.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

You can't get octopuses if you do it naturally.

WOMAN READING A BOOK

Well, these days I think you'll find what's *natural* is a hard thing to define.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Well, I think you'll find it's not so hard at all. Anyway, I know what's natural.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

What does your husband think?

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

My husband?

WOMAN READING A BOOK

You do have one, I suppose?

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Of course not. How could I have a husband? I'm the last person in the world who could ever get married. I'm the very antithesis of all that.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

So, how are you going to have a baby?

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Well, I'll just go out and grab a man and say, come on mate, stick it to me, I want a baby. I mean, I'm not that bad looking am I, it shouldn't be hard, complete stranger, I don't know him from Adam and he doesn't know me from Eve.

WOMAN READING A BOOK

Have you any idea how irresponsible that sounds?

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

With a complete stranger, I mean, he might be a lunatic, or a rapist or something, come on!

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

(*dreamily*)

I always know who they are, I can see right into their souls, they all secretly want to father bastards. So I can just pick one, what a luxury! Just think, I could find a scientist with an IQ of 180 and have a little genius, or I could go and find a labourer with a tanned skin and muscles whose sweat smells like honey and give birth to a little boxer, or I could find a musician or an artist and have a

little Mozart or Picasso, it's just a shame one can only have one father at a time.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

Seems like this park bench is a magnet for nutters. First it's financial advice for squirrels and bears, now this one's planning an orgy. Do you mind if I ask you, are your parents alive? What do they think about this?

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Oh, they don't care, they invented lunacy. They get a fat royalty on every mad impulsive act.

WOMAN READING A BOOK

Well, as for who you pick to father your brat, I really couldn't care less, but don't you think it's rather irresponsible to be talking about bringing more people into the world at this juncture in history?

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Who cares about history - I want to have a baby!

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

Have you thought about school fees, medical insurance, the cost of prams and baby clothes, have you thought about the hours you'll spend washing nappies, being woken at midnight night after night, teething pains, kindergarten, about taking it to school, about examinations, drug abuse, the high cost of sports shoes and teenage pregnancies.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

I don't give a toss, all that happens afterwards. I just want a baby!

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

You're nuts, frankly.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Look around you, where there were black twigs, there are sticky buds, bursting at the joins with little panes of velvet where the petals hustle to be free. Where there was ice peaty water runs like maiden piss, every duck has a tribe of ducklings, cats purr up from baskets full of kitties and bitches dangle baggy teats around the streets - I want a baby!

I don't care about school fees and medical insurance and prams and baby clothes and schools and the high cost of Barbie dolls, I just want a baby. Sod the rest.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

Oh God, you're making me broody now.

WOMAN READING A BOOK

(snapping shut her book and getting annoyed)

Have you considered what sort of a world you would be bringing this baby into? Do you ever actually open your eyes and look around you? Do you?

The Earth's population is now over six billion. If the Catholics have their way, by the end of the century it will be nine billion, no doubt.

The next fifty years will be cataclysmic. There will be serious shortages of food and water, there will be increasingly destructive territorial wars, and it's quite possible that there will be epidemics. I am already an adult, but your child, your child will have to live in this mess, can you really inflict this on another person?

Is this really a responsible way to act?

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

That's a bit over the top, isn't it? The poor girl only wants *one* baby, not three billion, it's natural, isn't it?

WOMAN READING A BOOK

Oh, so now we know what's *natural*, do we?

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

I've seen all manner of destruction in my time. Why should I let death and destruction yet to come deter me?

Yes, the future does look black. Yes, maybe there will be sorrow and hardship for my baby. But do you really think the human race will disappear?

WOMAN READING A BOOK

Lots of species have. And plenty more are going to.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

Might not be such a bad thing if it did, frankly.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

No, it might not at that. But it's finally not up to humans to decide. Yes, probably the world will change in ways we can't imagine, but there will always be *some* humans. And for there to be humans there must be babies. We must offer our babies to the future, even though we know it may be terrible for them, we cannot throw away our genes and block the very fountainhead of life.

WOMAN READING A BOOK

(looking a bit more interested)

Well, I suppose you may have a point there.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

A baby is the most fragile thing in the world, isn't it. Without its mother it can't live two days. Without blankets it will freeze, without shade from the sun its tender eyes will be blinded. But a baby is also the most perfect, the most undamaged, the most passionate thing in the world, the strongest thing in the world. Every baby is a new hope, a new variation on our tired old theme.

I want a baby! But I will prepare my baby for what lies ahead, I won't feed him with lies and conventions, I won't teach him greed and deceit. I will teach him or her that life is an incomprehensible gift and that being on Earth is the greatest fortune anyone can possess.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

Might want to send her on a shorthand course or something, though, in case she has to pay the rent.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

That's NOT my department! I do believe, though, that despite everything, one day my child will thank me. And if things come to the worst, isn't it better to have blinked in the sun for one day or even one hour than never to have lived at all?

WOMAN READING A BOOK

Oh, God. Now you've got me feeling broody too.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Just imagine it, you're lying there, feeling exhausted but more elated than you ever have before, they bring this tiny little squealing thing and lay it on your breast and it

looks at you with its soft little eyes and takes your swollen nipple between its gums and ...(*sighs*)

Starts to suck and suck and suck and its little eyes fix on your face and a trickle of milk runs down its tiny little chin ...

Oh *can't I tempt you!*

WOMAN WITH A BOOK

(*groans and rocks as though in pain*)

Oh, God, now I really do want a baby. Look what you've done, and I don't even have a man. Oh, God!

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

(*impatiently*)

Oh, just go out and grab one, they're all over the place.

They're all *much* the same, you know!

The two other women are now sitting there looking rather dazed, no longer filing and no longer reading. The girl in the green hat gets up to go.

