

FIRES OF THE MIND

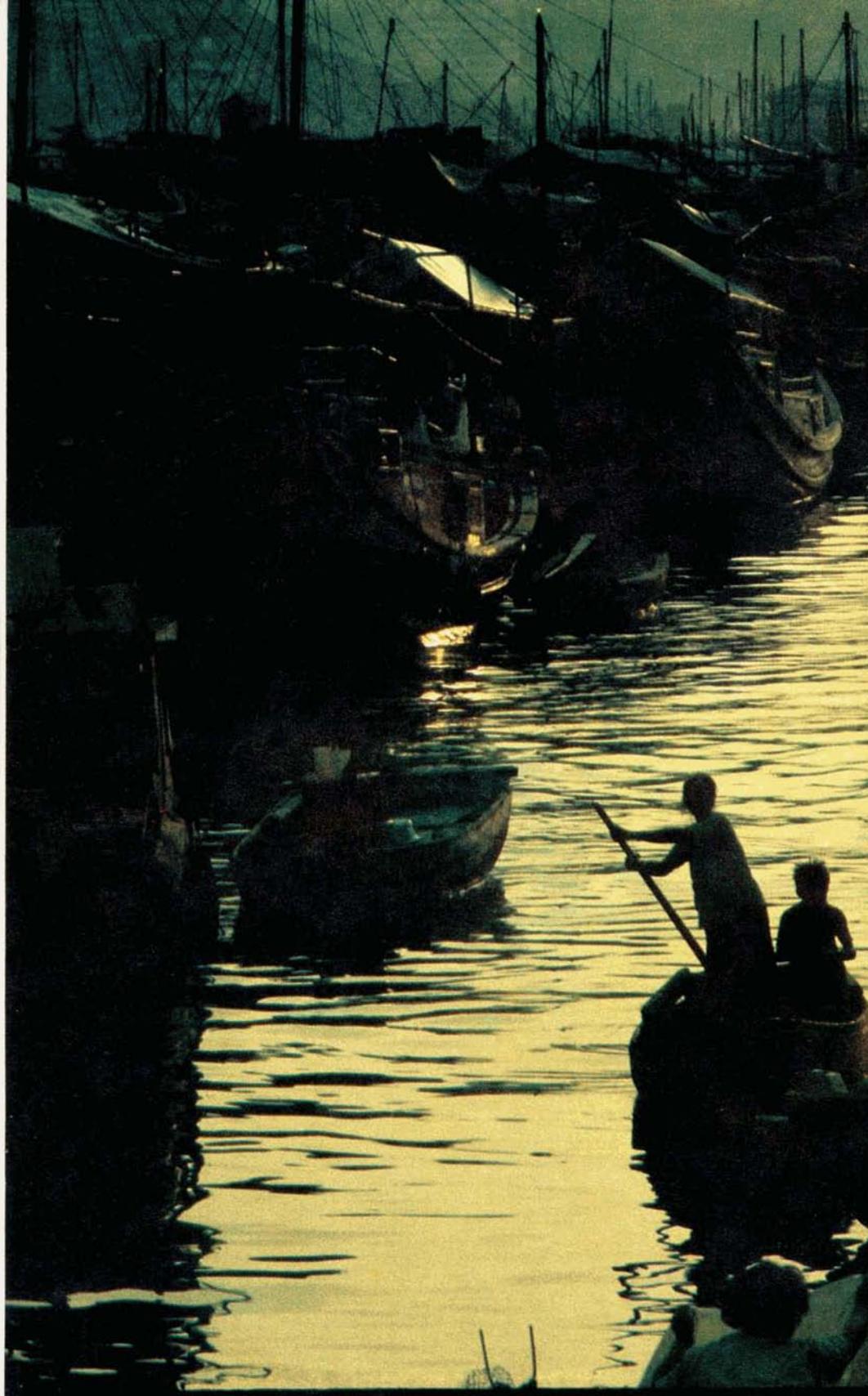
A three-act play by:

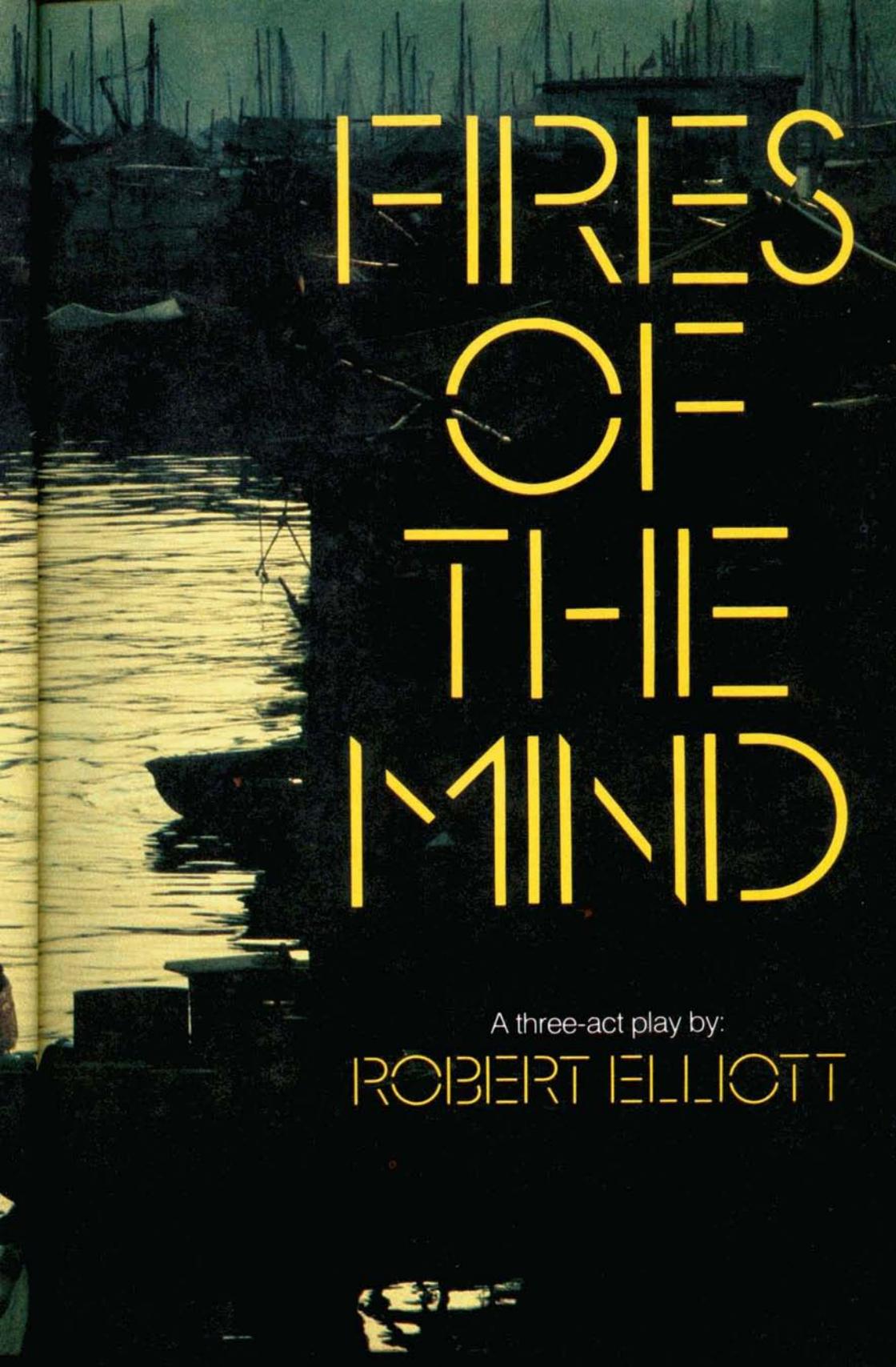
ROBERT ELLIOTT

Robert Elliot, a native of Sidney, New York, went to Brigham Young University with a David O. McKay scholarship, served a mission in Taiwan, and graduated from BYU in 1973. Bob is presently completing his master's degree at the the University of Utah in English and drama, and is married to Dorice Williams Elliott.

"Fires of the Mind" was produced in the Margetts Arena Theatre, BYU, in November, 1974, and selected as BYU's entry in the American College Theatre Festival.

Fires of the Mind is copyrighted. Any performance or reproduction of the play is prohibited without written permission of the playwright. Such authorization is not difficult to obtain, however, and performances are especially encouraged. Write Robert Elliott, Paul Roberts Associates, 555 East Fourth South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84102.





FIRES OF THE MIND

A three-act play by:

ROBERT ELLIOTT

Author's Preface

Though Fires of the Mind is written in a realistic style, the events and characters portrayed are fictional. Indeed, the play only creates an illusion of reality, what Aristotle called a "probable impossibility." It is highly unlikely that characters with the temperaments depicted, though not uncommon singly, would ever meet and mix in precisely the fashion described.

The play was written, however, with the revelatory intentions of traditional realism firmly in mind. I believe that contemporary LDS society is prepared to accept penetrating self-analysis which, without resorting to outrage or negativism, attempts to deal honestly with the human problems and weaknesses which plague it. Fires of the Mind does not intend, in any way, to disparage the divine doctrines and principles on which our religion is founded. It is a human drama reflecting the imperfect thoughts and actions of several imperfect but good young men, each struggling in his own way to become better. Hopefully, by perceiving the flaws and mistakes of these imaginary figures (especially, despite his strengths, those of Johnson), readers and viewers of the play will become more self-aware and, perhaps, be forewarned regarding tendencies in their own thoughts and actions. – Bob Elliott

Cast of Characters

ELDER BARNEY JOHNSON, 22, a Latter-day Saint missionary in Nationalist China (Taiwan)

ELDER KEITH POLL, 21, Johnson's third senior companion

ELDER MARK MARKHAM, 20, Johnson's fourth senior companion

ELDER JOSEPH MATTHEWS, 21, Johnson's zone leader

ELDER STEPHEN LUCAS, 19, Matthews' junior companion, the ZLC

BROTHER T'ANG LI SUN (UNCLE SAM), 45, their Chinese houseboy

SISTER CHOU LI TS'WUN (HOLLY), 20, a Chinese college student

BROTHER CH'EN YUN TA, 32, a Chinese college professor

Synopsis of Scenes

The action occurs over a three-week period in the summer of 1970 in Taipei, capital city of the Republic of China (Taiwan), and one of its suburbs, Lung Nan.

ACT I A missionary apartment in Lung Nan. Late afternoon.

ACT II A chapel classroom in Taipei two weeks later. Early evening.

ACT III The missionary apartment one week later. Early morning.

EPILOG The same. That night.

Setting

Although the play might best be performed in the round, with a less cluttered set, I have provided proscenium directions for convenience in visualization. The missionary apartment, though it is situated on the third floor of a medium-rent Chinese apartment building might easily be mistaken for a cheap flat in mid-town Kansas City. It contains a front room and a kitchen, both uncarpeted, visible to the audience. A door backstage left leads to a bedroom and bath facilities. Backstage right is the entrance from the apartment balcony and staircase. The front room contains a small dinner table, a coffee table, several hard-back chairs, two armchairs, a sofa, a coatrack, a bookcase, and nefarious other articles strewn about haphazardly. Only a few curious items — a Chinese painting, a coolie hat hanging from the coatrack, a Chinese newspaper — suggest that the apartment's inhabitants are 10,000 miles from home. The kitchen is nondescript, stripped to essentials, containing only a stove, a sink, a refrigerator, and some drawer or cabinet space. The chapel classroom is of white cement, very small and windowless. It contains only a small table or desk and a number of fold-up metal chairs. The entrance from the corridor is backstage right.

Dress

Except for ACT III, the missionaries wear standard white shirts and ties, with reasonably dressy pants, but without coats. Due to the weather, the shirts may be short-sleeved, or the characters may roll

their sleeves up. Jeans, T-shirts, and tennis shoes are perfectly appropriate for the playday. UNCLE SAM wears rough working clothes, sporting a besmeared apron in the kitchen. HOLLY dresses in fashionable Western styles, preferably classy pant outfits. BROTHER CHEN wears an uninspired business suit, of any color, a white shirt, and a thin dark tie.

Act I

(The missionary apartment.

Late afternoon. POLL and JOHNSON are seated in the front room at the dinner table, drinking Chi Shui.

The lights come up on JOHNSON first, then spread to POLL and the entire scene.)

JOHNSON (Lightly.) Well, how do you feel, Elder Poll?

POLL I don't know. It's a little like dying.

JOHNSON Come on.

POLL No, really. I'm scared. (Pause.) It's not just going home. You see this ring?

JOHNSON Your class ring?

POLL No, *not* my class ring. A class ring.

JOHNSON I thought it was yours.

POLL So has everyone my whole mission. Well it's not. (Pause.)

JOHNSON (Curious now.) Whose is it?

POLL Her name is Jenny Peterson.

JOHNSON Jenny Pe — J.P.! I thought that was your mother writing you all those letters!

POLL Pretty close.

JOHNSON Oh, man.
(He starts laughing.)

