

SOME OTHER DIGNITY

(A Short)

Dec 2020

INT. DOUWA'S HOME - DAY

Early 1970s, a very poor peasant's family in the countryside of north China. They live in a cave which is dug into the mountain of yellow earth. A family of four is going to have breakfast.

The mother is bringing steaming porridge to the table. The father is fixing farm tools, which brings a lot of noise from the corner. A 7 years old boy (Douwa, son of a bean farmer) gets up and dresses with girl-style clothes on the Kang (brick bed).

A poster of Chairman Mao and his quotations are displayed on the dark brown dried muddy walls. The quotations are: **"Never Forget Class Struggle", "Be Determined To Fear No Death And Overcome All Difficulties To Win Victory"**

The grandma, an old lady of bound feet smokes a long Chinese pipe and hums a tune in the inner section of the house.

A big yellow dog (Dahuang) enters. He lies down by the grandma's Kang.

GRANDMA

(humming the same  
tune repeatedly)

Here he comes, again and again.  
He lies down in front of me, Douwa,  
Douwa, you need to get up now,  
Dahuang is taking you to school...

Douwa's mother shouts over to him while placing extremely big bowls of diluted porridge to the table.

DOUWA'S MOTHER

You've got to hurry up, Douwa.

Douwa puts all his clothes on, picks up his schoolbag and heads out.

DOUWA'S MOTHER (cont'd)  
Are you still dreaming? Going to  
school without breakfast?

Douwa returns to the table in a daze and takes a big mouthful of porridge, after which he is awake.

DOUWA  
(to the dog)  
Let's go, Dahuang.

Douwa and Dahuang head to the door.

Douwa's mother shouts again while they are leaving.

DOUWA'S MOTHER  
Don't waste your time on the road.  
Go together with your schoolmates  
if you can, and don't be late. Or  
your teacher will punish you again.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE HOME TO SCHOOL ROAD - DAY

Douwa walks with broken girl-style shoes, his toes can be seen. His outfit is big for his body. The color of the schoolbag is faded. Dahuang escorts him to the school.

CUT TO:

EXT. BY THE DOOR - DAY

Douwa's mother looks at them leaving.

DOUWA'S MOTHER

(think aloud)

It would have been nice if we had  
Dahuang earlier.

EXT. ON THE ROAD TO SCHOOL - DAY

Douwa and Dahuang are approach to the school, which is an abandoned temple. The Meditation Hall on the left is the classroom for Grade One in this large Buddhism courtyard.

EXT/INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Through the wooden frame window with no glass, Douwa and his best playmate Laifu (Luck Comes) can be seen. They sit in the first row of the classroom. A very young female teacher with a long braid reads Chairman Mao's Little Red Book aloud. She looks devoted and full of emotion.

Her reading has a very strong local accent. 20 or so children sit by wooden boards supported by four wooden legs, repeating what she reads aloud.

THE TEACHER

"Policies and strategies  
are the life of the party.  
Leading comrades at all levels  
must pay full attention to them,  
and they must not be careless".

The children have no textbooks. Hysterically, they repeat without understanding.

The young teacher spends the whole session reading Mao's line without explanation. This makes the children lose interest quickly.

Douwa becomes restless. He has his left hand reached out of the window where Dahuang comes to licks his hand for affection.

THE TEACHER (cont'd)

(noticing Douwa)

Douwa, stand up.

Douwa is startled by the sudden calling of his name and slowly stands up.

THE TEACHER (cont'd)  
 "Policies and strategies  
 are the life of the party",  
 what does this sentence mean?

DOUWA  
 (slowly with self-  
 made answer)  
 Mr. Zheng and Mr. Ce can be the  
 killers for Mr. Dang.

THE TEACHER  
 Nonsense, sit down.

A BOY (V.O.)  
 (loudly)  
 Teacher, what does it mean then?

The temple bell rings.

THE TEACHER  
 Class is over. We shall deal with  
 them next time.

INT/EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Kids rush out of the classroom in the sound of the temple bell.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE - DAY

Douwa caresses Dahuang while talking with Laifu under the sunshine against a wall. The strong sunshine makes them hard to keep their eyes fully opened. Dahuang on the other hand, is excited to see so many kids around.

DOUWA

This is boring. I don't like the teacher. Let's go to pick mushrooms in the woods, shall we?

LAIFU

Too early, too soon, right? Let's stay for one more class. My dad would beat me up if he found out.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The math class starts with the same teacher.