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Well, ladies, I must love you and leave you, I've got some procreation to do.

WOMAN FILING HER NAILS

Who are you?

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

You know perfectly well who I am.

WOMAN READING A BOOK

Do you come here often?

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Every year at about the same time. I kick out that old bird who goes on about nuts and daylight saving time or whatever it is.

WOMAN READING A BOOK

What's your name?

GIRL IN A GREEN HAT

Spring. Nice to meet you, ladies.

She goes.

THE BASKET

First performance
Penghao Theatre (Beijing) 15 May 2009

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jO0bvfgmFks>

ACT I
Scene 1

A small room with a desk, a few things scattered around. A young man (Mark) sits quietly at the desk, seemingly looking into space. After a short pause, there is the sound of a key in the lock and two middle-aged people come in carrying a large suitcase, Mark's parents, Jack and Debbie. As they come through the door they seem unaware at first of Mark's presence, but after Jack closes the door they look over towards him and see him. They appear surprised. Mark doesn't seem surprised at all.

MARK

Don't you usually knock before you come in?

JACK

I, er, we didn't think you'd be here. That is, we thought you'd be here, but ...

Mark says nothing. Jack and Debbie look at each other as though non-plussed.

JACK (CONT.)

It's good to see you.

MARK

Sure.

JACK

No, really. I, I know we haven't been good parents.

MARK

Well, who am I to judge. Not exactly a family man myself.

DEBBIE

No, we haven't. But we finally came. We came all this way.

JACK

It's been a long flight.

MARK

Of course. Can I get you anything? Nescaff, tea, a drop of filial piety?

JACK

Tea? I'd love a cup of tea.

MARK

You'll have to make it yourself, I'm, how shall I put this, a bit immobile myself.

Debbie goes O/S and roots
around

DEBBIE

There's nescaff, and powdered milk, and some of that Chinese tea.

JACK

I'll have nescaff.

(to Mark)

You want a cup?

No answer. He doesn't want a cup.

Mark remains impassive
throughout this.

JACK

We had to get emergency visas. Your mother didn't want to come at first, but I talked her into it.

MARK

Must be the first time you ever talked her into anything.

JACK

Probably is, probably is. I had a strong case, though, you must admit. Then we got held up at the airport because of the snow.

MARK

Snow? Is there snow?

JACK

Yes, coming down thick and fast. Go out and have a look.

MARK

I wish I could.

A few moments of silence.

MARK (CONT.)

I have the feeling that any minute now you're going to tell me what this is about?

JACK

Don't you know? We've come to take you home.

MARK

(shifting uneasily)

What if I don't want to go?

JACK

I don't think you've got much say in the matter, under the circumstances.

MARK

(uneasy)

Circumstances? What circumstances?

Debbie comes back in bringing
three cups of coffee

DEBBIE

Here we are. I made one for Mark just in case.

She puts one cup on the table
next to Mark, who looks
askance at it, and gives the
other cup to Jack.

(to Mark)

I know you don't always say what you want.

MARK

Must be funny for you two to travel together, after all these years.

JACK

Funny's not the word. Like old times, really.

DEBBIE

Old times? When did we ever travel?

JACK

Well, we didn't travel a lot, but, I mean, being together, that's like old times.

DEBBIE

When you were small, we used to carry you around in a basket.

JACK

(laughs)

That's right, people used to look in it expecting shopping, and there was a little baby, fast asleep!

MARK

Sometimes I wonder why you had me, I mean, you make me sound like a toy or something.

JACK

Maybe you were, I mean, what's a baby but a woman's toy?

DEBBIE

Jack! What a ridiculous thing to say!

JACK

We were so young. When you're at school you look at your parents and think they're so grown up, but when you get to our age, you look at those young parents and you think, they're just children. We were just children when we had you, we didn't know what we were doing.

DEBBIE

Speak for yourself, I knew what I was doing!

MARK

So you knew you were going to split up with him, even when you had me?

DEBBIE

No, of course not, I don't mean that.

MARK

Then you didn't know what you were doing.

DEBBIE

What do you want me to say, that I'm sorry I gave birth to you?

MARK

Well, are you? A bit of truth wouldn't hurt.

JACK

Now come on, Mark, no need to be like that.

MARK

What do you mean *like that*? Can't we be truthful with each other, even after all these years? How pathetic is that!

JACK

Perhaps what your mother means is that it's not fair to ask a woman to be logical about anything she does.

DEBBIE

(scoffs)

That's a typical male chauvinist remark!

MARK

Well, I must admit, logic doesn't seem to come into it where women are concerned. But I still want to know, why did you have me? Why have a child if you didn't plan to stay together?

JACK

It seemed right at the time. It wasn't planned. Some things just happen.

DEBBIE

Huh, it didn't seem right to you, I seem to remember. You were in denial about it right up until he was born.

JACK

It's hard for a man, becoming a father is scary for a man.

MARK

What's scary about it?

JACK

It's a big responsibility.

MARK

You don't seem to have taken that responsibility very seriously.

JACK

But, I felt quite different when you were born. It was a sunny day and your mother was in a ward which opened onto a garden with a lawn and a honeysuckle bush. Your little face was folded like a rosebud. I suddenly felt like a tree that had grown another branch, I felt strong and ready for anything.

DEBBIE

You were such a good baby, a calm baby, a clever baby, you hardly ever woke us in the night. Until you were two, that was when the problems started.

MARK

(to Jack)

That was after you left, wasn't it?

JACK

Yes.

DEBBIE

Do you remember that? You were so small.

MARK

Not really.