- POLL She's waiting, and she thinks we'll be married in two months.
- (This is even more hilarious. JOHNSON laughs harder.)
- POLL I'm up the creek; I mean what can I say? Two years and the only guy she's been out with is her cousin. Jeez. (Pause.) What's so doggone funny?
- JOHNSON (Grandly, with a grin.) Romeo Poll.
- POLL (Unamused.) Yeah.
- JOHNSON (Still chuckling.) Hey, take it easy, It'll work out.
- POLL Yeah, well . . . well it's just that things are so different.
- JOHNSON Maybe, maybe not. Missions are screwy. They warp people. And not only about girls. Jeez, I've never been so neurotic. Everything's so . . . unnatural.
- POLL (Needling good-naturedly.) The natural man is an enemy to God.
- JOHNSON (Studying his half-full glass.) I wonder if anyone's ever been baptized in soda pop.
- POLL (Grabbing the bottle.) Stay where you are Johnson, or so help me I'll soak you.
- (They both get up and circle the table warily. JOHNSON stops.)
- JOHNSON To Keith and Jenny Poll. Cheers.
- (POLL laughs and they drink. A terrible barking breaks out outside the door. There are bumping noises and MARKHAM appears, haggard and winded.)
- MARKHAM Garbage!
- (POLL and JOHNSON laugh. MARKHAM grins.)

MARKHAM What was that!

JOHNSON We call him Cerberus. Can we help you?

MARKHAM No, I've got it.

(He bumps in, puts down
bags.)

MARKHAM Whew! That's a hard climb with a foot locker.

POLL Welcome to the Lung Nan Arms Celestial Suite.

(Laughter.)

MARKHAM Is that what you guys call this place? (Looks around.)
Well, it *is* pretty nice. You should see the places in
the south.

POLL I've been there, you young whipper. Hey, you guys
haven't met, have you?

JOHNSON No.

POLL Elder Barney Johnson, Elder Mark Markham.

MARKHAM Hi.

JOHNSON How are you?
(They shake hands.)

POLL Hey, how about some Chi Shui?

MARKHAM All right!! (Laughter.) Oh, I've still got some stuff in
the cab. Save me a glass, O.K.?

(Goes out; barking.)

(POLL and JOHNSON retire
to the table, both are
meditative.)

JOHNSON Seems like a nice guy.

POLL Yeah, you'll get along great.

JOHNSON You think so?

POLL Yeah. (Pause.)

JOHNSON Listen, will you talk to him. I'm tired of going
through it.

POLL You want me to?

JOHNSON Yeah — I get so tired.

POLL I'm sure he knows some of it already.

(Johnson groans irritably.)

POLL Well, *you* let the cat out of the bag at conference.

JOHNSON What else could I do? Jeez! Bearing testimonies like it was a game of dominoes. One guy plops down, the next guy stands up, everyone trying to outdo the guy before. No way out. I just sat there and watched it coming. Man, I had to be honest! Pressure testimony. Social testimony. Jeez, that irks me!

POLL Come on.

JOHNSON (Burned.) Well . . .

POLL Listen, you know most of those guys mean what they say.

JOHNSON Yeah, but they just say what everybody wants to hear. It's not the whole truth. It's propaganda. It's a big psyche-up session.

POLL Sure it is. The Communists do the same thing over on the mainland. Political parties do it. Businesses do it. It's positive thinking. Everybody's got doubts, but they only discuss them in private. Everybody wants to be riding a winner, so they try to convince themselves they are. Except for us. We know we've got the truth.

JOHNSON Some of us do.
(Bumping, barking; they lapse into silence.
MARKHAM reappears.)

MARKHAM Should it cost 50 kwai to get here from the train station?

POLL That's about right.

MARKHAM Huh, I gave the guy a hard time for nothing. Oh well. (He grins.)

POLL You want that Chi Shui?

MARKHAM You bet! It's not as hot here, but it sure is muggy.

POLL Elder Johnson, why don't you store Elder Markham's stuff in the bedroom. I'll fill him in on our investigators. And work on that fifth discussion, O.K.?

JOHNSON Aye, aye, cap'n. Hey — let me know before you leave.

POLL I will.

(JOHNSON goes into the bedroom.)

MARKHAM (Drinking) Boy, that tastes good. You remember Tate? Marlowe says that Tate's working out a plan to import this stuff to the States. He'll make a fortune.

POLL It'll never fly. Tate's all mouth.

MARKHAM Yeah, well, probably so — say, how's the work going here?

POLL A little slow, right now. We've got one good man coming along, and one of those eternal girls, and two students and a housewife on firsts. But summers are awful, you know. Everybody falls out, or goes on vacation, or some other doggone thing. We're frustrated.

MARKHAM (Casually checks bedroom door, which JOHNSON has closed.) How's Johnson?

POLL What?

MARKHAM I wondered — well, you know — since the conference — and Larsen moved in with us after he left here. He told us there'd been some — problems.

POLL Larsen talks too much.

MARKHAM Well, we all talk.

POLL Yeah, you're right. We all talk — too much! Listen, I don't know what Larsen told you, or what conclusions you drew from that little incident at conference, but you've got one heckuva good companion on your hands. Johnson's a good man — he's a good man. (Pause.) Hey, I'm sorry. I know you're probably nervous about this assignment.

Well, it's not easy. But don't lose faith in Johnson. He's got all the tools.

MARKHAM Except one.

POLL Yeah.
(Agreeing reluctantly.)

MARKHAM What's his problem?

POLL Well, he's hung up on this "real communication" thing. He knows the Church rests basically on revelation and individual testimony, and he's not satisfied with what he's got.

MARKHAM (Snorts.) Well, who is?

POLL Yeah, but he looks at it different. He doesn't want a sign, but he figures the "warm feelings" everybody talks about aren't enough to base your life on. He wants something more, and until he gets it, he has to reserve judgment. And he's honest, painfully honest. I mean he can't just accept the fact that he hasn't completely arrived, and work at it slowly. He's always thinking about it and tormenting himself, and sometimes he has to let loose. I guess that's what happened at conference. He's too intellectual, I suppose. He *is* smart. Sometimes he goes through all his arguments and counter-arguments with me. Most of the time I don't know what he's talking about. I just tell him to be patient and stop worrying. Yeah, he is intelligent.

MARKHAM The glory of God is intelligence.

POLL Huh?

MARKHAM The glory of God is intelligence; the wisdom of men is foolishness and it profiteth them not. That's Second Nephi.

POLL Yeah, I know where it's from. Jeez, Elder, don't throw that at him. He'd go into a shell for weeks.

MARKHAM (Worried and indignant.) Well, why's he here if he doesn't have a testimony? How'd he get through his interviews?

POLL Ahh, you know how it is. Half the guys out here didn't have a testimony when they left. I didn't. I didn't know enough. Blind faith pulled me through, and I'm glad, but I'm sure I wasn't very impressive

when I was interviewed. All they really look for is desire, and Johnson's got plenty of that. He says his stake president just smiled when he told him all his doubts and said "You scoundrel, you'll be the best missionary of them all." And, well, that is the important thing, Elder Markham. Johnson wants to know the truth and he wants to share. School was getting him nowhere. He figured a mission would force some answers. So he came.

MARKHAM How can I help him?

POLL Be patient. President Jones drops him a line about once a week, and they talk whenever he comes in from Hong Kong. That's why they've kept him here in the capital — for easy access. It's kind of a shame, though. Johnson's always been a leader, and here he is, stuck in the same city after ten months, still a junior companion, while all his LTM group are senior companions or branch presidents. He gets depressed.

MARKHAM I can imagine.

POLL Well, listen, if you'll do the work, he'll follow you and help you. He's no slacker. Just stay with him, and I think it'll come.

(Barking; enter MATTHEWS and LUCAS.)

LUCAS Scramble, baby. The great white bird awaits.

POLL Lucas, I only regret that I'm leaving this beautiful island to the likes of you.

LUCAS Come on, graybeard. I promised Osborne I'd have you back at the chapel inside of twenty minutes.
(Laughter)

POLL Osborne? — Man, it's been a long time since I saw him!

LUCAS He and Anderson are terrorizing the greenies. You know how thin Anderson is. Well, he convinced one kid that he weighed 220 when he came on the island. And I heard Osborne warning two kids going to Kao Hsuung about blood leeches and poisonous spiders.
(Laughter)

POLL Wow, I'd better get down there. I don't want to miss all the action. (Looks around.) Well . . .

MATTHEWS Are your bags in the bedroom?

POLL Yeah — Hey, send Johnson out.

(MATTHEWS and LUCAS go
into the bedroom.)

MARKHAM Good luck, Elder Poll.

POLL Same to you, Elder. And be patient.

JOHNSON (Coming out.) Time?

POLL Yeah.

(He hesitates; MATTHEWS
and LUCAS come out
heavily laden.)

MARKHAM Here, give me one of those.
(To LUCAS.)

LUCAS With pleasure.

(Gives him the heaviest,
laughing; they go out;
barking.)

JOHNSON Thanks, Elder Poll. You've been like a brother.

POLL It's been good, Barney. Take care. Look me up.

JOHNSON You and the Mrs.?

POLL If Markham came back and found you dead, they'd
never catch me. (They laugh.) I — love you, Elder.

JOHNSON Me too.

(They hesitantly embrace,
arm on shoulder.)

LUCAS (Outside.) Quick, Poll! We're being attacked by Red
commandos!

POLL Ha. I'm glad the ZLs are moving in here. I don't like
Matthews much, but Lucas is gonna be one of the
best. Talk to him.

JOHNSON O.K. Seriously, good luck with the lady. And write.

POLL Thanks, I will . . . Dzai Jyan.

JOHNSON Dzai Jyan.

(Barking; POLL is gone.)

(JOHNSON goes out on the balcony, waits a few seconds, is seen waving; comes back in, pours out a glass of Chi Shui, wanders, opens a scripture, closes it, ponders; barking; enter MARKHAM.)

MARKHAM Brother, that dog is something! I'm sure glad they've got him chained up. What'd you say you called him?

JOHNSON Cerberus.

MARKHAM What's that? Sounds like some kind of mass transportation.

JOHNSON Heh, no. It's from the Greek myths. Cerberus was the three-headed dog that guarded the gates of Hell. He kept the dead in and the living out.

MARKHAM And which is Hell — in here out out there?
(Going along, lightly.)

JOHNSON(Coldly.) It depends. Wherever I am, Hell follows. I better study.

(He walks quickly into the bedroom; MARKHAM looks deflated and bewildered.)

JOHNSON (Returning.) Hey, I'm sorry, Elder. I guess I just like to shock people or something. I figure if they already think I'm a louse, I can't disappoint them with the real me. Really, I'm sorry. Can we talk about it later?

MARKHAM Sure. (Pause.) Where you from?

JOHNSON Mesa. You?

MARKHAM Salt Lake. (Pause.) You go to the Y?

JOHNSON Yeah, you?

MARKHAM No, U. of U. One year?

JOHNSON Three.

MARKHAM How old are you?

JOHNSON 22.

MARKHAM Hmm.

JOHNSON What are you studying?

MARKHAM Oh, I haven't really decided. I'd like to be a doctor.

JOHNSON Competition's rough.

MARKHAM Yeah. How 'bout you?

JOHNSON Oh, I've bounced around a lot. Social Science. Humanities, history. I don't know.

(Pause.)

MARKHAM Uh, you always been a member?

JOHNSON Well, I was baptized when I was eight, if that's what you mean. Yeah, I'm a lifer.

MARKHAM Your folks active?

JOHNSON (Looks up irritably, then smiles.)

Yeah. Look, I guess I better explain some things. Elder Poll didn't have much time. I come from a good Mormon family. My dad's been in bishoprics half his life, and my mom's a stalwart Mormon homemaker. My brother was an AP in England and my little sister's a seminary officer. (Mildly sarcastic.) Everybody in our ward thinks we're wonderful.

MARKHAM What's wong with that?

JOHNSON Let's talk about it another time.
(Sizing him up.)

MARKHAM No, wait, now if we're gonna be companions we've got to know each other. I want to know what makes you tick. What's wrong with being respected?

JOHNSON Well, my family's got problems like anybody else. My dad works too long and too hard, my mom's got an awful temper. You know. But it's not their fault. It's the lifestyle. Upper middle class. Split-level home. Two cars, a camper, a garden, sprinklers, dishwasher, workshop. I don't know. It's so domestic, and lifeless — bloodless. The boredom grates on everybody, even if they don't realize it. And the Church goes right along with it.

Everything's geared to the family — which is fine — except all the families are geared to money, success, drudging work, and boring leisure. For me, the Gospel and Church don't jive. It's hard to explain. It seems like there should be more.

(Pause.)

MARKHAM More what?

JOHNSON I don't know. Excitement, maybe. Well, not really. Real active happiness. Joy. Life.

MARKHAM The Church brings me joy.

JOHNSON Really? It bring most people peace. Then they sleep through life satisfied. They're content, not joyful. They fall into a pattern and spend the rest of their lives following a program. And they think they're happy.

MARKHAM (Mildly defiant.) Maybe they are.

JOHNSON Hey, I'm not aiming this at you or anybody. It's just that, well, the Gospel tells us not to be of the world, and we interpret that as meaning to avoid sex and drugs and alcohol. But what about materialism, the whole midde-class mentality? That's twice as insidious! (He hits the table. Pause.) I think it's funny that they call good Mormons "active." It oughta be "passive." (Silence.) You shouldn't have started me.

MARKHAM No, that's fine.