THE TEACHER

Now, all of you, listen well!

The kids become quiet and try to listen.

THE TEACHER (cont'd)

(emotionally)

The evil landlord has 100 sheep, the poor peasant Uncle Wang has only two sheep. How many more sheep does the landlord have than the poor peasant?

(pause)

Who can write the calculation on the blackboard?

All the kids hands up except Douwa.

THE TEACHER (cont'd)

Douwa, you, come over to write on the blackboard.

Douwa slowly stands up. He tries not to have eye contact with the teacher. For a few seconds, he doesn't move towards the blackboard.

THE TEACHER (cont'd)

Douwa, you are so stupid! You sleep in my Chinese class and you don't understand anything in my math class. You are really inferior to your sister.

A BOY (V.O.)

(loudly)

Teacher, his sister was eaten by a wolf.

THE TEACHER

Shut up. I know that. No need for you to tell me.

Douwa tries hard to stop the teardrops rolling out of his eyes after he hears the words "his sister".

All of sudden, Dahuang's front paws rest on the windowsill. It barks at the teacher, who is taken aback, but does not apologize to Douwa.

All the kids giggle.

EXT. IN A WOODS - DAY

Douwa and Laifu walk aimlessly in a woods. They talk and laugh as Dahuang is happily running around them.

Suddenly, Dahuang becomes alert and barks at the bush. He barks louder and louder. His body is now ready to attack. Finally, Dahuang shoots himself out to the bush, which makes the bush shake extremely violent. Animal fighting sounds can be heard.

DOUWA

Wolf, run!

Douwa and Laifu turn around and run as fast as they can.

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - DAY

Douwa and Laifu run back to the village without stopping until they see some farmers. They find a place to sit and catch a breath.

A FARMER

Douwa, are you both skipping school again?

DOUWA

(breathlessly)

Wolf, wolf, there are wolves over there!

THE FARMER

Go home quickly.

DOUWA

My Dahuang is not back yet. Will you take me to see if it is OK?

THE FARMER

Your Dahuang will come back himself, don't worry, just go home now.

DOUWA

No, I'll be here and wait for Dahuang to return.

THE FARMER

(while leaving)

So stubborn.

The farmer leaves.

Douwa and Laifu remain where they are.

DOUWA

Do you think Dahuang can defeat the wolf?

LAIFU

I am not sure. If there was only one wolf, I think Dahuang can win, but it is hard to say if it was a group of wolves.

DOUWA

Did you see one wolf or many of them?

LAIFU

I saw zero wolves.

EXT. OUTSIDE DOUWA'S HOME - EVENING

Douwa sits by the door, expecting Dahuang return safely. Sound of sheep cry can be heard.

DOUWA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Douwa, feed the sheep, will you? Do not sit there doing nothing. Whether Dahuang can come back depends on its luck. The wolves are hungry in this season.

DOUWA

Mom, can you ask Dad to find Dahuang with some of his friends?

DOUWA'S MOTHER

Go feed the sheep. Stop wasting time.

While tossing grass over to the sheep, Douwa can't help looking at the direction where Dahuang might turn up.



INT. DOUWA'S HOME - NIGHT

Douwa's parents snore but he stays wide awake. He listens carefully to any sound that might come from outside.

INT/EXT. DOUWA'S HOME - MORNING

Early in the morning, Douwa opens the door to check if Dahuang is back, but returns inside with disappointment.

CUT TO:

DOUWA' MOTHER  
(serving breakfast)  
Douwa, hurry up! Get ready for school. Your dad will walk you to school today.

Douwa drinks porridge with a big bowl.

DOUWA'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Douwa's Dad, can you ask around on your way back who has a puppy in our village? Douwa cannot go to school without a big dog.

DOUWA'S FATHER  
A puppy cannot change into a big dog within one day. We need to have Dahuang back.

EXT. ON THE ROAD TO SCHOOL - DAY

Douwa goes to school. His father walks next to him, carrying a shovel on his shoulder.

DOUWA  
I want no other dog but Dahuang.

EXT. OUTSIDE DOUWA'S HOME - DAY

Dahuang comes back seriously injured and dying. He lies on a straw mat which turns to red by his blood.

CUT TO:

Douwa comes home from school and is overjoyed to see Dahuang. After noticing Dahuang's bleeding, Douwa looks serious.

INT. DOUWA'S HOME - EVENING

Douwa's mother brings a dinner to the table, which includes salted vegetables, rock-hard steamed corn bread and very diluted hot millet porridge.