JACK

A couple of weeks before your second birthday I was sitting in the garden one evening and the mist cleared and I knew I had to go. I started to weep. You came out and saw my tears and you were so concerned, you comforted me, even though you couldn't speak, you knew something was happening, you knew I was sad.

MARK

(coldly)

How very touching.

JACK

Well, how much do you remember?

MARK

I remember the wedding, vaguely, and Ted getting drunk and falling about, and I remember Julia being born and all the fuss about that, and feeling that I wasn't really a part of the family any more.

DEBBIE

Oh, Mark, that's terrible.

MARK

And I knew that Ted didn't like me, I remember being clear about that very early on.

DEBBIE

Ted tried his best, he was very good to you. But you were such different characters. You always took after him.

(nods towards Jack)

JACK

I thought the best thing was to step aside and let Ted take over the fathering, I thought it would be confusing for you to have two fathers pulling in different directions.

MARK

So you talked it over together did you, like an extended family council?

JACK

Well, I suppose if you put it like that, yes, we did.

DEBBIE

We were trying to find the best solution in a difficult situation.

JACK

We never realized what an effect being adopted by Ted would have on you.

MARK

So what effect did it have on me? Perhaps I'm not the best person to judge.

DEBBIE

(looks at Jack)

Well, er, you never seemed to settle down, never had a job for more than a few months, never had a steady girl friend.

MARK

Is that the only criterion, then, of a life? Job, earnings, girlfriend, wife? I seem to remember that you two slumped around a bit in your youth.

JACK

That's right. He's right, Deb, we did. I don't know why you always got so anxious about it, he seemed to be having a good time in China, learning some new skills, languages, martial arts.

DEBBIE

Fat lot of use those are when it comes to making a living.

JACK

And he's had a few girl friends, haven't you Mark?

DEBBIE

None of them seemed very serious to me.

MARK

Well, you two hardly set me a good example did you?

DEBBIE

I think Ted set you a good example.

MARK

I could never figure out what made you and Ted tick, though, it seemed to me you were the trophy wife and he was the wounded lion. I was the thorn in his paw - the trophy wife came with a bastard son attached, he could never get over it.

DEBBIE

That's not fair. Ted made a huge effort with you, and he spent a lot of money on raising you and sending you to a good school.

MARK

Well, the money was there and I was his kid. Is childhood a restaurant? Do your kids leave with a bill?

DEBBIE

He worked hard for that money.

MARK

He wanted to work, and in those days money was a lot easier to earn than it is now.

DEBBIE

Well, you won't earn much money by teaching English in China, that's for sure.

MARK

In fact I realized early on that it didn't much matter what I did, I'd never have enough money to own a house in England unless I devoted my whole life to money and cut out everything else. What would be the point?

DEBBIE

Well, what did you want to do, then?

MARK

You know what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a musician.

DEBBIE

Well, you'd never have earned any money doing that.

MARK

How do you know?

JACK

I can see your point, Mark. I think it's really hard for young people now. When we were young we could take a few years off to experiment, you could buy little tumbledown houses cheap, nobody was afraid they wouldn't have at least some sort of roof over their head.

MARK

That's right. You don't know how lucky you were.

JACK

Young people now come into a world of which every inch is already owned by their parents. England may be a rich country, but all the wealth belongs to the old. Our kids are born poor and we have no means for sharing the wealth with them. We can't even give them the basic freedoms that we had, like free university education; as soon as they graduate they're already saddled with debt.

DEBBIE

Well, they have to adapt to the way things are. Lots of them do.

JACK

But some of them can't.

DEBBIE

I suppose so.

JACK

And then this happens.

DEBBIE

I suppose so.

JACK

They die.

MARK

Wait a minute, what are you saying?

JACK

You died, Mark.

MARK

Died?

JACK

Yes, didn't you know?

MARK

No!

JACK

That's why we came. To take you home.

MARK

So what am I then?

JACK

A box of ash.

MARK

No wonder. No wonder I feel like smoke; no wonder my anger is fading; so it's all over then, no more disappointment, no more pain, this is all I'll ever be! That's that. I can go! Fine, that's fine, that's great!

JACK

No, Mark, it's not great. It's not so great for us.

MARK

Well, I'm sorry. It wasn't planned. Some things just happen.

JACK

(to Debbie)

Let's go then. Have you got the basket?

DEBBIE

Yes.

She opens the suitcase and takes out a long basket (should be big enough that a small baby could be carried in it)

Funny, I kept this basket all these years but it never occurred to me you would ever fit in it again. Come on, my love, my good baby.

They pick up a box from somewhere behind where Mark is sitting immobile, put it in the basket, and leave.

THE WELL

By

E Ross-Levy

First performed at the Penghao Theatre Beijing 2009

An old well in the center of the stage, Two people come on.

Well, here it is. P1

What? P2

Didn't I just tell you? P1

Did you? P2

Well, didn't I? P1

Not that I'm aware of. P2

Well. P1

Well, what? P2

Well. Just, well. P1

Oh, I see, it's a well! Of course it is, it's a well! P2

Well done! P1

What's it for? P2

What do you think? P1

I dunno. Is it an oil well? P2

What do you think! P1

Is it for wishing? P2

No, you fool, of course it's not for wishing. You don't dig wells for wishing! P1

Why not? P2

Because. Because, if you started to dig a well for wishing, then the first thing you'd think was *God I wish I didn't* P1

have to dig this well and then you'd stop and your well would never be dug and your wish would already be true.

Wouldn't it?

P2

I suppose.

P1

(scornfully)

You suppose!

P2

So, you can't use it for wishing, then?

P1

Oh yes. Of course, you can *use* it for wishing.

P2

You can!

P1

Oh yes. It's not *for* wishing, but you can *use* it for wishing. You can use any well for wishing, as a matter of fact.