JOHNSON Look, I believe in the Gospel. The principles strike me really right. The New Testament is beautiful, though there was a time I wondered about all that self-denial. Anyway, it's the doctrines that worry me — and some of the things the Church does to people. But I could swallow the whole ball of wax if I knew it was true. I just want that assurance, and then I'll work within the system to make it all meaningful. The Lord promises individual revelation. That's what I want. Then I could surrender myself. But not before. (Shrugs.) That's why I'm here. They said in order to know the Gospel you have to live it and share it. I mean it *is* good. It brings people out of total confusion and gives them self-respect. It just seems like it should do more. I want more. What do you think?

MARKHAM Mmm, Elder, I feel like I should bear my . . .
(Barking; outside a booming voice.)

VOICE Sup-per! Sup-per!

JOHNSON Uncle Sam!

MARKHAM The servant?

JOHNSON Oh, man, don't call him that. (Going to door.) Say hey, Uncle!

UNCLE SAM Hey! Arizona still here! Good! Tonight, bacon, lettuce, and tomato, heh, heh, heh.

JOHNSON Where's you get it?

UNCLE SAM Black market, heh, heh, heh.

JOHNSON You old rascal. (They both laugh. To MARKHAM.) When he cooked for the army, they always called him the "old rascal." He stole them blind, but they loved him.

UNCLE SAM Don't worry, I've reformed, heh, heh, heh. The
(To MARKHAM.) Mormons came and told me about John Smith . . .

JOHNSON Joseph Smith.

UNCLE SAM Joseph Smith and the Book of Moroni.

JOHNSON Mormon.

UNCLE SAM Mormon, heh, heh, heh. They perverted me.

JOHNSON *Con*-verted, you old rascal.

UNCLE SAM Heh, heh, heh.

JOHNSON His English is better than mine. Don't let him put you on. He's a hopeless ham and his favorite role is the funny-dumb Chinaman. He picked it up from American T.V. shows. You remember Hop Sing from *Bonanza*?

UNCLE SAM
(Mugs and kowtows a bit; then, to JOHNSON) Who's the new tenant?

JOHNSON Elder Mark Markham — Salt Lake.

- UNCLE SAM Utah 22.
- MARKHAM What?
- JOHNSON You're the twenty-second Utah elder that's lived here since he started work. I'm Arizona 5. Poll was Idaho 16. Uncle Sam, a treat! A Canadian!
- UNCLE SAM Oh, my very first, heh, heh, heh. What else?
- JOHNSON Where's Matthews from?
- MARKHAM California.
- UNCLE SAM (Wrinkles his nose.) Ooh.
- JOHNSON He doesn't like Californians. (To SAM.) How's your family?
- UNCLE SAM The same. Ai Mei is still stick and my wife is very tired. She works too hard.
- MARKHAM Where does she work?
- JOHNSON The Zenith plant. (To SAM.) Hey, Uncle, maybe this'll help.
- (Pulls pouch off coffee table.)
- UNCLE SAM What is it?
- JOHNSON It's Idaho's Chinese money. He figured it wouldn't do him much good in Boise.
- UNCLE SAM Idaho was a good elder. (Pause.) Well, Sup-per!
- JOHNSON O.K. Uncle. If you need any help holler.
- UNCLE SAM I am the master of my kitchen, Arizona! You learn Chinese! (Roaring.)
- JOHNSON O.K. (To MARKHAM.) The guy's a riot. (Laughing.)
- MARKHAM How long has he worked here?
- JOHNSON Three years.
- MARKHAM Any trouble?

- JOHNSON (Scoffing.) No; he's a counselor in the MIA. And he loves the elders, even though he's down on Americans. The army raked him over good.
- MARKHAM Sounds like it was mutual.
- JOHNSON (Barking; MATTHEWS and LUCAS are heard singing "God Be With You." They come in, finishing the hymn together, self-consciously, very low and out of key. Laughter.) Dog eat dog, brother. That's one thing I like about the Gospel. At least it puts a stop to a lot of cutthroating.
- LUCAS Man, that was beautiful. You should've seen it. The whole place was going nuts when we got there. Osborne and Anderson and Jeffries were doing a cancan on the lawn and Moffitt had some fireworks. Then Poll did his Nixon imitation and waved peace signs at everybody. I thought I was gonna split.
- MATTHEWS It's not so funny for us, Canadian.
- LUCAS Well, if you can do a Trudeau imitation, I promise to laugh just as hard.
- UNCLE SAM (From the kitchen door) I am Pierre Trudeau, the most beautiful prime minister in the world. Mah, mah, mah, mah!!!
(He does kissing imitations. Laughter.)
- LUCAS (Delighted.) Is that the houseboy?
- JOHNSON Uncle Sam.
- LUCAS You don't really expect me to call him that do you? What's his last name?
- JOHNSON T'ang.
- LUCAS (Taking SAM's wooden serving spoon, taps him on both shoulders.) Brother T'ang, I dub you Pierre.
- UNCLE SAM (Takes back the spoon.) What does "dub" mean?

LUCAS It means I've given you a title.

UNCLE SAM I dub you Canada I.
(He raps LUCAS once,
lightly, on the head and
retires. Laughter.)

LUCAS Anyway, Gordon finally stopped the festivities and led a prayer. Then we all sang "God Be With You." It was really something — the old heads, and the greenies, and the office staff, and the chapel elders. Some of the members came down too. (Pause.) Man, I've gotta be careful or I'll start crying again. (Pause.) Yea, even, the great Stoneface did shed a tear.

(He points to MATTHEWS,
who grins sheepishly.)

MATTHEWS It reminded me of leaving the LTM. A mission's too short.

(Pause; then,
authoritatively, but
apprehensively.)

MATTHEWS Elder Johnson? We need to set you some new language goals. Your old ones are out of date.

JOHNSON Oh, great!

MATTHEWS Let's go in the bedroom.

JOHNSON Like a lamb to the slaughter.
(Heaving a sigh.)

(Walking in to the
bedroom.)

JOHNSON How many times have we been through this?

(MATTHEWS closes the
door.)

MARKHAM He hasn't even got the sixth yet?

LUCAS Not yet.

MARKHAM How's his conversation?

LUCAS Really good; he speaks as well as anybody, and he's got the gist of all the lessons. It's just the

memorizing that bogs him down. He's sort of . . . got other things on his mind.

MARKHAM Yeah, we talked a little already.

LUCAS He's probably got more talent for the language than any elder I've met.

MARKHAM Hm! Well, he couldn't have any more talent than you. They tell me you learned all six in the LTM. Down south they call you Wonder Boy.

LUCAS You know, I'm a little ashamed about that?
(Quietly.)

MARKHAM Are you kidding?
(Astonished.)

LUCAS No, really. Oh, I'm glad I learned the lessons, all right. It's been a big help. But I sure had a bad attitude in the LTM.

MARKHAM How so?

LUCAS I come from a little hick town in Alberta. When I got my mission call, I made up my mind that no big city Heart of Zion boys were ever gonna show me up. I was determined to beat 'em all. You see what I mean? I went into the LTM red hot and I burned the place up. But it wasn't for the Lord. I worked really hard, but only to prove that I was the best. All that work was an ego trip. I felt competitive. You know, I not only felt good when I succeeded on a conclusion or a discussion — I felt good when my companions failed! I'm surprised the Lord didn't humble me — hit me with a stupor of thought or something.

MARKHAM I don't see anything wrong with wanting to be the best. That's what the Gospel's all about — reaching exaltation. And only a few'll make it.

LUCAS Sure, I want to be my best. And I wanta make exaltation. But it's not a contest. We're supposed to love and help each other. You can't kick and elbow your way to glory — it's just not Christlike. I don't know how this "better" and "best" thing got started, anyway; it's the same stuff that ruined the Nephites. Everywhere, everybody wants to be the best. The best roadshow, the best Sunday School, the best mission, It's not enough just to live

righteously and do the Lord's work. People expect all kinds of praise and recognition for it.

MARKHAM Praise reinforces people. It helps them.

LUCAS Sometimes; but people are too praise-oriented, you know? They all want a reward. Rewards are a Law of Moses concept. Do we obey the commandments just to gain a reward — a blessing? I hope not. Christ said "if ye love me, keep my commandments." That's the ticket. We obey out of love for God, not because we know what He can do for us.

MARKHAM Yeah.
(Blankly.)

LUCAS It's funny the way rewards sort of creep up on us. You're from Salt Lake; you ever notice how many people consider leadership positions rewards for living the best lives? No, really, think about it. Don't you set up a ranking system in your mind about which Church positions are the most prestigious? And don't you judge people by the positions they're called to? And don't you look at the supposedly more prestigious jobs as rewards? It's hard not to; I have an awful time. But that's the worldly perspective. The world is completely reward-oriented. The Gospel is based on love.

MARKHAM That's pretty heavy stuff, Elder Lucas. You come on like a philosophy prof.
(Fairly snowed.)

LUCAS Yeah, well, it's been my pet subject ever since I realized what a bum I was in the LTM. I didn't mean to talk your ear off.
(Laughs.)

MARKHAM No, it's interesting. I'll have to think about it. (Pause.) I guess I've been thinking a little about it already — rewards, I mean. I've been out almost a year and things just haven't been like I expected.

LUCAS The mission field you mean?

MARKHAM Yeah, I don't know. I've worked hard since I came out and sometimes I wonder if it's been worth it. A few people that I've taught have come into the Church, but three of them are inactive already, and I don't think the rest really know what they're doing. Everytime somebody really feels the Gospel and comes in, somebody else loses it and goes out. I hit the doors, and check all the referrals, and fast and

pray and study, and I beat my brains out at night trying to think of creative new approaches, new introductions. If I could have baptized one family, or just one good man . . .

LUCAS You'd like to see some results.

MARKHAM (Pursuing this rapidly.) Well, I've seen some good come from my work; but it sure seems insignificant compared to the scriptures, or Church history, or even some of the things I used to hear in Sacrament meetings. It seems like there should be something here, too — something I could put my finger on and say, "That was a success."

LUCAS Yeah, I know how you feel. Usually there is; but really if we have faith and work hard, the Holy Ghost'll tell us we've done well. Besides, tangible success is just another reward — an outward sign. Rewards are a lot like signs. They're artificial. Take Johnson — now he's a sign-seeker even though he's pretty subtle about it. He wants some glorious inner manifestation. But he still wants it to come from an external source. He won't accept anything his own spirit tells him, even when he's been touched by the Holy Ghost. He calls it emotion, and goes on waiting for something supernatural. Reward-seekers aren't that complex. They just want some outer confirmation that they've done well — material comforts and blessings, praise, or a position. But it amounts to the same thing. Reward-seekers and sign-seekers are both looking for proof that they're worthy. They're both insecure, and they want the Lord to compensate them for it. Sometimes He will, but sometimes He won't. I guess that's the trial of faith, or at least one of them. (Synthesizing.) Yeah. Reward-seeking equals sign-seeking. (Brightly.) I like that. (Pause.)

MARKHAM It sounds good. But, you know, it seems like half the scriptures talk about life and the commandments in terms of rewards. Obey, and receive a blessing, obey and inherit the earth, obey and receive exaltation.

LUCAS That's terrestrial stuff. It's milk, not meat.

MARKHAM Maybe so. (Pause.) You know, you just hit on something else I didn't expect out here. I was ready for bad food, sickness, crummy apartments, doors slammed in my face, even persecution, and I haven't had problems with any of 'em. The food and

the apartments are pretty good and the people are really pretty nice. But I wasn't ready for a companion without a testimony. I thought even if we didn't get along personally, we'd at least have common goals. What can I do about Johnson?

LUCAS Listen, his bark is worse than his bite. He's been a fine missionary these last three months. Give him a chance. His spirit's coming around and it's telling him good things, even if his head doesn't know it yet.

MARKHAM I hope so. (Earnestly.) I want to do the work here and we've got to do it together. (Pause.) I just want to be a good missionary, you know?

LUCAS We all do.

(MATTHEWS and JOHNSON come out of the bedroom. MATTHEWS is visibly rattled and perturbed. JOHNSON is bland and whimsical, his eyes twinkling.)

MATTHEWS Elder Markham. Sorry I didn't talk to you right away. I wanted to get those goals set with Elder Johnson while we had a chance. Welcome to Lung Nan.

(Handshake.)

MARKHAM Thanks, Elder Matthews.

(There is some obvious hero worship here.)

LUCAS Whew, I'm bushed. How long till supper?

UNCLE SAM Twenty minutes! Any complaints, Canada?!

(Roaring from kitchen.)

LUCAS Mais, non, Pierre. Pardonnez-moi. (Laughter. LUCAS staggers in mock agony.) Uhh! It's got me!

MARKHAM What?

LUCAS The force. It's irresistible. (He clutches the door frame as though being blown by gale force winds; hoarsely.) Mattress gravity. I'm a goner, boys. Wake me for dinner.

(Moving toward bedroom as though being sucked into a vacuum.)

(He vanishes. There is a plop and a long sigh. MARKHAM, MATTHEWS, and JOHNSON laugh.)

MATTHEWS Crazy kid.

MARKHAM Well, how's the work here in the North?

MATTHEWS Oh, it's coming; the Lord is blessing us daily. The harvest is at hand if we'll just thrust in our sickles and reap. If the Lord is with us, we can't fail.

MARKHAM The Gospel's so beautiful. I've never been so happy.

MATTHEWS Yes, these are the best two years of our lives.

MARKHAM It's so wonderful to be serving these people. They're so humble and beautiful. I work my tail off and I love every minute of it. It makes me feel so good. I wish I could just do this forever.

MATTHEWS How long have you been out?

