

GOLD MOUNTAIN

A  
Short Screenplay  
Written by

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INT. ATTIC ROOM - NIGHT - SHANGHAI - 1849

We see a grand painting of Shangri-la. A vast landscape with waterfalls, forests and cobbled roads spiralling around a breathtaking mountain. The mountain reaches to such heights, it stands among the clouds.

Yet floating between the clouds is a mythical Chinese Snake weaving in and out of sight. We notice in the lower portion of the painting, a Fisherman gazing up at the towering spectacle.

All the dialogue while in Shanghai is spoken in Chinese.

JIANG (O.S.)

For him, there was never a sight so grand, never a sight so of another world. When the Fisherman recognized this, he could do nothing but cry. He cried for what he saw warmed his heart. He cried for he learned then he could never leave this place. He could never return and see his family. Gold Mountain was now his new home.

Just beyond the majestic peaks of the mountain is a radiant sun, gleaming all rays of sunlight.

We cut to JIANG (40s) & WEI (10). Wei is lying under the covers as his father narrates a tale so spectacular, Wei's eyes are as big as saucers. His ears drink up every word.

JIANG (CONT'D)

That, Wei, that is where we're going tomorrow.

EXT. SHANGHAI STREETS - NEXT DAY

Female hands are seen putting a half-crested necklace around Wei's neck. He looks up with much trepidation.

JIA (O.S.)

You now have one half, Wei.

JIA (40s) leans down and shows her necklace.

JIA (CONT'D)

And I have the other.

She places them side-by-side. Together, they form a complete moon. She then pulls them apart.

JIA (CONT'D)  
 Don't worry, they'll be one again.  
 In time.

WEI  
 Mamma, you wouldn't lie, would you?

JIA  
 Never to you, love. Be safe. Listen  
 to Father. If you ever feel lonely,  
 hold this tight and I'll know.

She kisses him on the forehead. She turns to Jiang watching  
 some feet away. She takes off her necklace and presses it  
 into his hands.

JIA (CONT'D)  
 When he is at his worse, give this  
 to him.

Jiang takes her in his arms.

EXT. DOCKS - LATER

Both Jiang and Wei watch as aristocrat folk stride up the  
 platform leading into the giant ship.

WEI  
 Are they going to Gold Mountain,  
 too?

JIANG  
 (after a sigh)  
 They are.

WEI  
 Will there still be room for us?

JIANG  
 Don't worry, they'll be space for  
 us all.

INT. THIRD-CLASS CABIN - NIGHT

We see makeshift beds stacked on top of one other, as dozens  
 and dozens of Chinese travelers sit, lie, languish and stand  
 on top of one another.

Between the roars of laughter and snores, over the clamor of  
 mahjong, through the smoke fumes, we see Jiang and Wei  
 occupying their little bed.

Wei idly plays with his necklace. Jiang watches him.

WEI  
Is everyone here going to Gold  
Mountain?

JIANG  
They are.

WEI  
Uncle Po's already there, isn't he?

JIANG  
He is.

WEI  
Have you met anyone whose returned?

JIANG  
No.

WEI  
It's because when they get to Gold  
Mountain, they never want to leave,  
right? Like the Fisherman.

Jiang hesitates before speaking.

JIANG  
Right.

INT. THIRD-CLASS CABIN - LATER

The same space that was once packed with noise and movement is now filled with people slumbering through the night.

People slumber into the dead of night. Beams of moonlight spill into the room from a single porthole.

Wei, the only one awake, gazes out from the porthole. The ocean is as black as tar. The sky sprinkled with stars.

Wei appears drowsy, as if he's been staring out for hours. His eyelids begin to fall. His head nods off.

A gold glint flashes across his face. He snaps wide-open. After a few moments, another glint. And another.

Wei peels his eyes as best he can.

WEI  
(whispering)  
Gold Mountain.

He jumps off the bed and rushes out the room. He hurries up the stairs, past officers and crewman. He climbs up the last flight of stairs before arriving onto the deck of the ship.

He sprints to the bow of the ship.

Wei reaches the balcony and stops. He's out of breath, but that doesn't stop him from peering out into the distance.

He watches in anticipation. The golden lint appears like clockwork, flashing across the ocean in a full arc. Wei watches as the gold light splashes across his arms.