P2

(looks down the well)

Oh!

So how would I use it to make a wish?

P1

Well, to make a wish you'd have to throw something down it.

P2

Like what?

P1

Well, that depends on what you wanted to wish for. If it was something abstract, like love or world peace, you'd probably have to throw a penny or something like that. But if it was something selfish like winning the lottery or finding a Picasso in your auntie's garage, then you'd have to throw a bit more down it, I'd say a pound maybe, would do.

P2

What if it was, say, the end of all suffering and pain?

P1

Well, then, you'd have to throw yourself down it, sure that would do the trick.

P2

I see.

A long pause while P2
stares down the well.

P2

You know ...

You know, I think there's water in it.

P1

Probably.

P2

How did that get in there?

P1

It was probably in there already.

P2

Already?

P1

Yes, already.

P2

You mean, already before the well was dug?

P1

Precisely.

P2

You know ...

You know I think I can see my reflection in it!

P1

Are you sure? Are you sure it's not a frog?

P2

Do I look like a frog?

P1

Well, it's not for me to say.

P2

Well, you know, I don't think it's a frog.

They say if you can see your reflection that means your sins are forgiven.

P1

I doubt that. I very much doubt that sins are ever forgiven.

P2

They are too, your sins are forgiven, if you ask God nicely he'll forgive you your sins.

P1
Well, he might, but I won't.

P2
You won't! So what do you have that God doesn't have?

P1
Well, you, for a start, here by this well.

P2
But if God will forgive me, why wouldn't you?

P1
Well, I might not. I might not, and then your sins would not be forgiven.

P2
What sins, anyway? Do you even know about my sins?

P1
Oh, I know, alright. Do you remember that year when we were at ...

P2
At ...

P1
Precisely, and you said you'd never ...

P2
I said I'd never ...

P1
Precisely. And you did.

P2
Oh. I did so.

P1
Precisely.

P2
Only once.

P1
Once was enough.

P2
No it wasn't.

P1
Once was enough for me.

P2
You're going down this well!

P1
No, please!

P2
Yes you are, headfirst.

P1
No please.

P2
Oh, yes.

Can I go feet first, please, can I go feet first?

P1

No.

P2 looks down the well,
appalled. Then he/she
suddenly produces a coin
and throws it down the
well.

P2

I wish I could go feet first.

P1

Well, go on then.

P2

What?

P1

Jump. Take the matter into your own hands, if you want to
go down feet first, just jump. Nobody's stopping you.

P2

I'd have to be mad to jump down there!

P1

You'd have to be mad to let me throw you down headfirst.

P2

What makes you think you can?

P1

Oh, I *know* I can!

P2

How so?

P1

I've been practicing.

P2

Practicing?

P1

Quite so. First I threw a mouse down. That wasn't hard.
Then I threw a rat. That was a bit harder because the rat
wasn't a bit pleased. Then I worked my way up through a
cat, a dog, a billygoat, a small palomino, and yesterday I
threw a cow down there. With one hand I threw a cow.

P2

(a bit scared)

Really??

P1

Oh yes. And all headfirst, every one of them. And do you
know what that cow said when I threw her down the well?

P2

No, what did she say?

P1

Moo.

P2

Aw Jesus, this is terrible. Is there anything I can do? Is there anything I can do to stop you throwing me down that well?

P1

No.

P2

Would you accept compensation? Would you accept a payment in compensation?

Struggles in pockets,
produces a small amount
of money.

Here. Here's all I have.

P1

(leans over and peers carefully at the money)

No.

P2

Please, please, there must be something I can do.

P1

Well, there is one thing.

P2

What!

P1

You can throw yourself headfirst down that well.

Indicates the well and
waits expectantly,
naturally nothing
happens.

No. I thought so. Know what you are? You're all mouth.

P2

You know what, so are you. You're all mouth. You're bullshitting me.

P1

How so?

P2

There's no cow down there. I just looked down there and I didn't see a cow.

P1

The cow is under water. The cow is now a submarine cow.

P2

How can the water be that deep? I'd surely see at least a hoof, at least a pair of horns?

P1

Some wells are deep. Some wells are very deep. Some wells are deeper than the thoughts of Parmenides. Some wells go right to the centre of the Earth. And most of the way it's water.

P2

And what's in the centre of the Earth?

P1

Well ...

P2

I mean, besides a mouse, a rat, a dog, a cat, a billygoat, a small palomino and a cow?

P1

I don't know.

P2

So, if you threw me down there, I could very soon wind up knowing more than you do!

They both eye the well with renewed interest. After a short pause they both make a dash for the well. There is a struggle, P2 prevails and throws P1 to the ground and leaps into the well and disappears. P1 seems to be momentarily stunned, then gets up and returns to the well. Just as he/she is about to peer over the edge, P2 suddenly stands up.

My feet touched the bottom already.

P1

Oh.

P2

There's no cow there.

P1

Oh.

No billygoat either. P2

Oh. P1

And you were bullshitting me. P2

Oh. P1

Don't oh, oh, oh, just admit it, you were bullshitting me. P2

(sarcastically) P1

Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh! P2

And what exactly did I do anyway? That can't be forgiven? P1

I forget. P2

No, no, come on, out with it, after all that you forget, is that it? How pathetic is that? P1

Well, I'm not the historian of your sins now, am I? Record your own sins, why don't you? P2

Well, alright then. I once, one Christmas, stole a peanut from the table without asking my father's permission. P1

Really. P2

Yes, and you know what? You know what? I was so horrified by what I had done that I went to become a monk (nun)! P1

Well you can't be a monk (nun) because you're a woman (man). P2

So that's why they turned me down. And I thought it was the theft of a small nut.