MARKHAM 11½ months tomorrow.

(JOHNSON has been relaxing with his Chi Shui, listening in quiet disbelief. This cracks him up. MATTHEWS and MARKHAM glance over. JOHNSON stops laughing. They continue.)

MATTHEWS Well, the worth of souls is great in the eyes of the Lord. It gives me a warm feeling all over to see the Gospel spreading here.

MARKHAM Like a rock cut from a mountain without hands.

MATTHEWS Huh?

(JOHNSON puts an open Bible over his face to hide his laughter.)

MARKHAM Daniel's prophecy.

MATTHEWS Oh. (Pause.) Yes, these are the best two years of our lives.

MARKHAM Yup. (Nods his head; pause.) I've never been so happy.

(Pause; JOHNSON is obviously laughing again. They look at him.)

MATTHEWS Something funny, Elder Johnson?
(Nettled.)

JOHNSON No, no. I'd better go study.
(Barely under control.)

(He goes into the bedroom shaking with silent mirth.)

MARKHAM Say, when does Gordon leave?

MATTHEWS The AP? Oh, three weeks or so. President Jones wanted him to supervise the move and make sure everybody's settled O.K.

MARKHAM When he goes, who'll take his place?

MATTHEWS Oh, I don't know.

MARKHAM I'll bet it's you. You're surely qualified.

MATTHEWS Thanks. Well, the Lord will call whoever's best for the job. Besides I've only got three months left.

MARKHAM That's plenty of time. Gordon's only been in nine weeks. I'm sure it'll be you.

MATTHEWS Maybe so.

MARKHAM Wow!

MATTHEWS What?

MARKHAM That'd be some job. (Brief pause.) I mean think of the responsibility. With President Jones only here once a month, the AP has to handle everything. Gee! I don't think I could ever prepare for anything like that.

MATTHEWS Oh, in these positions you learn to trust the Lord. He never lets you down. No one ever feels prepared for a calling, but the Lord makes weak vessels strong.

MARKHAM I'll remember that.

MATTHEWS We've heard good things about you up here, Elder Markham. You and Elder Morris baptized six people in the last two months, didn't you?

MARKHAM Yes.

MATTHEWS And you averaged seventy hours a week. That's moving.

MARKHAM Well, there's no time to waste, you know.

MATTHEWS And seventeen investigators! How many will make it?

MARKHAM Oh, hard to say. They're all on early lessons.

MATTHEWS Any families?

MARKHAM No, we've been trying to start a couple, but none yet.

MATTHEWS Good men?

MARKHAM Well, mostly high school kids really. You know how it is in the South.

MATTHEWS It's the same here.
(Pause.)

MARKHAM Say, if you do go AP, who'll be the new zone leader here?

MATTHEWS Oh, President Jones really likes Lucas but he's only been out eight months, so I imagine he and Jensen would go co-ZL.

MARKHAM Jensen's the district leader now here isn't he?
(MATTHEWS nods.) Hmm, who'll take *his* place?

MATTHEWS Well, it's up for grabs. Wouldn't surprise me if it was you though.

MARKHAM Me!

MATTHEWS Your reports have looked very good.

MARKHAM Wow!

MATTHEWS It's not a sure thing.

MARKHAM Oh, of course not. Wow, I . . .

MATTHEWS See what you and Elder Johnson can do here in Lung Nan. I'll be talking to Elder Gordon and President Jones in a couple of weeks.

MARKHAM I'll do my best. (Pause; MARKHAM sighs.)
Brother

MATTHEWS You worried about Johnson?

MARKHAM Yeah.

MATTHEWS (Talking lower.) Well, you got a right. He's a pain in the butt. I've talked to him twice and it didn't do any good. He thinks he's twice as smart as anybody. And he just mopes around. He hasn't even learned the lessons yet. Says he can't concentrate. The guy's a loafer and a goldbrick. He drags down everybody. Don't let him get to you.

MARKHAM He's already started telling me some of the junk he thinks about. It's incredible.

MATTHEWS I haven't seen many guys I thought were worthless out here, but Johnson's one. He makes things miserable.

MARKHAM What can I do?

MATTHEWS Well, the big thing is don't baby him. Poll let him have his way and it messed them both up. Their hours went way down. It killed the zone average. They were always talking. Or at least Johnson was. Poll'd pick his toenails or his nose or something, (MARKHAM laughs) and Johnson'd just rattle on. Poll didn't have the guts to lay on him. You know how he was. He never even made DL. Straight senior for fifteen months. No leadership. I don't know how many hours they wasted.

MARKHAM What about their contacts?

MATTHEWS Well, that was funny. They did really well. They baptized two people a month all three months they were together. I don't know where they found 'em. And they've got one great guy now, too. Brother Ch'en. Gee, don't lose him. He's a potential branch president.

MARKHAM How'd they find him?

MATTHEWS Johnson met him on a bus. He's good at that. He just starts talking to people. Like Lucas. Yea, Johnson's

O.K. sometimes.

MARKHAM But mostly he's a pain.

MATTHEWS You wouldn't believe. He makes everybody nervous. You've got to get him moving. Stay on him. Work his tail off. And don't take any crap. If he starts to fizzle, remind him who he is and what he's here for.

MARKHAM I'll try. What about their other investigators? Poll mentioned an "eternal girl?"

MATTHEWS Holly Chou. Yeah, she's a foxy college chick that just walked into the chapel one day and started talking to Poll. Her English is pretty good and I think she just wanted some practice. Poll got her into English class, and a week later they started teaching her the lessons. She was a fire-eater right up until they started seriously talking baptism. Then they found out she had some family problems. Her dad's a traditionalist and doesn't want her to join. I think he's pretty mean to her. She comes out to church and all the members love her. I think she's got a testimony, but it's hard to tell with girls, you know. They've been teaching her an extra lesson now and then, and Poll wanted to talk to her father, but she wouldn't let him. There's potential there. Stay with her. Careful, though, she's a knockout.

MARKHAM Don't worry. I've had it with little girls. I want a good man or two.

MATTHEWS Don't we all. (Pause.) Well, Johnson can tell you about the others. (Earnestly.) But listen, Elder Markham, you've gotta have some ready by the end of July. The zone's running low. Even Hong Kong beat us last month.

MARKHAM We'll have some. Hey, how's the food here?

MATTHEWS I've heard it's the best. Brother T'ang alternates Chinese and American food. Oh, and that's another thing. Most of the elders like Brother T'ang. But frankly, he bugs me. I don't trust these slant-eye houseboys even if they are members. And this one's too savvy. You know? He

UNCLE SAM (From kitchen.) Arizona!

JOHNSON Yo!
(From bedroom.)

UNCLE SAM Set the table!

JOHNSON Aye aye, Uncle — (Comes out; looks at MARKHAM and MATTHEWS; chuckles.) Well, you guys got all our problems solved?

MATTHEWS I forgot to tell you he's a wise guy too. I don't envy you, Elder Markham. Remember, don't take any crap.

END OF ACT I

Act II

(The chapel classroom. Early evening. Two weeks later. JOHNSON is seated at the table, studying. The lights come up on him, then spread. MARKHAM is pacing impatiently.)

MARKHAM He's fifteen minutes late already.

JOHNSON He'll be here.

MARKHAM Is he always late?

JOHNSON Always.

MARKHAM Boy, I hope we haven't lost him. (Pause.) How's that fifth coming?

JOHNSON Awful. I can't concentrate.

MARKHAM Well, you'd better get on it. Matthews wants you to have all six by the move next week. He's holding me responsible. How long have you been out anyway? (Silence.) Come on, let's hear the first three conclusions.

JOHNSON I'm not ready.

MARKHAM Johnson, when are you gonna get smart? You've (Rebuking him, but without malice.) been dogging it ever since we started working together. You don't study in the mornings. You just sit there and read, or write in your journal, or stare off into space. That won't get you *anywhere*. You dog it on your bike. You dog it when we're tracting. I *always* have to wait for you. You even dog it in meetings. I might as well be alone most of the time.

(Pause.) You better shape up. (Pause.) Understand?

JOHNSON I ought to. I hear it daily.

MARKHAM And you'll hear it until you do something about it! My patience is wearing thin. So is Elder Matthew's and President Jones'.

JOHNSON President Jones understands.

MARKHAM Wanna bet?

JOHNSON You haven't talked to him.

MARKHAM He wrote me a letter before the move.

JOHNSON What'd he say?
(Interested.)

MARKHAM He said, Johnson, that you're his biggest headache right now and that he doesn't know what to do with you.

JOHNSON He did not.

MARKHAM He did. And he said he was sorry to put me into such a tricky situation, but somebody had to babysit, and he wanted someone responsible.

JOHNSON He didn't say "babysit."

MARKHAM Well, that's what he meant. So shape up. You say
(Slightly abashed, then kindly advising.) you don't want to be the baby, the "problem missionary." Don't be. Get on the ball, Elder.

MARKHAM Come on, let's hear that first conclusion.

(He waits; pause.)

JOHNSON Have you ever wondered what it'd be like to be
(In a serious tone.) Satan or Cain? I was reading today how Cain became Master Mahan. That's powerful stuff.

MARKHAM Don't talk about it.

JOHNSON I look in the mirror sometimes and wonder what it'd
(Enjoying this.) be like to be possessed. I kind of let my eyes gleam and flash, and screw up my cheekbones and squint. Then tighten every muscle in my body, and think about war or murder or sex. Once I started to shiver.

MARKHAM You're talking evil, Elder Johnson. I don't want to

hear it. That kind of talk brings on darkness. You've heard the stories. Drop it and, for your own sake, don't even think about it.

JOHNSON Stories. I wouldn't mind seeing a devil. At least I'd know.

MARKHAM Will you shut up? (Pause.) Look, *please* give me the first conclusion.

JOHNSON Don't worry, Elder. Sometimes I think I'd be better at wickedness than I am at righteousness. I have all kinds of ingenious ideas for evil. I bet I could be really creative. But it scares me as much as it does you.

MARKHAM If it did, you wouldn't talk about it.

JOHNSON Huh, maybe you're right. (Gets up.) No, I want to be righteous. I want the Gospel to be true. Hm! It's funny. I don't know if there are devils any more than I know there's a God. But they're a lot easier to talk about.

MARKHAM Haven't you ever felt like you've had an answer to prayer?

JOHNSON Sure, for a day or so. Even before my mission I'd get so uptight about truth that I'd go for a week or so not really thinking about anything else. Then I'd pray my guts out, and cry, and yell, and plead with God to hear me and answer me. Once or twice, when I was really into it, I'd suddenly feel good and all the tension and bitterness would leave me.

MARKHAM That sounds like an answer.

JOHNSON I thought so too until I cooled off and began to think objectively. Then I realized I'd been under a great emotional strain. Pressure does strange things to people. They'll do anything to relieve it — even lie to themselves. Every time I'd begin to feel good, I'd start wondering if I'd convinced myself I'd had an answer. Then all my doubts would come flooding back and I'd start over. (Pause.) Well, I don't know why I'm using the past tense. It's exactly the same now. (Pause.) You know, if the Church isn't true, whoever thought up this personal revelation trip was a genius. I mean there's no way out. You *can't* prove the Gospel is false. No way. They'll always tell you you weren't worthy, or you asked wrong, or God's reserving his answers. But you *want* it to be

true. So you keep on plugging. The Mormon God is a one-armed bandit and I'm a compulsive gambler. I feed him coins of my time and I keep on losing. A month, a year, now two years for this mission. And I always say I'll quit if I don't get an answer. But, everyone says "Try, just once more, try. You've tried so hard and so long. Don't quit now. Maybe it'll come this time." And it never does. A taste, sometimes — a feeling, a thought — but it's only a tease. They never last. Never. (Pause.) I'm sick and tired of the whole routine.

MARKHAM Elder Johnson, all I can say is I *know* the Gospel is true.

JOHNSON Yeah.
(Starts to retort, then:)

MARKHAM I know it's true because it makes me happy.

JOHNSON Ahh. There! That's where we see things differently. When I was fifteen I decided that a man could seek truth or happiness, but one had to take priority. I decided I couldn't really be happy without truth. Truth had to come first. You see? I could never say something's true because it makes me happy. For me, it's got to be the other way around. It makes me happy because it's true.

MARKHAM Wow! All I know is the Gospel can give us both.
(Shakes his head.)

JOHNSON I'd like to think so.

MARKHAM I wish Brother Ch'en would get here. (Pause.) You know, I've been out almost a year and this is the first really older man I've had a chance to teach. I'm so sick of little girls. But they're the only ones that seem to hang in there.

JOHNSON Male chauvinist.

MARKHAM President Jones says this island needs priesthood.
(Smiles.) Girls are all right, but they're no good to us.

JOHNSON That's a pretty brutal thing to say.
(Teasing again.)

MARKHAM Jeez, I'm a nervous wreck. I'm gonna go wait out front. Will you work on that fifth?

JOHNSON nods.

MARKHAM smiles and goes
out.)

(JOHNSON sits thinking for
a minute, then begins to
study. The door opens;
LUCAS pops his head in.)

LUCAS Hey, what's happening?

JOHNSON Hi, Elder Lucas. We're waiting for Brother Ch'en.
What are you doing here?

LUCAS Elder Matthews had to talk to Elder Gordon and
President Jones about the mini-move next week.
They're on the horn to Hong Kong right now. Hey,
I've got a letter for you.