DOUWA

Mom, shall we get some meat for Dahuang?

DOUWA'S MOTHER

Silly boy, do you remember the last time we had meat?

DOUWA

Can we have Dahuang stay inside tonight?

DOUWA'S MOTHER

No, I don't like seeing blood inside. It's unlucky.

Douwa turns broody.

EXT. OUTSIDE DOUWA'S HOME - NIGHT

Dahuang licks its wounds.

DOUWA'S DAD (V.O.)

How about killing a chicken? Douwa and his grandma can eat some meat. Dahuang can have the bones.

DOUWA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

What are you talking about? All the hens are about to lay eggs. Don't even think about it. Whether Dahuang can survive it depends on his luck.

INT/EXT. DOUWA'S HOME - EARLY MORNING

Douwa gets up and runs out to see Dahuang, who is too weak to stand up. Douwa looks heartbroken and helpless. The background sheep cry reminds Douwa of something.

CUT TO:

Douwa returns to grandma's room, where she smokes, hums, and plays cards.

THE GRANDMA

(humming)

Here he comes, again and again. He lies down in front of me...

Douwa climbs onto grandma's Kang.

DOUWA

(sweetly)

Grandma, why do you drink goat milk every day? Do you have to?

GRANDMA

Grandma doesn't have to drink goat milk. Grandma can let Douwa drink. Drinking more goat milk makes you grow tall and handsome.

DOUWA

Grandma can grow tall by drinking less.

Grandma puffs and laughs.

GRANDMA

I cannot grow tall anymore. I pray not to shrink too fast.

EXT. OUTSIDE DOUWA'S HOME - DAY

Douwa approaches the goats with a bowl. This is his first time to milk a goat. After a big effort, Douwa carefully carries half a bowl of goat milk and walks to Dahuang.

CUT TO:

Douwa feeds Dahuang with goat milk.

DOUWA

Drink! Drink more goat milk and grow tall and handsome. Kill the bad wolf and get revenge for my sister.

CUT TO:

Douwa's mother enters and sees Douwa feeding Dahuang with goat milk. She becomes angry, shouts at Douwa, and comes to grab the bowl.

DOUWA'S MOTHER

Douwa, what do you think you are doing?

DOUWA

I am not drinking, grandma is not drinking, I give my milk to Dahuang.

The mother and son start to fight over the half bowl of milk, which makes it fall to the ground. The bowl is cracked into pieces.

Dahuang looks guilty and self-blaming.

Douwa starts to cry and walks back home.

                  DOUWA (cont'd)  
                  (heading to grandma)  
I won't drink, grandma won't drink  
we give Dahuang our milk.

Grandma sees the scene from inside over the window.

EXT. ON THE ROAD TO SCHOOL - MORNING

Douwa's father walks with Douwa to school.

                  DOUWA'S DAD  
Douwa, you need to study hard. Don't  
think about Dahuang all day long. I  
will harvest beans today and bring  
you a surprise, but you must promise,  
you are going to study hard. The  
teacher sent me a message, a kind of  
complaint letter.

Douwa nods without replying. Laifu joins them in the distance.

EXT. THE TEMPLE - DAY

A wide shot over the temple. Sound of the teacher and the kids, reading Chairman Mao's quotations.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CLASSROOM - DAY

The teacher is picking on individuals to recite Mao's lines. All kids are doing great except when it comes to Douwa's turn.

DOUWA  
(eyes closed, pray  
aloud)  
Please, do not call me, please, do  
not call me.

THE TEACHER  
Douwa, it's your turn. Stand up.

Douwa stands up but he can't remember anything.

THE TEACHER (cont'd)  
Douwa, I don't know what to say.  
What's wrong with you?

LAIFU  
His dog, Dahuang was attacked by  
wolves. The dog is very injured.

THE TEACHER  
Now sit down.

The bell starts, class is over. The teacher leaves. Many kids are coming to comfort him.

ALL KIDS  
Dahuang will be OK, for sure, he will  
be recovered.

Laifu pulls half white bun from his pocket and gives it to Douwa by putting it into his schoolbag.

EXT. ON THE ROAD HOME - DAY

Douwa's dad returns home, a sickle in one hand and two dead hares in another.

INT. DOUWA'S HOME - EVENING

The family is about to have dinner. Grandma comes out and sits by the table with Douwa.

DOUWA

Grandma, what should I do? Dahuang isn't eating or drinking. He will never recover.