Come on, help me out will you? P1

Okay. P1 takes P2's hand and helps P2 out of the hole.

Hey, wait a minute, there's something in here. P2

P1

What?

P2 reaches into the well
and produces what looks
like a painting (by
Picasso)

P2

What is it?

P1

Looks like a Picasso.

P2

Well *that* was lucky!

P1

It's our lucky day!

P2

Well done.

P1

Really well done!

P2

Well really done!

They leave, dragging the
painting behind them

RAINBOW CARP

By
Ben Thompson

November 2010

CHARACTERS

Ted Bream (White male aged 40 - 60)
Sheila Spratt (White female aged 25-35)

Both English

Waitress
Chinese

First performance in January 2011 at the "Fish out of Water" festival, Peng Hao Theatre, Beijing.

Ted: Daniel Cotterill
Sheila: Liz Ashford
Waitress: Lavender Zhao

*To the memory of Joseph Bosco
1948-2010*



**Foure gleedes han we, which I shal devyse --
Avauntyng, liyng, anger, coveitise;
Thise foure sparkles longen unto eelde.**

Geoffrey Chaucer

A restaurant. A table. This scene might open with a tape recording of a noisy restaurant, lots of clashing of knives and forks, people yelling for the waitress etc. Then lights up on - Ted (white male aged 40-60) sits at the table drinking tea, reading a book and eating a big plate of peanuts. Sheila (white female aged 25-30) comes in, looks around nervously, lost. A waitress rushes over.

几位?
WAITRESS

What?
SHEILA

一位?
WAITRESS

Sorry?
SHEILA

How many ... person?
WAITRESS
(with difficulty)

Oh, one.
SHEILA

While this dialogue is going on, Ted becomes aware of Sheila and puts down his book and stares at the pair of them. The waitress looks around, sees that there is a place at Ted's table and ushers Sheila over to it. Sheila stands politely and asks Ted's permission.

SHEILA
Is anyone sitting here?

TED
Sprechen Die Deutsch?

SHEILA
Nein, entschuldigen.

TED
Nah, me neither. Have a seat.

SHEILA
Danke, er, thank you.

Ted picks up his book and starts reading again. The waitress goes away to get a menu. Sheila watches Ted picking up peanuts with his chopsticks. After he's eaten three or four she clears her throat and speaks.

SHEILA
Ahem, you're English?

TED
(not looking up)
Yes.

SHEILA
Are those peanuts?

TED
(not looking up)
Yes

(he looks up enquiringly)

Would you like ...

SHEILA
Oh, no, no, I didn't mean ...

TED

Oh, I insist ...

(a beat)

Have one.

He picks up one peanut and puts it on a saucer in front of Sheila and goes back to his book. Sheila stares at the solitary peanut an amazement while Ted eats quite a few more peanuts himself. After a while she can't bear it any longer and she speaks.

SHEILA

You know ...

TED

(patiently, not looking up)

Yes?

SHEILA

I saw this cartoon once, in Punch, I think it was, there were four people sitting bolt upright around a tree, each staring grimly into space, and the caption said, *four English people in a foreign country who have not been introduced.*

Ted puts down his book and stares at her for a moment. Then he closes the book.

TED

I'm frightfully sorry, Ted, Ted Bream.

SHEILA

Sheila Spratt.

Sheila holds out her hand to shake hands, but Ted stands up. She looks at him for a moment, then stands up

herself and puts out her hand
just as he sits down.

TED

(laughs nervously)

Hah, anyway we can't shake hands, can we, we're both fish!

I'm sorry I wasn't more welcoming just now, just that I
tend not to speak to nubile young western girls in case
they think I'm trying to pick them up.

SHEILA

Oh. Nubile am I?

TED

I think that's indisputable.

SHEILA

But you don't even know me!

TED

One doesn't have to know someone to observe that they are
nubile.

SHEILA

Anyway, I might be trying to pick you up.

TED

That's different, I'm a man.

(stands up)

Shall I call a taxi? Your place or mine?

SHEILA

No, no, sit down, everyone's looking at us!

TED

Oh, don't worry, they don't understand a word. Anyway they
think all foreigners fuck like rabbits. Really they do.

(he sits and picks up his book again)

The waitress comes back with
a menu and an order pad and
stands tapping her pencil on
the order pad, looking around

impatiently at the other customers. Sheila picks up the all-Chinese menu and her face drops.

SHEILA

Er, excuse me. . .

Ted puts down his book and looks at her.

SHEILA

I'm sorry, I, er, I just arrived in China, could you suggest something that I might eat, I mean, other than dog?

TED

Cat?

SHEILA

All right, other than dog or cat or ... you know, please!!

TED

Sure, what do you like, meat, fish? Do you like spicy stuff?

SHEILA

Fish sounds good. Not too spicy.

TED

How about steamed fish then?

SHEILA

What kind of fish is it?

TED

(looks at the menu)

How about this? Some kind of carp, buffalo carp? Rainbow carp?

SHEILA

I'll give that a try. Will it have vegetables with it?

TED

No, but you could order some.

(points to something on the menu)

SHEILA

Ok.

Ted gives an order to the waitress, including rice, the waitress goes off.

SHEILA

Thanks a lot.

She smiles. Ted is getting more interested now since she has broken the ice. He closes his book.

TED

Just got here, you say?

SHEILA

Yes.

TED

Here to work?

SHEILA

I've no idea.

TED

Oh? Here with no idea? That sounds good.

SHEILA

I just had a brainstorm. I had a brainstorm one day and thought I can't stand this any more and I ... just left.

TED

Brave girl.

SHEILA

I'm not a girl.

TED

Oh. I think my eyes need testing. You're not one of those unisex people are you, a transformer, I mean, trans ... trans ...