JOHNSON My folks?

LUCAS Nope, it's from Boise.

JOHNSON Poll! All right! Lemme see that!

(Ripping it open.)

JOHNSON Probably a doggone wedding announcement.

(Reads, laughs, reads,
laughs again.)

LUCAS What's he say?

JOHNSON You remember that girl I told you about?
(LUCAS nods.)

JOHNSON Catch this. "Dear Barney, (Exaggeratedly) Well, it
(They both laugh.) wasn't so bad after all."

JOHNSON "Don't worry. I'm not making any rash decisions.
How could I after knowing you?"

JOHNSON (Grins, then "She sure is beautiful, though."
goes on, again exaggerating
slightly.)

(They laugh. He skims on
down the page, goes on to
the next one; admiringly.)

JOHNSON Listen to this: "Give my best to all the people we
baptized together. I've included a note for each of
them."

JOHNSON Sure enough. "Also one for Holly and Brother Ch'en. How are they doing? If you lose either one, I'll wring your neck. How's it going with Markham? And how are you?" Umm, then he philosophizes. What a good guy!

LUCAS He was a great missionary. Take his advice.

JOHNSON That's what he said about you.

(LUCAS laughs.)

LUCAS Hasn't Brother Ch'en already heard all six?

JOHNSON Yeah, but he's still wavering. We had him read through Third Nephi and we're gonna try to answer his questions today.

LUCAS He's a good man. What does he teach?

JOHNSON He's an economics professor at Tai Ta.

LUCAS I wonder if he could teach me how to live on eighty bucks a month.

JOHNSON Is that all you get?

LUCAS Well, my folks don't have much. They're not too jazzed about my mission anyway. Our seventies quorum is helping out.

JOHNSON Aren't your folks members?

LUCAS Well, sort of. They've been inactive most of my life. My dad runs a ranch and he's always busy. And when he does get a break he prefers fishing to Sunday School. My mom does whatever he wants to do. The neighbors always took us to church — my little sister and me.

JOHNSON They're not against the Church then?

LUCAS Oh no; my mom and dad are good people. They wanted us to grow up right. I guess somewhere in early married life they just got their values crossed up. You know how middle-aged people are. They think they've lost all their illusions. They consider themselves hard-bitten veterans in the war of life. I keep working on 'em, though. My sisters tell me that my letters really help. They've started having Family Home Evenings. There's hope.

JOHNSON It must've taken a lot for you to go to Church without your parents.

LUCAS Are you kidding! I'd do anything to get out of chores! (Laughter.) No, I suppose I could've stayed home if I'd wanted. My dad couldn't have put up too much of a fuss. But it always seemed right for me to go. I thought about quitting when I was sixteen or so, but I had some good teachers that worked with me and . . . I gained a real testimony.

JOHNSON How?

LUCAS Well, at first it was intellectual, I guess — at least as intellectual as you can get a sixteen. It all seemed so logical given certain premises. It wasn't until later I began to wonder about the premises. I remember sitting in a geometry class one day and the teacher saying, "Now, this theorem says out perfectly *assuming* parallel lines will never meet in a given plane. We always make assumptions. We take certain absolutes for granted in order to move ahead pragmatically." Then some joker asked what "pragmatic" meant and the whole discussion fell apart. But I remember thinking "Hmm, I assume God, don't I? I take him for granted. And Joseph Smith too." I mean I'd thought about there not being a God before, or about Joseph Smith being a crank, but it didn't mean anything. I never internalized it. That's when I began to understand all that about the Book of Mormon being the "keystone of our religion." So I began studying the scriptures on my own. And I tried really praying.

JOHNSON What happened?

LUCAS Well, I never had any angels come flapping down into my bedroom, but I sure felt good a few times. And as I got more active in our branch work and really saw the way the Church could help people, it reinforced me. Since then there've been times the Spirit's just seemed to wash over me. I guess mostly I've just felt myself growing in what seems to be the right direction. And the Gospel's at the heart of it. Sometimes I have doubts. I'll be gunning along full blast in some doctrinal discussion and my mind'll say "Whoa, do you really believe that?" Then I have to ponder it out and hit the knees; but I've always come away accepting it. I know the Gospel's true.

JOHNSON How can you ever have doubts if you know?

LUCAS Semantics. "Know" is just a word we use that means

"beyond belief." Hey, there's semantics again! Not "beyond belief," I mean "more than belief." When I say "I know" it means I "more than believe." I haven't had any Second Comforter.

JOHNSON If that's the case, why don't people say what they mean?

LUCAS Most people aren't semanticists. They don't give a rat about ambiguity. They just talk. I'm that way. It's only when I get with a linguist like you that I get inspired. Which reminds me, how's that fifth coming?

JOHNSON Oh, jeez!
(Pause.)

LUCAS Look, I'm just studying written characters in the mornings now, and they aren't that much use to me. I mean can you see me in Asian Studies? I'm going into business and get rich! So, why don't you and I start slipping out front after Gospel Study and before breakfast and you can teach me a few lessons. I'll throw you every goofy answer I've ever heard; we'll have a real good time. What d'ya say?

JOHNSON Would Elder Matthews mind?

LUCAS Elder Matthews is paranoid about my being in the bedroom anyway. He's got a guilty conscience because he spends his study time setting up a filing system for those ten thousand slides of his. Well, it does bug me a little. If we don't need to study, we oughta be out on the street. But he's the boss. And once we're out, he runs me ragged doing the work and helping the elders. He *really* works *hard*.

JOHNSON I hear the elders in Ping Tung used to call him pea-brain.

LUCAS Hey, no backbiting, fella. Elder Matthews is O.K.

JOHNSON Right, I'm sorry.

(The door opens. HOLLY stands there grinning.)

HOLLY Hol-lee Hello!

JOHNSON Hol-lee Hello! Come in! Elder Lucas, This is Holly Chou.

LUCAS Chou jye mei, ni hau ma?

HOLLY H au, sye sye ni.

(They shake hands.)

JOHNSON Holly has the best English of any Chinese student I've heard. What are you doing here?

HOLLY We just finished with English class. (She giggles, stands upright, says seriously.) I am your soul sister. Will you be my soul brother? (LUCAS and JOHNSON laugh.) I didn't say it right?

JOHNSON No, you said it right.

HOLLY Give me five.

(She sticks out her hand,
palm up.)

JOHNSON Right on, sister. (He slaps her hand, turns his palm up; she slaps it.) Groovy. Did you learn this in English class?

HOLLY Yes, Elder Ferguson says that's how the niggers talk in America.

(Brief silence.)

JOHNSON Did he teach you that word?

HOLLY Which word?

JOHNSON "Niggers."

HOLLY Yes. Is something wrong?

(JOHNSON looks at
LUCAS.)

LUCAS I'll talk to him.

JOHNSON It's not a nice word. It's like calling somebody a "shagwa" in Chinese.
(To HOLLY.)

HOLLY Ooh!

(Unpleasantly surprised.)

(MATTHEWS' voice is heard
bellowing outside:
"Lucas!")

LUCAS Whoops! The ZL cometh. Sister Chou, it was nice to meet you. (To JOHNSON) Good luck with Brother

Ch'en. See ya tonight.

(He goes out.)

JOHNSON How's school, Holly?
(Sits down at table.)

HOLLY Pretty good. My number two boyfriend got drafted.

JOHNSON And that's good?

HOLLY He was starting to get serious. Now the army has saved me. How do you say? The cavalry to the rescue?

JOHNSON Right. What about your number one boyfriend?
(Laughs.)

HOLLY He's safe. I am his number four girlfriend.

(She giggles.)

JOHNSON Holly, you're delightful. If you represent the Western influence on Chinese youth, I guess it can't be all bad.

HOLLY My father thinks it is all bad. He says Chinese culture is being destroyed by the Americans. He says Taiwan will be like Vietnam. First spheres of influence, then wars, then big power domination.
(Serious now.)

JOHNSON I hope he's wrong. I don't think the fact that Chinese students want to grow long hair and wear bell-bottom pants is America's fault. Kids everywhere are beginning to question their cultures, their lifestyles. There's a world-wide awakening. France, Greece, Thailand, the U. S., Japan — it's the same there. Students are dissenting, looking for a better way. I just hope they'll preserve what's good as well as overturn what's bad. Your father has a right to be proud of the Chinese culture. Many of your traditions are very beautiful.

HOLLY My father says Western missionaries do the most damage of anyone. He says they turn our people away from honoring their ancestors and teach them to worship white gods.

JOHNSON Well, some of them do. I hope we've convinced you, though, that our Church is universal. We believe in honoring our ancestors and *do* something

about it too. You remember what we taught you about temple work?

HOLLY Gynecology?

(They both laugh.)

JOHNSON No, *genealogy*. Where'd you learn that other word?

HOLLY Biochemistry.
(Giggling.)

JOHNSON Holly, you're amazing. (Pause.) Have you finished the Book of Mormon yet?
(Shaking his head, laughing.)

HOLLY No, I just started reading the Book of Ether last night.

JOHNSON How do you feel?

HOLLY I believe it is true. I believe all that you have taught me is true. My life is better since I met you. I have done well in school . . . and had many friends, but I have never been happy for very long. Everything seemed so . . . fleeting. So temporary. The Mormon Church has helped me understand eternal things. *You* have helped me. I will be baptized as soon as my father agrees. And if he does *not* agree, I will be baptized as soon as I am old enough to decide for myself. O.K. Joe?

JOHNSON I'm glad. (Pause.) How do you like the Book of Ether?

HOLLY Oh, so much war! It is like a . . . a gudai pyan.

JOHNSON A what?

HOLLY How do you say . . . an ancient Chinese sword movie.

JOHNSON A sword flick! Oh, man, I guess so.

HOLLY Have you seen such movies?

JOHNSON About once a month we go to one. All the missionaries love them.

HOLLY We must see *one* together. When is your day off?

JOHNSON No, I can't do that.

(Taken aback, but amused.)

HOLLY It is not allowed?

JOHNSON No, it is *not* allowed.

HOLLY Too bad; well you must go see "Blood Mountain" with your friends. It is the best I have ever seen.

JOHNSON I saw that one last week. The one with David Chiang?

HOLLY Chiang Da Wei. Yes. Oh, did you like it?

JOHNSON It was great! I loved that final scene. (He jumps up, pulls out his comb and pen, puts one in each hand, and begins to circle the table slowly, menacingly.) Your doomsday has come, Black Wang. Release the Princess Lyou.

HOLLY giggles, pulls out two pens from her book-bag, gets up and circles opposite him.)

HOLLY Never, Tiger Chang. You will never see her alive again.

(Pause; they continue, breathing heavily, growling, and squinting ferociously.)

JOHNSON and HOLLY Swwaaaya!

(They both leap in their places, doing a full twist, gesticulating wildly, then go back to circling. JOHNSON skips nimbly across a row of chairs to HOLLY's delight.)

JOHNSON (Himself.) Just practicing.

HOLLY That wasn't in the script!
(Protesting.)

(They laugh.)

JOHNSON Prepare yourself, Wang. Your life is spent.
(Reverting to his role.)

HOLLY Bold words, Tiger Chang. They carry no truth.

JOHNSON We shall see, devil-man. (He flies into a frenzy; leaps onto a chair.) Now! My trustworthy sword shall drink your blood!

(HOLLY stops below him, lowers her arms.)

HOLLY No!
(In mock terror-anger.)

JOHNSON Ayeeee! (Lands at her feet and stabs her with the comb.) Ha!

(Leaps off the chair in a full twist, gesticulating wildly again.)

(She does not fall, however, because she has been distracted by BROTHER CH'EN and ELDER MARKHAM who are standing at the door dumbfounded.)

MARKHAM Elder Johnson, what's going on here?

(Very uncomfortably with a hint of anger, poorly disguised by a smile, and that what-are-you-doing-with-her-here-alone look.)

JOHNSON Well . . . uh . . . we were acting out the final fight scene from "Blood Mountain." I was playing Tiger Chang. (HOLLY has begun to giggle. She sits down and puts her hand over her mouth.) She was Black Wang.

(This is too much for HOLLY. She breaks out laughing again.)

MARKHAM That hardly seems the thing to be doing — does it?

JOHNSON No, I guess not.

CH'EN It was, however, very accurate. Except your friend is a bit too attractive to play Wang.

(To Johnson.)

MARKHAM Oh, you saw the movie, too?

(Much relieved, laughing.)

CH'EN Yes, last week.

MARKHAM Well Oh, Brother Ch'en Yun Ta, this is Sister Chou Li Ts'un. Sister Chou is another one of our investigators.

HOLLY Hello.

(They shake hands.)

CH'EN I am very pleased to meet you.

MARKHAM Well

(He looks at HOLLY, nodding his head slightly toward the door.)

HOLLY Oh! . . . Well, I will see you Sunday. Goodbye. (She remembers she should leave.)
(Remembering she should leave.) She turns to JOHNSON and gives two kung fu thrusts.)
Sa! Sa! We will have a rematch.

(She goes out laughing.)

CH'EN A lovely girl.

MARKHAM Yes Elder Johnson, Brother Ch'en only has a few minutes. We should get started.

CH'EN I am sorry to be so late. We had an unexpected meeting at the university.
(To JOHNSON)

JOHNSON I understand.

MARKHAM Brother Ch'en would you give us an opening prayer?