GRANDMA

(slowly)

Douwa, dogs are like people. We care about our faces. They care about their self-respect from their owners.

DOUWA

What is self-respect?

GRANDMA

Did you say Thank You to Dahuang after he came back?

DOUWA

No, I didn't.

GRANDMA

Dahuang is very clever. If you say Thank You to him, that means self-respect to him.

DOUWA  
You mean he will eat if I say Thank  
You to him?

Grandma nods with a smile. A close shot over the mother, who slows down her meal and looks like she is thinking deeply.

GRANDMA  
(lighting her pipe  
and hums)  
Here he comes, again and again.  
He lies down in front of me, we all  
need to say Thank You to Dahuang

EXT. OUTSIDE DOUWA'S HOME - NIGHT

Douwa's mother milks the sheep and brings the milk to Dahuang. Dahuang tries his best to stand up, wagging his tail. He starts drinking the milk.

DOUWA'S MOTHER  
(caressing Dahuang)  
Go ahead and drink the milk.

Dahuang looks at his owner and starts to drink the milk.

INT. DOUWA'S HOME - NIGHT

Douwa's mother puts two skinned hares into boiling water.

Grandma notices Douwa's mother cooking for Dahuang. She starts to hum again and lights up her long pipe.

Dahuang enters in grandma's humming tune.



DOUWA'S MOTHER

(think aloud)

Give me a minute, Dahuang, I am cooking the hares for you.

GRANDMA

Here he comes, again and again. He lies down in front of me, Dahuang has meat for dinner tonight.

CUT TO:

Douwa brings out a half white steamed bun from his old schoolbag. He breaks the bun apart with his dirty hands. Dahuang slowly begins to eat it.

DOUWA

Eat it all. Laifu saved his breakfast for you.

Douwa's mother dishes up half-cooked hares from the pot. She places them on the chopping board and chops them into pieces with a large knife.

DOUWA'S MOTHER

Come, Dahuang, eat outside.

Dahuang follows her out.

EXT. OUTSIDE DOUWA'S HOME - NIGHT

Douwa's mother is watching Dahuang eating the meat.

DOUWA'S MOTHER

Thank you, Dahuang, thank you for saving Douwa's life. You are the hero of our family. Douwa's sister is not as lucky as he is.

(MORE)

DOUWA'S MOTHER (cont'd)  
(pause to dry her  
tears)  
Eat this and get well, grow bigger.  
Douwa needs you to go to school with.

Douwa's mother dries her wet eyes with her sleeve.

INT. DOUWA'S HOME - NIGHT

A quiet night. Douwa is sleeping. A close shot on Douwa's sweet face. Dahuang is on the floor, fast asleep too.

DOUWA'S MOTHER (V.O.)  
Douwa is such a loving boy. He knows his sister is not his real sister but insists having Dahuang taking revenge for her.

(pause)

He is very much like you. He will be a reliable man when he grows up, for sure.

(pause)

I married you with my young and old ones. We are poor and struggling for our lives but cannot afford to have any more accidents.

DOUWA'S DAD  
Dahuang is our blessing. Don't you worry.

EXT. ON THE ROAD TO SCHOOL/THE SCHOOL - DAY

Douwa goes to school, followed by Dahuang. In the distance, Laifu joins them.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A wide shot of the quiet class. Serious faces of the young individuals.

THE TEACHER

Today we are not going to recite Chairman Mao's lines. Instead, Douwa completed a story of his dog Dahuang. He wants to share it with us, is that OK?

ALL KIDS

(clap)

Yes, can't wait. Go on Douwa.

Douwa walks to the front, he turns back to face the teacher and kids. He has confidence from his shiny eyes. He slowly pulls out a black slate from his schoolbag, on which is his pre-written story.

DOUWA

Dahuang, Dahuang, my good friend. He saved my life from the wolves. And Laifu's too. Laifu feeds him with white bread. I feed him with goat milk. He is the best friend of ours.

Douwa lifts his head to look at his classmates followed by claps. A shy smile starts gradually on his face.

Dahuang stands up from outside by the window, friendly barking over Douwa.

All kids and the teacher laugh.

## ALL KIDS

Dahuang, Dahuang, my good friend. He saved my life from the wolves. And Laifu's too. Laifu feeds him with white bread. I feed him with goat milk. He is the best friend of ours.

Their voices echo over the temple, the village valley, the yellow earth mountains, the forests.....

**THE END**