SHEILA

I mean, I'm not a girl, I'm a *woman*.

TED

Oh, sorry. That was rude of me. Tell you what, you can call me a boy, if you like, then we'll be even.

(awkward pause)

Why come to China?

SHEILA

I don't know really, I just wanted something completely different, anything completely different.

My original plan was to go to Ireland and buy a house with three acres of land.

TED

What changed your mind?

SHEILA

My mother said *what do you want three acres of land for, everything in your window-box is dead.*

So then I realised, that wasn't a plan really, I needed somewhere with people.

TED

Well, you've come to the right place, then. One thing that's not in short supply here is people.

SHEILA

Anyway, I'm not really cut out to be a hermit.

TED

You can be a hermit here, why not? Old Chinese saying, *the minor hermit hides in the woods, the great hermit hides in the city.*

SHEILA

That's good. That's brilliant! Do you speak Chinese, then?

TED

Of course. Been here for ten years.

SHEILA

So how did you get here?

TED

Same way as you really, woke up one day and realised the ship was sinking and left.

SHEILA

Huh. Like me, like a rat, rats leave a sinking ship, don't they?

TED

What kind of animal stays on one?

The waitress comes back on carrying a plastic bag in which a live fish is struggling (might be able to use an electric toy or something to make the bag move)

SHEILA

(shocked)

Oh!

Oh my God, what's that!

TED

That's your dinner, don't you want to interview it?

SHEILA

(covering her eyes with her hands)

No, no thanks. Oh! I don't like my dinner staring at me!

Ted mutters to the waitress that the fish is ok and the girl goes off.

SHEILA

Do they always do that?

TED

Yes. They don't like being out of the water.

SHEILA

No, I mean do they always bring your dinner to be interviewed?

TED

Yes.

SHEILA

I'll remember not to order beef, then.

TED

Don't worry, they won't bring a cow to your table.

SHEILA

Well that's a relief.

TED

Nothing bigger than a crocodile.

SHEILA

What?

TED

Actually that's one thing I've never seen on the menu here, crocodile.

SHEILA

Well, thank goodness for that!

TED

I had a crocodile sandwich once, though, in Brighton.

SHEILA

(a slight pause)

Weren't you afraid?

TED

No, it wasn't a whole crocodile, just a few bits that had been put through a mincer, it was well and truly ...

SHEILA

(interrupts)

No, I mean weren't you afraid just leaving everything behind? I was.

TED

I try to keep my fear in perspective. My uncle was a spy in the last war. Caught in France and and shot by the Nazis. Every time I find myself chickening out of a hard decision I remind myself what those people went through. It puts my problems in perspective.

SHEILA

I know, I do something like that too, I look to my heroes. There have been a few times in my life when I've just needed to jump. They say *look before you leap*, but what happens when you look and all you see is a void?

TED

You still have to leap.

SHEILA

Huh. I don't meet many people like you, people who think like that. What do you do here?

TED

I write.

SHEILA

Write what?

TED

Guidebooks, articles. Things of my own.

SHEILA

What sort of things?

TED

I don't talk about them. Never talk about a thing till it's written, that's my rule.

SHEILA

I'm a writer too.

TED

Oh?

SHEILA

I had a novel out and a book of poems.

TED

Good for you. Which was worse?

SHEILA

What?

TED

I mean, which hurt worse. Labour pains, I mean.

SHEILA

Oh. The poems. The novel was fun.

I think this will be a good place to write.

TED

It is, if you can escape the motor horns. The traffic noise gets worse and worse, I just moved into a hutong to escape from it.

SHEILA

Oh, I'd love to explore the hutongs, but aren't the hutong houses a bit primitive?

TED

Not always, a lot of them have been modernized. Actually the hardest thing is to find a place that hasn't been filled with the landlord's crap furniture, so you can actually make it the way you want it.

SHEILA

Well, that's the trouble with rented places everywhere.

TED

I suppose so. I looked at loads of houses but they were all filled with nasty cheap furniture. There was one place that had two rooms, but they both had enormous beds in so you could hardly creep around the edges of the room.

I thought what use is this place? Suit two opium addicts or a depressed man with a paralyzed wife!

SHEILA

(laughs)

I went into a couple of hutongs yesterday. They seemed so peaceful. Even though the houses were simple and the people looked poor, everyone seemed relaxed. People were eating kebabs and playing cards. It seemed like the old China, a place touched by eternity, a place ... where you could see God blink.

TED

Hah, you definitely should write that!

SHEILA

I spent the whole day just wandering around, the contrasts are amazing, in one place I saw this incredible brand new office building with a marble façade and reflective windows, while I was staring at it a guy with a sooty face rode past on a sort of flat pedal bike loaded with squashed cardboard ... it's so surreal.

TED

I know. A country where people speak in music and write in pictures, where if you want to get out of a building, you look for the sign that says EXIT and then walk in the opposite direction. If China hadn't existed Marcel Duchamp would have had to invent it.

SHEILA

There must be a lot of foreigners here now. China seems to be a hot topic everywhere.

TED

Of course. Foreigners, I can take them or leave them myself.

SHEILA

What do you mean?

TED

Well, when I'm with Chinese people I think foreigners are incredibly weird, but when I'm with foreigners I think Chinese are incredibly weird.

SHEILA

What about when you're alone?

TED

When I'm alone I think everyone's incredibly weird.

Actually, come to think of it though, my best friend is a foreigner. Was a foreigner, I should say.

SHEILA

Was?

TED

Yes, Bill Sorkin, Big Bill I used to call him. Came from Texas, huge bloke, great big pot belly, looked like a turd

sliding down a flagpole, had to do everything bigger than me.

SHEILA

How do you mean bigger?