CH'EN Father in Heaven, I am grateful to be here today to learn from these elders of thy Church. I am grateful that they have come here to Taiwan to teach the Chinese people more about thee. Help me to understand what they say, so that I may draw closer to thee. I say this in Jesus' name. Amen.
(Nods head; heads bow.)

MARKHAM That was a beautiful prayer, Brother Ch'en. Have you been praying twice every day?

CH'EN Yes.

MARKHAM Has it helped you?

CH'EN Yes . . . I think so.

MARKHAM Did you read Third Nephi in the Book of Mormon since we last met?

CH'EN Yes.

MARKHAM Did you enjoy it?

CH'EN It moved me greatly.

MARKHAM Good. Will you continue to read the Book of Mormon every day?

CH'EN Yes.

MARKHAM We didn't see you in church on Sunday.

CH'EN Yes, my parents asked me to go on a picnic with them in the country. I am sorry I could not come.

MARKHAM I see . . . well, of course it's good to be close to your family, but church meetings are also very important.
(A bit unnerved.)

CH'EN I understand.

MARKHAM Will you be able to attend both Sunday School and Sacrament meeting this Sunday?

CH'EN No, I am sorry. Because of a shortage of teachers at the university for the next quarter, I have been asked to take my vacation beginning this week rather than in August. I will be visiting my brother and his family in Hua Lien and then return in three weeks to begin teaching immediately. Perhaps I can attend meetings there.

MARKHAM Yes, we do have a small branch there. I'm sure they would be happy to have you visit. I will contact the elders there and tell them to expect you.
(Really jolted.)

CH'EN Of course, I don't know what my brother will have planned.

JOHNSON Perhaps your brother and his family would be interested in attending church with you.

CH'EN Perhaps. (An awkward silence. JOHNSON and MARKHAM look at each other.)

MARKHAM Well, it looks as though we will have to postpone your baptismal date. Do you remember when you were to be baptized?

CH'EN I believe it was this Saturday, July 1. Yes, I am afraid that will have to be postponed. (Pause.)

MARKHAM Well, let me check my calendar. (Digs it out.) Shall

we set a new goal date of . . . say . . . July 30?

CH'EN It is very difficult to know exactly what I will be doing when I return. Perhaps we could establish a new date after I get back.

MARKHAM (Reluctantly.) All right. We will contact you at the university sometime around the 20th. Will you be back by then?

CH'EN Yes, that would be fine.

(JOHNSON and MARKHAM look at each other again.)

JOHNSON Brother Ch'en are you beginning to feel as though you would rather not be baptized?
(MARKHAM looks at him angrily.)

CH'EN Why

JOHNSON Let's talk about it. What is it that's worrying you?

CH'EN I should have known you would come straight to the point, Elder Johnson. I am very impressed with your Church. I like your members. I enjoy the Book of Mormon and your meetings. Everything you have told me seems right to me. Yet I worry because I feel I have not received the personal witness which I need to be baptized. I have not felt the Holy Ghost as I sense he ought to be felt.

MARKHAM How do you feel when you pray, Brother Ch'en?

CH'EN I feel peaceful at first, and sometimes after I have prayed a short while, I feel warm and very good.

MARKHAM That's it, Brother Ch'en!

JOHNSON Yes, that's a *beginning* Brother Ch'en. But it's only what we told you to expect. (MARKHAM glares at JOHNSON.) If you *really do* feel that, it is a beginning. But only *you* can recognize God's real answer to you. We can tell you what *we* feel, but *you* must seek *your* answer *yourself*. If you are not satisfied, you must continue to try. Only *you* can judge what is enough for you.

MARKHAM But you must not expect too much. Once you are baptized, you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Then you will have the right to have the Spirit

with you at all times. Also, as your knowledge about the Church increases, your faith will grow stronger. And as your faith grows, your ability to communicate with our Father in Heaven will grow also.

JOHNSON Still, that doesn't mean you're not entitled to a very strong answer now. The scripture in Moroni, which we showed you, is the Lord's promise to individuals truly and humbly searching for the truth. And He is bound to fulfill his promise if we approach him properly. No one is allowed to be baptized who has not had this personal confirmation of the Gospel's truthfulness by the Holy Ghost. Isn't that so, Elder Markham?

MARKHAM Yes; at the same time, though, we don't want you to think you will receive a vision or any sort of overwhelming manifestation. Don't get me wrong. Visions and powerful witnesses are possible, but they generally come to prophets or other Church leaders who have proven their willingness to serve and their unshakeable faith. I don't know any of the elders here, for instance, who have received such a powerful witness.

JOHNSON Our religion is a very personal affair, Brother Ch'en. Each man must establish his own relationship with God. We cannot really tell you what to look for or how to go about looking. We can only give you broad patterns which can help to streamline your efforts.

MARKHAM Remember, Brother Ch'en, all testimonies are not gained strictly through prayer. Your good feelings about our members, and our meetings, and about the various principles we have taught you, are just as important as any feelings you might gain through prayer.

JOHNSON Yes, but these feelings alone are not enough. You must establish a personal communication with God, as well as respond to his work here on earth.

CH'EN There seems to be a very fine balance in what is required for a true testimony. Apparently, revelation, as you call it, has a broad interpretation.

JOHNSON As broad as the whole earth, and as varied as each individual.

CH'EN Elder Johnson, you are very . . . eloquent. But let

me ask you again. What is the proper way to prepare oneself to receive such a . . . witness?

MARKHAM The best guidelines are still in Moroni 10:4-5. First you must think carefully about all you know of the Gospel, and especially of the Book of Mormon. Do you do that Brother Ch'en?

CH'EN I have thought of little else for some time.

MARKHAM Good. Now, the scripture says you must also have a sincere heart, real intent, and faith in Jesus Christ. I interpret that as meaning, first, you must be *humble* and willing to accept what the Lord sees fit to give you. Second, you must really *want* to know if these things are true. If you secretly feel that your life is already sufficient, God will not respond. Finally, faith. Do you believe God has the power to hear and answer prayers?

(JOHNSON has turned away from the discussion during this speech. He is thoughtful and a bit irritated.)

CH'EN I have always believed in some supreme power. I have always hoped that I could discover It or Him or Her. (Smiles.) Yes, I believe this power, this God, should be able to speak to me. Elder Markham, you have helped me considerably. I feel that I have perhaps not been humble enough in my prayers. I have had a tendency to kneel down and analyze all that I was doing and saying, even while I was praying, and to base my judgments on certain mental *criteria* I had established. I will try to be more humble. Also, there are times when I feel very satisfied with my life. I become complacent . . . how do the Americans say . . . a fat cat?

(Ch'en and Markham smile.)

MARKHAM Yes.

CH'EN Although it seems I have been seriously searching for the truth for many years, it is only a moments like these that I feel the need to really know. It is easy to become completely immersed in day-to-day affairs.

MARKHAM Yes. (Brief Pause.) Well, I suppose you need to be going, Brother Ch'en . . .

JOHNSON May I make one final comment? I would like to add
(Out of nowhere.) that while you are working on humility and real
intent, do not ever sacrifice your honesty or your
self-respect. You are a son of God, if God exists;
and therefore he will not require you to relinquish
these qualities ever for him.

(Markham is restless.)

CH'EN I am not sure I understand, but I will try to
remember.

JOHNSON Good. Brother Ch'en. I'm very happy I met you on
that bus two months ago. I've come to appreciate
your intelligence and your sensitivity very much. I
want you to know that I think you are a very fine
man, and I believe that you can gain a testimony of
this Gospel. Perhaps during this vacation you will
have a chance to relax from your regular routine and
concentrate on what we have taught you. I wish you
. . . the very best.

CH'EN Thank you, Elder Johnson.

MARKHAM Brother Ch'en. I'd like to bear you my testimony. I
(Honestly, plainly, and know this Gospel and this Church are true. I was
deeply-felt.) brought up in the Church and I've seen the
wonderful effect it has had on the lives of people
I've known. I have prayed to know the truth of many
things, and God has never failed me. He has
answered my prayers; and he will answer yours, if
you will fulfill your commitments to us and to him. I
know he wants you to gain a testimony and be
baptized. I know he will do everything he can to
help you find a better and more meaningful life. I
know that Jesus Christ lives, and that Joseph Smith
was a prophet. I know that we have a living prophet
that guides this Church today. I know the Book of
Mormon is true. The promise of Moroni is true. I
feel I can promise you that, if you will pray humbly
and sincerely to God, you will receive an answer
and you can come to know as I know. I bear you my
testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

(MARKHAM gazes straight
into CH'EN's eyes. CH'EN is
moved.)

CH'EN Thank you.

MARKHAM Elder Johnson, would you offer the closing prayer?

JOHNSON Sure. (Heads bow.) Father in Heaven, we're thankful that we have been able to meet with Brother Ch'en this evening. We pray that thy Spirit will be with him as he leaves now, that he may return home in safety. We also pray that he will receive the answer he needs concerning this Gospel. (Uncomfortable pause.) Help us all to continually come to know thee better. We are thankful for all that we have. And we say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

MARKHAM Thank you, Elder Johnson. Brother Ch'en? (They shake hands.) We'll look you up around the 20th. Have a nice vacation. Try to make it to church in Hua Lien if you can.

CH'EN I will.

JOHNSON Good luck, Brother Ch'en.

CH'EN Thank you; good night.

(He goes out.)

MARKHAM He's a good man.
(Looking after him.)

JOHNSON Elder Markham? (MARKHAM turns.) I think we pounded out an effective compromise there. Nice job.

(Sticks out his hand.)

MARKHAM You too, Elder Johnson. (He looks at JOHNSON just as he looked at CH'EN.) I . . . I just wish you could really bear witness. It'd be so much better. (He turns to get his things, JOHNSON looks down, grimacing.) Well, let's go. We have to be at Sister Chang's by eight o'clock.

(JOHNSON slams his scriptures onto the floor; MARKHAM looks at him in exasperation; BROTHER CH'EN reappears at the door.)

CH'EN Elder Markham, would it be all right if I read some scriptures here before I leave?

MARKHAM Well, yes, of course. I thought you had an appointment.

CH'EN It is not so important. I would like to read for just a few minutes.

MARKHAM Of course; uh, Elder Johnson and I need to go to another meeting.

CH'EN Fine, I will only stay a short time.

MARKHAM Fine. Well, good night again, Brother Ch'en. (To JOHNSON, who is still looking down, in a concerned and quiet tone.) Elder Johnson? We need to hurry.

(He goes out.)

JOHNSON Good night, Brother Ch'en.

(Follows MARKHAM out.)

(CH'EN closes door, goes and sits down for a moment and opens the Book of Mormon to the end. Then he kneels by the table, the lights dim — silence briefly, then he says, with head bowed:)

CH'EN God? (Silence again, a bit longer; a spotlight comes in on him very dimly; he looks up; quietly.) Yes . . . God . . . Yes.

(The spotlight comes up on him, brighter.)

END OF ACT II

Act III

(The missionary apartment. A week later. It is July 4, a playday. Early morning. Music is heard — The Doobie Brothers, "Jesus Is Just All Right With Me" coming from a cassette tape recorder. Curtain. The spotlight comes up on JOHNSON, who is dressed very casually, as are all the characters in this act. He has

been writing in his journal;
 he gets up here, however,
 and begins to dance around
 the apartment with the
 music. Barking.)

UNCLE SAM Break-fast!
 (From outside.)

JOHNSON Get in here, Uncle. Let's see you shake.

UNCLE SAM Eh? Hey, hey, hey.

JOHNSON Come on, rock out. Relax a little.

UNCLE SAM Foreign devil music.

(They laugh.)

JOHNSON Here, I'll show you. 1-2-3 hey! 1-2-3 hey!

(They do a three step and a
 kick. Both are enjoying
 themselves immensely. The
 bedroom door flies open.)

MARKHAM Johnson, turn that music down.
 (Sharply.)

JOHNSON What?

MARKHAM Turn that music down.

JOHNSON Could he be talking to us? (MARKHAM snaps off the
 (To SAM.) recorder.) The man has no soul, Uncle. Join me
 later. I'll teach you to boogaloo.

UNCLE SAM Be a good boy, Arizona.

JOHNSON Cook my breakfast, you pagan.

(He turns the music on again
 softly. Begins to write,
 MARKHAM reappears.)

MARKHAM Johnson, I don't think that kind of music, especially
 that song, is appropriate here.

JOHNSON I do.
 (Casually.)

MARKHAM Well, I don't (JOHNSON keeps writing.) Johnson, turn it off.

JOHNSON
(Begins humming as he writes, MARKHAM retreats to the bedroom. Pause. MATTHEWS comes out.)

MATTHEWS Elder Johnson, please turn that off. I'm trying to read scriptures.

JOHNSON Fat chance. You're filing slides.

(MATTHEWS is furious. He pulls the plug out of the wall.)

JOHNSON Temper, temper!

MATTHEWS So help me, Johnson, if you push me any further, I'll punch your lights out.

JOHNSON Fighting's against the rules, Elder Matthews.

MATTHEWS I don't care.

JOHNSON "Then the high priest rent his clothes saying: He hath spoken blasphemy. What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now we have heard his blasphemy. (MATTHEWS slams the door as he goes back to the bedroom) What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death."

UNCLE SAM Arizona?!

JOHNSON Who speaks to Caiaphas, the high priest?

UNCLE SAM Come here. (JOHNSON goes into kitchen.) Wise up.

JOHNSON What do you mean?

