

Waiting begins in Goose Village in China in 1983. At the farmhouse where the nurses are billeted, Lin drains Manna's blisters and then helps her for several days until her feet are healed. In the courtroom, Shuyu's brother Bensheng protests that Lin is acting unfairly to his wife, and the judge declines Lin's request. Lin returns home and tells his girlfriend Manna Wu that he will seek a divorce the following year, because according to the law an officer could divorce his wife after an eighteen-year separation, with or without her consent. Lin Kong, an officer, and doctor in the Chinese army has returned from the army hospital in Muji City, where he works, to divorce Shuyu, his wife of twenty years. The court always turns down his request because at the last minute Shuyu changes her mind and refuses to agree to it. Lin's marriage was arranged by his parents, and although he does not dislike his wife, he has never loved her either, and they have not had sexual relations for seventeen years. In 1964, Manna is a nursing student at the military hospital in Muji, where she falls in love with a lieutenant named Mai Dong. From her earliest days at nursing school, Manna had been friends with Lin Kong, one of her teachers. One evening, she sees Lin in the company of Pingping Ma, the hospital librarian, and she grows agitated, wondering whether they have a romantic relationship. Mai Dong is transferred to a new regiment eighty miles away, and after several months, he tells her he is going to Shanghai, where he will marry his cousin. In the winter of 1966, hospital staff go through a training exercise in which they march four hundred miles through the countryside, practicing treating the wounded and rescuing people from a battlefield. Manna grows curious about Lin and wonders what his wife is like. Ran Su, vice-director of the hospital's political department, tells Lin he is heading for trouble, and Lin promises that he and Manna will not have sexual relations. Manna's friend Haiyan suggests she should sleep with Lin and gives Manna the key to her sister's house, saying that her sister will be away over the weekend. Manna reluctantly agrees but worries that Lin does not love her enough to take a risk. An immediate marriage is not possible, but Manna promises Mai Dong she will marry him sooner or later. He invites her to his dormitory to help him make dust jackets for his books. By August they see each other frequently during the day, and people begin to gossip about them, saying they are having an affair. Manna is heartbroken. He seems to her to be a scholarly man, and she borrows books from him. Lin is the head of a medical team, and Manna also takes part in the training. During a forced march, Manna can barely walk because of blisters on her feet. She decides she must do something to stop Pingping Ma from taking Lin away. Manna leaves an envelope on Lin's desk. During the opera, which is about a battle between Chinese and Japanese forces, Manna places her hand on top of his. That night, Lin wonders whether this is the beginning of an affair. When he encounters her the next day and she suggests they go for a walk on Sunday, he is willing to begin an affair. During their walk they talk about the social and political upheaval in China.