TED

Well, you know, bigger. Like when I told him I'd done a TV commercial he told me he'd been on Broadway, when I told him I was writing an article, he told me he was writing three books, that sort of thing.

SHEILA

What was he doing in China?

TED

I think he was here for the girls, mostly. He was a committed serial monogamist. Well, I suspect he did a bit of parallel monogamy from time to time also, but that's just what I suspect.

But he died. Just a couple of months ago.

SHEILA

Oh dear, what happened?

TED

Alcoholic poisoning. His housekeeper came in one day and found him dead with an empty whisky bottle. That's the story, anyway.

SHEILA

So, you don't believe them then? Do you think it was suicide?

TED

No, I don't think there's any evidence that he was trying to die, though I don't think there's any evidence that he was trying to live either. I just hope ...

He becomes choked with emotion.

SHEILA

(comfortingly, reaching out and putting her hand on his shoulder)

What?

TED

I just hope for his sake that bottle was a good single malt!

(weeps into his hands)

SHEILA

(patting his shoulder)

Well, never mind, he's out of it now. He can't feel any more pain.

TED

Yes, you're right.

(wiping his eyes with a tissue)

Anyway, he was always like that, always had to be first at everything. Huh, I bet when I get to the other side he'll be playing a harp twice as big as mine.

Do you think they play harps in Hell?

SHEILA

Don't, you're teasing me.

TED

Attagirl!

SHEILA

I'm not a girl!

TED

Well, attawoman then, attawhateveryouare.

He really did die, though.

SHEILA

Oh.

TED

He had a family history of death.

SHEILA

What?

TED

(can hardly contain his chuckles)

A family history of death.

SHEILA

What on Earth does that mean?

TED

I don't know! I saw this article recently about what to do if you have a family history of death.

Oh no, no death in *my* family! My grandpa still lives with my great-grandpa and Methuselah lives in their shed!

(laughs uproariously)

SHEILA

How can you joke about it?

TED

Well, he's out of it now. Far from home and in his cups, as good a way to go as any.

How would you like to die?

SHEILA

Me? I never thought about it.

TED

Well ...

SHEILA

Hush, let me think about it, I want to think about it.

(about half a minute's silence)

Yes, that's it. I had a friend whose father died under his favourite tree, he just went out and lay down under his favourite tree and went to sleep like an old cat in a catnip bush. That's how I'd like to go. How about you?

TED

In a plane crash. Definitely in a plane crash.

SHEILA

What?? Why!!

TED

Just think about it, just think how exciting it'd be, *[make a noise like an airplane going down EEEEEARNGH]* flames

everywhere, clouds of smoke, all those smart people in suits who earn ten times as much as you and look down their noses at you throwing up their hands and screaming *I've wasted my life!!* While you're sitting there thinking, well, I rather enjoyed mine thanks very much.

SHEILA

This conversation is getting too morbid! Can we talk about something else please?

TED

Ah, here comes the food.

The waitress comes on with two dishes, one is steamed fish and the other a prawn dish. She sets the dishes down.

TED

Do you want something to drink? Beer? Tea?

SHEILA

Do they have tea?

TED

Do they have tea? They have all the tea in China!

He orders tea and asks for rice to be brought.

They start to sample their dishes. Sheila has some trouble with the chopsticks and Ted gives her a brief lesson in how to hold them.

SHEILA

So how do you find work? I mean, for example if I wanted to find a teaching job or something.

TED

There's a website called *thebeijinger*, everyone uses it, lots of small ads, jobs, lonelyhearts, and a forum where you can get basic information about visas and housing and stuff.

SHEILA

That sounds useful.

TED

The forum? It used to be, but then it got taken over by morons who just wanted to post vile thread after vile thread about seducing Chinese girls so they took it off the homepage and hardly anyone looks at it now.

SHEILA

No, I mean the small ads.

TED

Oh sure, the small ads are useful. Lots of shop till you drop type ads for foreigners, people selling "dinning tables", whatever they are, Chinese girls looking for foreign husbands and foreign boys looking for no strings fun with Chinese girls.

SHEILA

Hah. I bet the Chinese readers don't like that!

TED

What amazes me is that the penny never seems to drop, the girls never seem to realize that the boys won't give them what they want and the boys vice versa. I suppose they must find middle ground sometimes or why would they keep doing it?

SHEILA

And what about those vile forum threads you were talking about, vile in what way?

TED

Well, apart from the foul language, which would never get past the mods on any English forum, it's the total bland assurance of half-educated berks who can't even write a proper sentence in their own language that their way of doing things is unquestionably better and more advanced than the Chinese way.

I mean, you'd think that from time to time one of them would look over his shoulder and notice that his own culture is going up in flames!

SHEILA

That's a dramatic image. You should write about that!

TED

Before I came to China I had a Chinese qigong teacher. He once made a comment I'll never forget, he said, *lots of westerners stink in their hearts.*

(He waves his hands in front of his nose as though waving away a smelly fart)

I never knew what he meant until I came to China, because as a foreigner I have the opposite experience. I experience people whose hearts don't stink. Often they're as poor as church mice, but somehow, and I don't know how to explain this, they're just inwardly clean.

And it frightens me.

SHEILA

Frightens you?

TED

Yes, it scares the shit out of me.

SHEILA

Why?

TED

Because it makes me think of England, and it makes me realise that we're all fucked over there. Totally fucked!

(A moment of silence)

SHEILA

Where's the bathroom?

TED

You're going to take a bath? Now?

Sheila spots the sign, casts a scornful glance at Ted and leaves the table, goes offstage.

The waitress comes back on with a pot of tea. Ted watches her go off and come back with two bowls of rice.