UNCLE SAM There have been others like you. I know my elders. Wise up.

JOHNSON What do you know about me?

UNCLE SAM You don't have a testimony.

JOHNSON Jeez! You're pretty blunt. Is it that obvious? (Deflated.)

UNCLE SAM You see those hotcakes, Arizona. If I don't take them off the fire soon, they'll burn up. But they tell me when they're ready. They rise and bubble and turn brown. Then I know they're ready. I take them off before they scorch. Everyone of you elders is in the fire, on the griddle. And you've all got personal problems that make things tough. But almost all of you go through the motions, make the signs, do what's expected. It's called faith. If you don't make the signs, the fire gets hotter. You came out here to make a change. Make it! Have faith. Otherwise you'll go up in smoke. I've seen it happen to one elder and I've heard about others. Wise up. If you didn't have a basic belief, you wouldn't be here. Don't fight it; use it. And don't let those others shape your battle. They're fighting too, even if they don't know it. Your battle just attracts a little more attention. Wise up.

JOHNSON I can't be a hypocrite, Sam.

UNCLE SAM Hypocrite to what? What's your alternative? The world? Do you owe your allegiance to the world?

JOHNSON I owe allegiance to myself. I can't be a hypocrite to myself. If I don't have faith, I don't.

UNCLE SAM You can be what you want to be. I know you're afraid you'll talk yourself into something that's false, because you want it so much. Well, you can talk yourself into evil, too. What are you basically — good or evil? Answer that for yourself. There's the Gospel or there's nothing, Arizona. Which do you believe in? Which do you want? If you feel like a hypocrite doing good, then you're basically evil. Some people get away because they think it's all relative, but you can't feel that way do you?

JOHNSON No.

UNCLE SAM No, you recognize good and evil. You know they exist. Choose good. Be what you want to be. (Pause.) Now, set the table, will you? (Shouting.) Break-fast!

(JOHNSON begins to set the table. The others come out warily, except LUCAS, who is bouncing.)

LUCAS What do you think of the Fourth of July, Uncle Sam?

UNCLE SAM Pierre to you, Canada.

LUCAS Forgive me, mon petit. (Aghast.) Sam you burned the hotcakes.

JOHNSON Inside joke. Listen, I'm sorry about the music.

MATTHEWS Yeah, forget it. You take the blessing?

JOHNSON Sure. (Bowed heads.) Father in Heaven, we're grateful this morning for all our blessings. We're grateful for this calling which we have to spread the Gospel here in this land. Forgive us of our shortcomings and strengthen our faith. We're grateful for this food and pray that it will be blessed to give us nourishment and energy. This we say in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

LUCAS Have you ever been to this beach we're going to?
(To MARKHAM)

MARKHAM No.

LUCAS Oh, it's beautiful. Our district had a playday there right after I came on island. It was fantastic. And we just had watermelon then. Today we cook steaks! It's gonna be great! Elder Johnson, do you play football?

JOHNSON A little.

LUCAS I love it. We'll have to be careful, though. The beach is a real temptation. Last time, I remember I was supposed to hit Jensen on a down and in pattern. He ran down and out. I led him right into the ocean. Jackson and the waves both hit him at the same time. He went all the way under and came up laughing like a fool. Then he and Osborne threw Jackson in. It was a free for all. After that everybody went in but the sisters, and the only thing that saved them was Sister Jordan's reputation as a holy terror.

MARKHAM I hear she used to wrestle for the "Y". (Laughter.)

LUCAS Anderson dunked me. I asked him before I went under if he thought this was out of line. He said, "Maybe, but I'll bet God's laughing as hard as we are." (Laughter.)

MATTHEWS Well, it won't happen today. We're not going near the water.

- LUCAS Then why go to the beach? I mean we can at least wade.
- MATTHEWS We'll see. Elder Markham, how was that second last night?
- MARKHAM (A bit flustered.) Oh, well, not bad. We may not get past a third, though. The guy has ashtrays all over and they're all full.
- JOHNSON (Smiling.) Elder Markham really doesn't know how the second went last night.
- MARKHAM Come on, Johnson.
- JOHNSON Oh, they know how it is, Elder. (To MATTHEWS.) We rode our bikes all over the city yesterday and by the time we got to Brother Li's house, we were exhausted. He gave us a cold drink and I started the second. All of a sudden we heard snores. Elder Markham was completely zonked in the armchair. I thought Brother Li would die laughing. (Laughter.)
- MARKHAM I was not completely asleep and I was not snoring. (The other three shake their heads, humoring him satirically.)
- JOHNSON, LUCAS and MATTHEWS No.
Of course not.
Oh, no.
- MARKHAM is furious. (To MATTHEWS.) You know how slow Johnson gives his lessons. He can't even get through the first without flubbing it all up. (To JOHNSON.) It's torture listening to you.
- JOHNSON (Having a ball.) I know. Well, you sure didn't get tortured last night. I've never seen anybody look so at peace. (Laughter. MARKHAM leaves the table.) After we finished, Brother Li wanted to put a blanket on him while he and I played chess, but I figured that was a little much.
- MARKHAM (Icily.) I'll tell you what's too much, Johnson. You challenged him to baptism, you committed him to read the Book of Mormon, but you didn't bear your testimony to him, did you?
- JOHNSON (MATTHEWS and LUCAS murmur a protest. MARKHAM ignores them.) No.

MARKHAM Testimony is the heart of the Gospel, Johnson. Why didn't you bare your testimony to Brother Li?

JOHNSON You know why.

MARKHAM Yes, and I know we may lose Brother Li because of you, just like we lost Sister Chang. What are you doing out here without a testimony, huh? How do you expect to do anything at all? You don't *do* the Lord's work Johnson; you hold it up!

(JOHNSON drops his fork
and walks out; barking;
Pause.)

LUCAS You knucklehead.
(To MARKHAM)

MATTHEWS Shut up, Lucas. He had it coming. Maybe this'll wake him up.

LUCAS Sounds like Markham could use some waking up too.

MARKHAM Look at what that guy's done to this apartment. We're supposed to be companions! How can we work in a spirit like this? Wish he'd just go home. Anything to get him off my hands.

LUCAS Off your back, you mean. You don't know how to handle him and it bugs you. It makes you realize you're not perfect.

MARKHAM Could you handle him?

LUCAS I don't know. Poll did all right.

MATTHEWS Poll babied him. You don't know what you're talking about.

LUCAS I know they were happy and baptizing. But maybe you're right. He's got to face it sometime.

(JOHNSON re-enters,
trembling.)

JOHNSON Elder Markham, do something for me.

MARKHAM What?
(Flat.)

JOHNSON Come here.

MARKHAM Yeah?
(Goes.)

JOHNSON I want you to use your priesthood.

MARKHAM How?

JOHNSON Lift that breakfast table by your faith.

MARKHAM Get off it, Johnson

(He starts to walk away.)

JOHNSON Noooo, wait a minute, senior companion. You're afraid you couldn't do it. You don't really *believe* you could do it. Come on. Faith as a mustard seed, Markham. Give us a little show.

MATTHEWS All right, Johnson, cool off.

JOHNSON Shut up, pea-brain.

(He turns back to
MARKHAM)

MATTHEWS Johnson
(Walks over. Touches
JOHNSON on the
shoulder.)

(JOHNSON shoves him
away. MATTHEWS loses his
temper. They grapple for an
instant.)

UNCLE SAM Let them get it all out, California.
(Grabs MATTHEWS.)

MATTHEWS You dirty chink!

UNCLE SAM Go to your room, little boy!

(Shoves MATTHEWS into
the bedroom, closes and
holds the door.)

JOHNSON Come on, Markham.

MARKHAM You're seeking a sign, Johnson.

JOHNSON That's right. I'm a priest of Baal, Markham. I'm a Korihor. Are you an Alma? Huh? (Gives him a little

shove.) Come on; fire from heaven, bright boy,
strike me dumb!

MARKHAM Lucas?

UNCLE SAM Don't Canada. It's gotta come.

JOHNSON Markham, you don't have any more faith than I do. You don't have a testimony either. You and Matthews don't really *believe* or *live* the Gospel. You *use* it to help you plan your petty lives and make you feel important. Maybe the Gospel's true and maybe it's not, but you're not the one to tell me or show me anything about it. So keep your trap shut about my testimony. And don't worry; I'm not gonna touch you.

(MARKHAM glowers and
heads for the bedroom;
SAM lets him go in.)

LUCAS Elder Johnson, sit down.

JOHNSON I

LUCAS Sit down and be quiet. Look man, I don't care if you're three years older or not. I want to tell you something.

JOHNSON O.K.
(Pugnaciously, but sitting.)

LUCAS You're as screwed up as they are. First of all, Markham does have a testimony. So does Matthews, and so do I. We're not very strong in it because we haven't had it long. We know a little about the priesthood, but not much. It takes a lifetime to build faith. Maybe your little speech will help Markham. He's just a starstruck kid who was brought up in the Church and not in the Gospel. Yeah, I know the distinction too. Markham wants to be a mission leader and baptize a million people because he thinks that's what the Gospel's all about. Of course, he'd never admit it. But look, he's basically doing the right thing. He wants to serve the Lord, and even if his adolescent egotism gets in the way, he's on the right track. And at least he likes these people and really wants to help them. Don't be unjust to him.

JOHNSON What about Matthews?

LUCAS Mattews is schizophrenic. The world got him by the throat by the time he was twelve. Athletics, keg parties, fashion fads. He's been conditioned to the world. When he thinks about the Church and its principles, he's a great guy. You should've seen him at that send-off. He *really feels* it. But get him back to temporal affairs, even temporal mission affairs, and he's right back in the world — all its thoughts and all its reactions. I don't know if he'll ever get over it. But listen, Elder Johnson. I don't care how bright you are or how clearly you think you see things. You're the one with real trouble right now.

JOHNSON Why?

LUCAS Those guys will fight their problems within the Church framework. They'll have bishops and wives to help them overcome themselves all through life. Not to mention that the Lord blesses all of us for doing what we can. They'll probably both become bishops and at least one of them will be good. But you, baby, you're on your way out *right now*. And it's not God's fault, it's yours.

JOHNSON Why doesn't He answer my prayers?

LUCAS You won't let him. I'm sure He tries. Look, two things. How long have you been on this agnostic thing?

JOHNSON Since I was a sophomore in high school.

LUCAS And you've nourished and cared for it every since.

JOHNSON No, I . . .

LUCAS Come on, Johnson. Nobody lives in uncertainty. You may think you do, and torment yourself with arguments to keep yourself satisfied, but agnosticism has become your creed. You're proud of it. It's made you an individual. You've found your niche. The good but dissenting Mormon, who lives the principles but questions the doctrines. The man above. Pride, Johnson, and a pattern for life every bit as tight, if not so common, as the bourgeois Mormon lifestyle that bugs you so much. You've told us all what a puppet your father is. Well, the world pulls your strings too, buddy. And you jump.

JOHNSON I've thought of all this before. I've considered it. I've seen the pattern. Maybe you think all my efforts to break out are just red herrings to myself. But I know

they're not. I've felt the pain. I've scraped my brain on every wall of this stinking box I live in, and *there are no answers!* Shouldn't the Lord come to me when I can't do any more?

LUCAS You think you've thought of everything. How 'bout this, Johnson? Quote: "I can't have the faith to get an answer, until I get an answer." Unquote . . .

JOHNSON That's the vicious cycle that drives me insane.

LUCAS I *know* it is, for cryin' out loud. Will you lemme finish? That cycle, in your case, is hogwash. You believe in God, through his principles, at least part of the time, and the rest of the time you hope. True?

JOHNSON Yes.

LUCAS That should be plenty for God to work with. Alma says desire is enough of a seed to bring a response.

JOHNSON Yes, but all of Alma 32 is geared to convincing oneself that the Gospel is true rather than . . .

LUCAS Oh, Johnson. What are you, a computer? How many times have you started that line when somebody brings up Alma's seed? Can you hold off on the stock answers for just a minute? (JOHNSON looks down.) What I'm saying is this. You don't lack faith in God. Your belief is sufficient. Your doubts center on yourself. Do you understand me? You doubt yourself. You doubt your ability to receive what other people have received. You look at the Markhams and sneer because they're naive. And so you accuse them of not really knowing the Gospel is true. But the Markhams scare you, because they really seem to have had an answer. And, oh, you could pass off the Markhams. They're your age and not so smart. But what about those brilliant Church leaders you've known? And the General Authorities? Are they naive and stupid? Yet they know. They've received answers. Johnson, you're afraid. That's your problem. You're afraid that for all your brains you're not the real, worthwhile, teachable, feeling person that others are. You're afraid you wouldn't receive an answer because you haven't got what it takes. Your agnosticism is one big front of fear.

(Long silence.)

JOHNSON No, you're wrong.

LUCAS Sure I am. Everybody's wrong but you. You're always right. Look where it's got you. (Pause.) Pierre, have you got some milk? I talk too much.

(SAM goes to the kitchen.
LUCAS begins to clear the
table. Pause.)

JOHNSON Elder Lucas. Thanks. I'll think about it.

LUCAS *Feel it, Elder. That's what you need.*

(LUCAS follows SAM into
the kitchen with the dishes.

JOHNSON is in deep
thought.)

SAM Good job, Canada.

LUCAS I hope it works, Sam. He's a good man. He's bright. He cares about people. In a lot of ways he's very realistic. And he's got a sense of humor. That in itself is worth a lot. I really like him.