High above in the ship mast, he hears the WATCHER call out.

WATCHER  
(shouting)  
Land ahoy! Land ahoy!

Wei now watches closer. The fog before him dissolves.

The source of the golden flashes is revealed. It is not a mountain of gold, nor a shimmering snake.

It is a lighthouse. Its giant lamp rotates mechanically. It flashes across Wei again, yet some reason it's not exciting anymore.

INT. IMMIGRATION OFFICE - NEXT DAY

We watch as countless immigrants wait in dizzying lines. The lines wrap around the room twofold before disappearing through the entrance door.

There are only three desks currently in-service. An IMMIGRATION OFFICER sits behind each one. A faded American flag behind each officer.

The lack of air conditioning in the stuffy office is apparent on all within. The Officers are forced to wipe their greasy foreheads every few minutes as the sweat seems endless.

One of the officers smacks the side of his neck in an effort to kill a landed mosquito. He doesn't bother to wipe it away. The dead mosquito remains stuck to his skin.

Jiang and Wei waiting one away from the officer. A BOY (14) in front of them cautiously waits his turn. He nervously clutches a handful of documents.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER  
(without looking up)  
Next.

The Boy hurries to the desk and sits in the chair. He hands the papers to the Officer who snatches them up.

Wei watches as the Officer glazes over the papers. The Boy watches in anticipation. He's not blinking, and looks not even to be breathing. He bites his lips.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER (CONT'D)  
 (without looking up)  
 How old are you?

BOY  
 (in Chinese)  
 Fourteen.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER  
 In English. How old are you?

BOY  
 (in Chinese)  
 Fourteen.

The Boy begins counting on his fingers to show the Officer.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER  
 Jesus Christ.  
 (to the line)  
 Can anybody here tell me what he said?

Jiang steps forward.

JIANG  
 Fourteen. He says he's fourteen.

The Officer returns back to his documents.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER  
 Figured as such. I mean honest to god they really try it, don't they. Hey Billy, we've got another one.

A deputy, BILLY, holding a clipboard marches up to the Officer's desk.

BILLY  
 Underage?

IMMIGRATION OFFICER  
 (quietly to Billy)  
 They really do try and make us look like the bad guys in front of everyone watching. But what can we do?

(MORE)

IMMIGRATION OFFICER (CONT'D)

We can't just let an underage kid walk the streets. He's too young to work, and the damn orphanages don't take immigrants. We have to ship 'em back.

BILLY

Why do they do it, Jim?

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

They do it because they know there's no future in this kid's country. Mom and Pop were probably too poor to buy tickets for themselves, and so let their youngest here reap the benefits of the New World. One ticket to paradise, they think...

He sighs.

BILLY

Come on, lad. I'll take you home.

The Boy willingly follows the Officer, without having the faintest clue as to where he's leading him.

The Officer takes the Boy's documents and stuffs them inside an already stuffed folder.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

(without looking up)

Next.

Jiang and Wei spring to life and hurry to the Officer. They each clutch a suitcase and set it down as they sit.

Jiang takes off his fedora hat. He shuffles through his briefcase before producing a manila envelope. He opens it and passes it to the Officer.

The Officer takes the documents and looks over the first pages. Jiang watches him, waiting for any hint or fault.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER (CONT'D)

All in order. Except your name.

JIANG

I'm sorry, I don't know how to spell it in English.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

Which is?

JIANG  
Jiang.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER  
Eh?

JIANG  
Jiang.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER  
Damn noise in this office is making  
me deaf. One more time?

JIANG  
Jiang!

IMMIGRATION OFFICER  
Jake. Did you say Jake?

Jiang looks beyond the Officer to the faded American flag hanging behind him. His eyes begin to water. He slowly nods.

Jiang watches in silence as the Officer slashes a line through his Chinese name. He scribbles down Jiang's new name and then slams it with a giant stamp.

The slamming shakes Jiang in his chair. He grits his teeth to stop the tears from falling.

The documents are handed back to him. Jiang looks at the spelling of his new name.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER (CONT'D)  
(without looking up)  
Next.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREETS - DAY

Jiang and Wei watch as the New World swirls around them. Vendors selling odd fruits litter the sidewalk, as newsboys shout the day's headlines.