你们是哪国人?
WAITRESS

我们是无国人
TED

什么?
WAITRESS

无国人
TED

无国在哪里? 我没听说过。
WAITRESS

无国就是没有国家的人
TED

什么意思?
WAITRESS

我们的国家坏了。经济，文化都垮了。
TED

先生你这是开玩笑吧!
WAITRESS

是，我是开玩笑。我们是英国人。
TED

英国人。我听说英国人都很绅士。
WAITRESS

不一定，我们还有天下最厉害的流氓。
TED

英国好还是中国好?
WAITRESS

要看你觉得好在哪里?
TED

生活条件好。
WAITRESS

TED

如果你就贪舒服，就想吃喝看电视，那样的话可能英国好。如果你想体会到人类的精髓，中国好。英国现在没有意思，我们都象动物园的动物徘徊徘徊，没什么前途。可是我呢，我不想过那种植物人的日子，人类是天下最有意思的东西，所以我觉得中国是最有意思的地方。

Sheila comes back to the table while he's speaking and sits down.

WAITRESS

听说那边的福利好

TED

是的，可是不是免费。

WAITRESS

是吗？

TED

你在工作的时候纳税百分之四十五

WAITRESS

哦！

LOUD VOICE OFF

服务员！服务员！

The waitress looks over her shoulder, it seems someone is calling her.

WAITRESS

(to the invisible caller)

稍等

(to Ted and Sheila)

慢慢吃

She goes.

TED

I mean, don't get me wrong, there are still people in England I love dearly, but those people always seem to be having the worst time of it.

You'll probably get on better here, as a woman, than you would if you were a man.

SHEILA

How so?

TED

Lots of the men here are just here for the girls. They come to China, discover the girls are sweet and gullible, get a Chinese girlfriend and they're hooked. Before long they've got through the first girl and they're onto girl number two and then they're addicted, they can't stop.

SHEILA

Sounds like nice work if you can get it.

TED

Yes, nice work if you can get it, but that kind of addiction destroys a man.

Moving to the East isn't as simple as just loading your stuff into a van and sticking a Chinese label on it, moving to a completely different culture creates whirlpools in your psyche that can suck you in and destroy you.

SHEILA

Wow, you should definitely write about that!

TED

Still, if you don't go into the tiger's lair you'll never get the tiger's cubs. Old Chinese saying.

SHEILA

Wow, I like that one. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

TED

It fails to mention, though, that if you do go into the tiger's lair you'll probably wind up as lunch.

SHEILA

(laughs uneasily)

TED

You can either try and corrupt China or you can let China purify you. If you try and corrupt her, she will destroy you. You may be too thick to know it's happened, but you'll still be a tiger's lunch.

SHEILA

But I always thought that China was one of the most corrupt countries in the world, corruption in business, corruption in the law, corruption in government, pollution, waste. Maybe you need to take off the rose-tinted spectacles?

TED

That's not what I'm talking about. How can I explain? This thing is hard to explain if you don't see it yourself.

Ok, just this story. Last Christmas I went back to Blighty for a month. I saw my friends and relations, but it was kind of depressing. It's like ... they have everything they need but nobody knows where to go from there, like there's no plan, no future. Anyway, I got through the month in a whiskey haze and then came back to Beijing. Coming back was like coming in out of the cold and getting into a warm bath.

The second day I had to buy a suit to film an advert. I went to a big market and bought the cheapest suit I could find. I took the trousers to a little stall to get them shortened. When I went back to collect them the woman asked for two Yuan or something. I gave her the money and she smiled at me.

But that smile, just a simple smile that doesn't say *buy*, that doesn't invite a sexual advance, that doesn't ask for anything, just gives itself like a flower blooming in the desert offers itself to the sky, is an elemental human thing. In Beijing I get that smile a hundred times a day. In England I just don't see it any more. I remember it from my childhood but I never see it any more.

And that moment, when she smiled, her smile sort of planted itself in my brain and the warmth of it started to spread all through me. And I knew I was back in the East.

We've poisoned our own future, and we don't even realise it. Poison in the air is easy to see, poison in the river, but not poison in the heart.

I say, that fish looks good!

SHEILA

It is. How are your prawns?

TED

Not bad. Tell you what, I'll give you some of my prawns if you'll let me have a taste of your fish.

SHEILA

(laughs)

That sounds like a proposition! So are you trying to pick me up?

TED

Hm, that wasn't my intention, a Freudian slip perhaps?

If it was a proposition, what would you say?

SHEILA

That's a totally unfair question, especially after you've been lecturing me about letting China purify me. I'm afraid I've wandered off into realms of abstraction.

TED

That's a pity, I must curb my tendency to deliver sermons.

SHEILA

You'd make a good preacher, though.

TED

It runs in the family, I have a family history of preachers.

SHEILA

Really!

Anyway, I really do think you're an interesting guy, but if that was a proposition I would probably say no. I'm still jet-lagged and a bit disorientated.

TED

That's not just an excuse, is it?

SHEILA

Probably, why, won't it do?

TED

(laughs)

Of course, my dear. I'm English, I'm a gentleman. But leave a phone number, no, better still, take my card. Get in

touch if you need any help, or ... if you'd just like to have dinner and chat.

He gives her his card and calls to the waitress.

结账

The waitress comes over and he settles the bill.

What's the damage? SHEILA

I'll get it. TED

No, really! SHEILA

Next time. TED

Okay then, that's a promise. SHEILA

Call me. TED

I will. SHEILA

I'll walk you to the underground. TED

The two of them get up to leave. As they get to the door, Sheila has a sudden thought.

Oh, shouldn't we leave a tip? SHEILA

You don't tip in China, it's a people's republic. TED

WAITRESS

慢走

Ted and Sheila off.