SAM So do I. I think he'll come around.

LUCAS I don't know. I know what Johnson's going through. I've seen it before, and I've read about it in Church history. Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Thomas Marsh. Some very good and some very brilliant people get hung up on a single point of the Gospel and they can't seem to break loose and catch the whole perspective again. Sometimes it's a major doctrinal question, like Johnson has with revelation, or like others have had with Church government or polygamy. Sometimes it's a much littler thing, like evolution or birth control or the Black question. But big or small, it nails 'em just the same. Their question becomes a subtle obsession, a fire in the mind. It's like a whirlpool, and it drags them down to an intellectual pit. They're still good people. They *want* to see the whole picture. They *want* to break out. But at the same time they build the walls around them even higher. They've made such a big thing of their question either to themselves or others that it becomes a matter of pride for them to resolve it. So they struggle on, attacking their question one day, reinforcing it the next, until they're so exhausted fighting themselves that they collapse. Then, after a while, they get up and start over again. But their minds are locked in and the obsession grows stronger. And it becomes a

way of life. It's not at all pleasant, but it's individual, or at least they think it is. In their own tormented way they're satisfied. Then Satan slowly feeds on their pain, and takes advantage of their distorted view of the Gospel, and they begin to view the whole Church from the standpoint of their terribly personal battle. Suddenly *all* the doctrines and principles are on trial. And the human follies of Church members, like aspiration, or materialism, or apathy seem unbearably wicked and reflect on the Gospel rather than on the individual. Then they become bitter and indifferent, and pretty soon, out of pride and frustration, they begin to sin. They're still good people, but, after that, they no longer care, or they have to justify themselves by continuing to rebel. It's not long before they're gone.

(Pause.)

UNCLE SAM Elder Johnson's only 22.

LUCAS But he's already been fighting himself for seven years. If he doesn't recognize what he's into now, he never will. He'll just dig deeper and deeper into his hole and then it'll just be a matter of time. I hope I made him see. (Pause.) He's a good man. (Pause.) Hey! Playday. Bus in twenty minutes. We've gotta roll.

(MATTHEWS and
MARKHAM come out
sullenly.)

JOHNSON I'd like to stay home, if I could. Sam'll be here.

MATTHEWS Brother T'ang is through. He's finished. I'm firing him.

LUCAS Hey, let's hit the playday first, We'll think about it again tonight.

JOHNSON Would you mind if I stayed here, Elder Markham?

MARKHAM Fine with me.

(MATTHEWS shrugs.)

LUCAS Let's go then. See you later, Elder Johnson. We'll bring you back a steak.

JOHNSON Elder Lucas? (The others go out.) You've got all of us

pegged. Just out of curiosity, what's *your* problem?

LUCAS I can't keep my mind off women. Adios. Pierre! Au revoir!
(Smiles.)

(He goes out; barking.)

UNCLE SAM I need to go do some shopping.

JOHNSON Fine, I want to be alone. I won't run off.

UNCLE SAM Bacon, lettuce, and tomato tonight, heh, heh, heh.

JOHNSON That'd be great.

(SAM goes out, JOHNSON sits down and writes furiously in his journal for an instant. Stops. Slams it shut, goes to the door and looks out. Comes back. Pulls out a chair. Kneels.)

JOHNSON Oh, God. (Lights fade, spotlight on JOHNSON.)
God?

(Voices are heard.)

MARKHAM Isn't the Gospel beautiful? It makes my happy all the time.

MATTHEWS It makes me feel love. God is love. Love is what it's all about.

MARKHAM Love and happiness — and truth. That's what makes it so beautiful. It's true, absolutely true and it'll last forever. Love and happiness and truth, for eternity.

JOHNSON What do you know about truth?

LUCAS He knows, Elder Johnson. I know too. Join us.

MARKHAM Yes, Elder Johnson. Come.

MATTHEWS You can know too, Johnson. Come.

POLL It *is* true, Barney, I know it is.

UNCLE SAM Wise up, Arizona.

JOHNSON No. No. There's got to be more. You're just men.

LUCAS God sends his answers through men. *I* didn't speak

to you; it was the Holy Ghost. You felt it. You know.

JOHNSON No.

LUCAS What did you feel?

JOHNSON It made me think.

POLL What did you *feel*, Barney?

JOHNSON Nothing.

UNCLE SAM You felt it, Arizona. Don't be afraid.

JOHNSON I only felt a little. That's all I ever feel. I . . .

(JOHNSON's own voice is
heard.)

JOHNSON'S VOICE Don't be a fool, Johnson. Was what you felt an answer from God? Be honest, Johnson. Think!

LUCAS That's your pride talking, Elder. That's your fear. Don't listen to it.

JOHNSON'S voice What does he know about what you've felt, what you've experienced? You know this isn't enough. Don't sell yourself out.

JOHNSON I want to know.

JOHNSON'S voice Truth or happiness, you can't have both.

MARKHAM Love and truth and happiness — forever.

JOHNSON'S voice Baloney. Johnson, be honest!

LUCAS Johnson, you're talking to yourself.

JOHNSON'S voice No.

LUCAS It's what you've always feared. But the opposite.

JOHNSON'S voice. No.

LUCAS Don't talk yourself *out* of the truth.

JOHNSON'S voice Don't let them talk you into a lie. Truth, Johnson. Honesty!

JOHNSON Yes.

- POLL No, Barney.
- JOHNSON Yes. There *must* be more!
- UNCLE SAM No, Arizona. More comes later. We grow!
- JOHNSON's voice Listen to them qualify, Johnson. They're backing down.
- LUCAS He's lying, Johnson. You're answering yourself. Don't make yourself your god.
- JOHNSON's voice Shut up.
- LUCAS Don't make pride and fear your gods. Open up! Break away!
- JOHNSON Yes, I must.
- JOHNSON's voice No! What if they're wrong? How could you live with yourself if they're wrong? Your life would be a joke. All your suffering a joke!
- MARKHAM You'll never know if you're wrong.
- JOHNSON's voice That's right, you'll never know. Never, never, never, know!
- POLL God will add to your light.
- JOHNSON's voice Never!
- JOHNSON Never.
- MATTHEWS Love, Johnson.
- MARKHAM Truth and happiness.
- JOHNSON's voice Never!
- LUCAS It's true, Johnson.
- JOHNSON's voice Honesty.
- UNCLE SAM Faith.
- JOHNSON Honesty!
- JOHNSON's voice Yes!
- LUCAS No! Faith *and* honesty; your pride is *dishonest*!

Your fear is *dishonest!* Feel it, Johnson. You know, you know

(All of them join in, in a crescendo. JOHNSON is racked.)

JOHNSON's voice No!!!
(Terribly loud.)

JOHNSON No!!!
(Blending with his own voice.)

(He stands upright, picks up the chair and stares into the blinding light.)

JOHNSON God!! I . . . No!!!!

(He smashes the chair across the table, falls, and lies face upward, sobbing. The spotlight on him slowly fades into nothingness.)

END OF ACT III

Epilog

(The missionary apartment. That night. Enter MARKHAM and JOHNSON. JOHNSON is in a black, careless humor. MARKHAM is frustrated. JOHNSON flops in an armchair, MARKHAM at the table.)

MARKHAM All right, what's on your mind, Elder Johnson?

JOHNSON My mind? Nothing.

MARKHAM Come on, you've been down all night. Something's on your mind.

JOHNSON No. I'm not thinking any more. I'm just feeling. Lucas suggested it.

MARKHAM Well, you must feel rotten then.

JOHNSON Yes.

(Pause.)

MARKHAM Lucas wants us all to try to forget this morning. At least the personal feelings. I'm willing. What do you say?

JOHNSON You're willing because you came off a jackass. (MARKHAM starts to retort angrily.) But don't worry. I'm not remembering. Memory is a process of mind, and I'm not thinking. I'm just feeling.

MARKHAM Can't we do anything, Elder? Won't you try?

JOHNSON My mind is a blank. Are you speaking to me? Beep beep beep.

MARKHAM Jeez!
(Bangs his hand down on the table.)

JOHNSON Golly gumdrops!

(He laughs. Pause.)

MARKHAM Oh wow! The transfer sheet. Come on, we've got to go back to the post office.

JOHNSON We?

MARKHAM We, Johnson. Let's go.

JOHNSON Oui, a French word signifying the affirmative. My mind is coming back.

MARKHAM I said, let's go.

JOHNSON Yes, my mind! But it's all so hazy. Did you hear a jackass bray?

MARKHAM Garbage.

(Barking.)

JOHNSON Hark, Cerberus! Who comes? Goldilocks Lucas and the Pea-grain?

(Laughs.)

MARKHAM No, it's too early.

(HOLLY appears; knocks.)

JOHNSON Hol-lee Hello!
(Snaps out.)

MARKHAM How'd she know where we live?

JOHNSON We taught her here once. Come in, Holly. What is it?

HOLLY Oh, I must talk to you.

MARKHAM We have to get that transfer sheet. Gordon goes home tomorrow.

JOHNSON Look, you go ahead, I'll talk to her. It's only five minutes to the post office. I think she wants to talk to me anyway. She knows me better.

MARKHAM Shoot, it's against the rules.

JOHNSON Well, but we've got to know about the transfer don't we?

MARKHAM All right. (To HOLLY.) Sister Chou, we have some other business to take care of, but we want to help you too. You talk to Elder Johnson; I'll be right back.

HOLLY Thank you. (He goes out; barking.) Oh, Elder Johnson.
(She is crying.)

JOHNSON Here, sit down.
(They sit at the table, corner to corner.)

HOLLY My father, he is so angry with me.

JOHNSON Why?

HOLLY I told him I wanted to go to . . . American college . . . to study.

JOHNSON What's wrong with that?

HOLLY He says . . . I will stay there . . . and live . . . and forget China. Ohh. (Sobbing, she takes his hand.) Forgive me, I am so silly.

JOHNSON No, no. (He strokes her hand.) Holly, you won't forget China. Your father must know that deep down. And it would do you good to study in America. You already have beautiful English, but you could improve it in the States. And anyone who speaks English has a better chance at a job with all

the American business here. And those are the people who get better pay. Have your teacher talk to him. Do you have a favorite teacher who would help you?

HOLLY Yes, I had not thought of that. And we wants me to go very much. I am his prize student.

JOHNSON There you go. It'll work out.
(He strokes her hand again.)

HOLLY Oh, you make me so happy!
(She jumps up.)

JOHNSON Good.

(Pause.)

HOLLY But *you* are not happy. You have not been happy since Elder Poll left. Is it this Elder Markham?

JOHNSON No, it's just a lot of things.

HOLLY Your family?

JOHNSON No, it's all in my mind.

HOLLY Tell me. I am your friend. Come, we will go out on the balcony and talk. The night air sets minds free. (She stops, looks at him a moment, then leans down and kisses him on the cheek.) This is how American girls show concern, is it not?

JOHNSON Holly.
(Stands up.)

HOLLY Is it not allowed?

JOHNSON Yes, it is allowed.
(Looks at her a moment, then leans over slowly and kisses her cheek.)

HOLLY You are wonderful! You make me so happy. How can I make you happy?
(Laughs.)

JOHNSON Just talk to me. You're very beautiful.
(Seriously, gently.)

HOLLY Come, we will go downtown. I will show you my favorite noodle shop. They serve the best beef
(Taking command.)

noodles in the capital. And gigantic bottles of Chi Shui! Come! It will make you happy again.

JOHNSON No.

HOLLY Why not?

JOHNSON No, I . . .

HOLLY It is this Elder Markham. He is the reason you are unhappy. I will kick his shins for you.

JOHNSON No, it's not Elder Markham.

HOLLY Then why not?

JOHNSON Well, I'd look ridiculous wearing a tie.

HOLLY Take it off. You are more silly than me.

(Laughs.)

JOHNSON All right. I want to. I just want to talk to you.

(Takes off the tie slowly,
drapes it over the chair;
softly.)

(Barking.)

HOLLY Elder Markham! He would never let you go. Quick,
(Hand on mouth.) the back way.

(She is giggling. This is great innocent fun. She crosses into the kitchen, waves him to come on. He follows rather dumbly. She opens the back door, beckons him to be quiet. MARKHAM storms in in roaring good spirits, carrying a big bottle of Chi Shui. JOHNSON motions HOLLY to go ahead. She beckons him to come, goes out. He stands and listens.)

MARKHAM Johnson, you won't believe it. (Sees the tie, addresses the bedroom) Come here and have a glass of Chi Shui. (Pours out JOHNSON's drink, then his own.) Get this Johnson: Matthews —

busted to straight senior. I can't believe it! Jensen — AP; Markham — district leader. You get that? Markham — district leader; all right, huh? Lucas — zone leader, and co-senior with Johnson! You get that? Lucas, your buddy, is your companion — and you're co-senior! How's that make you feel? You made it, Johnson! We both made it! And, oh yeah! Here's the best part. A letter from Brother Ch'en. He got his answer. He wants to be baptized in two weeks. Whaddya say Johnson? (Pause; JOHNSON looks down again. MARKHAM shakes his head, begins to read the letter over.) Finally, a good man. (JOHNSON turns and goes out. The lights fade to a spotlight on the table.) He's such a good man. (MARKHAM drinks; a door is heard closing; the lights go off MARKHAM; only the empty chair and glass, and the tie can be seen.) A good man.

The End