Jiang looks at the scribbled note written in his hand. It reads: Normandy and West. He then looks up to the street sign on the intersection. It reads: Normandy and West.

WEI  
This isn't Gold Mountain, is it  
Father?

JIANG  
No, I'm afraid not.



WEI

But that's why were waiting on  
Uncle Po. Because he's going to  
take us there, isn't he?

Jiang silently nods.

WEI (CONT'D)

And you're sure we're in the right  
place?

JIANG

(he lifts up a note)

I'm sure this is the right place.  
I've asked ten different people,  
and they've all directed me here.

Jiang notices the fear and distress in Wei's eyes. The giant  
buildings, the bustling people, the constant noise all appear  
to be bearing down on the boy.

Jiang digs into his pocket and brings out his mother's half-  
crested necklace.

He remembers Jia's words. He looks at Wei and then at the  
necklace. He glances back and forth, deciding whether now is  
the time.

A distant voice interrupts his thoughts.

VOICE (O.S.)

Jiang! Jiang!

Jiang swings around to find a stumpy little Chinese Man (30s)  
gating up to him. UNCLE PO.

He holds an umbrella to shield himself from the California  
sun. He looks immaculately dressed. He wears vintage slacks,  
a clean-pressed waistcoat. A pocket-watch clipped to his  
shirt flies wildly about as he hurries forward.

Uncle Po stops before Wei and Jiang. He bends over to catch  
his breath.

UNCLE PO

I'm so glad to have found you both.

JIANG

Uncle Po?

UNCLE PO

In the flesh!

On closer inspection, Jiang realizes that Uncle Po's appearance isn't as sharp as assumed. His slacks are faded, his waistcoat checkered with stains. The pocket-watch he wears is broken, and his umbrella slashed with many holes.

UNCLE PO (CONT'D)

I almost didn't recognize you both.  
I only caught you because you look  
the most lost pair on the street.  
Everybody around you's going  
somewhere, while you two were,  
well, just waiting. Waiting for me.

JIANG

(in Chinese)  
How have you been?

UNCLE PO

Eh?

JIANG

(in Chinese)  
How have you been?

UNCLE PO

(in English)  
Speak slower, Jiang. I haven't  
spoken Chinese in years. My ear for  
it is a bit rusty.

JIANG

(in English)  
How have you been?

UNCLE PO

Well. Well. I've been working under  
a contractor. A steel contractor.  
Melon Fiser. He's a plain and quiet  
fellow, but he's the one that  
forges most of the work in these  
parts. He's mighty important  
company to be around. Now being his  
chauffeur and driving him out and  
about has it's perks, and I've  
overheard things...

He looks around to make sure no one's listening.

UNCLE PO (CONT'D)

...I've heard they're building  
something magical in the Fiser  
factories. Something nobody's ever  
seen before. Something nobody's  
even dreamt up before.

(MORE)

UNCLE PO (CONT'D)

(beat)

A steel snake.

Wei gasps back in shock. We briefly cut back to the painting of Shangri-la in Wei's old room. The mythical Chinese Snake is seen soaring around Gold Mountain.

UNCLE PO (CONT'D)

Said to be fed off coal, rumors say it spits fire and steam and soars across these lands, West to East faster than any human could've ever conceived. Either it's black magic or a miracle. I'm inclined to believe it might be both. They're looking for strapping workers, like yourself, to bring this beast to reality. What'd you say?

Wei tugs at his father's coat.

WEI

(excitedly)

Papa, Papa. Can we see the snake?

Jiang watches his son's newfound vigor. He returns Jia's necklace back into his pocket.

JIANG

(to Uncle Po)

Maybe there's some magic left in these lands, after all.

UNCLE PO

Trust me, you won't be disappointed. Come along.

Uncle Po begins wading through the sea of street walkers and hurrying laborers. Jiang and Wei struggle to keep pace.

UNCLE PO (CONT'D)

(while leading)

Oh, and do try and stick to English. People here don't take a liking to foreigners speaking their native tongue. Think you're plotting against them or something...

His speech is soon muffled by the clamor of the city.

More workers and immigrants crowd the scene till Uncle Po and Jiang and Wei are lost in a sea of immigrants and workers.

**END.**