



# My Brother, My Sister

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**Feature** 35mm 100min.

**Budget**

US\$500,000  
(HK\$3,900,000)

**Producer**

ZHU Wen

**Production Company**

China Film Assist Co. Ltd

**HAF Goals**

Co-producers, Funds

### ■ Introduction ■

He is 20, a dreamy lad of gentle demeanor. She is barely 18, a pure village girl fresh as a daisy. To others, they are brother and sister. In their own world, they are lovers. Depicting that precious moment of first love in the prime of youth, this is a romance that shifts from country to city, and transits from love to separation. After masterfully exploring the possibilities of coexisting realities in the awardwinning *South of the Clouds* (2004), novelist/writer/director Zhu Wen refines his theme of alternative reality, by examining whether a taboo relationship in one social system can be free of all moral constraints in another environment.

### ■ Director/Producer ■

**ZHU Wen** was born in Fujian, China, in 1967. He graduated from the Energy Department of Southeast University in 1989, and became a freelance writer in 1994. After publishing several acclaimed books, he adapted his own novel into a screenplay entitled *In Expectation* (1996). The film, directed by Zhang Ming, won the New Currents Award at Pusan, Fipresci prize and Best Feature at Torino, the Dragons and Tigers award at Vancouver, and the Grand Prix and Don Quixote awards at Fribourg. His second screenplay, *Seventeen Years* (1999) co-written with Dai Ning, Hua Yu, and directed by Zhang Yuan, won Best Screenplay at Teheran IFF.

Zhu Wen also wrote his own directorial debut, the celebrated *Seafood* (2001), which won the Special Jury Award in Venice, Best Director at 23rd Nantes Festival of 3 Continents in France, and the Special Jury Award at the 58th Singapore IFF. The next film he wrote and directed, *South of the Clouds* (2004) upped the ante with five international honors: the NETPAC award at Berlin 2004, the Golden Firebird and Fipresci awards at 28th Hong Kong IFF, Best Director at Shanghai IFF, Prix de press at Paris Rencontres IFF 2004, and the Silver Image Generation Award at Chicago IFF.

### ■ Production Company ■

China Film Assist Co. Ltd was the producer of *South of the Clouds* (2004).

### ■ Synopsis ■

In a remote hillside village lives a family of three. The son is a young idler with a gentle demeanor. His younger sister is an earthy, unspoiled country girl. The siblings, 20 and 18, are very close to each other. They live with their widowed mother in an insular community. Their father, a revered schoolteacher, died young. For some unknown reason, he bestowed his surname on his son only. Sister adopts her mother's virgin name.

Although both have reached marriageable age, no girl would marry a poor good-for-nothing like Brother, while diligent Sister gets lots of offers. Mother grumbles all day about Brother's laziness, and turns down Sister's proposals for fear of losing domestic support.

One day, while lying in bed, feverish from a snake bite, Mother dreams of her late husband. His eyes moist with tears, he tells her to marry off Sister quickly. Yet, every time she arranges a match for her, Brother gets in the way. She notices something unusual and tries to come between her children. It becomes a game for them to maneuver around her watchful eyes.

The siblings have a tryst on the hill and plot to elope. They hear a thumping noise and notice that Mother has fallen off a tree while spying on them. With Mother paralyzed, they blatantly indulge in their taboo love in the house. One day, Father's spirit appears, and enters the room with a stick. The next moment, Brother runs out, scantily clad, with a bleeding wound. Sister trembles with fear in the pitch darkness.

Sister tries to end the affair by accepting a marriage proposal. She refuses Brother's advances and latches her door. One night, she is awakened by fuming smoke. The house is on fire, and Brother has packed up to leave with her. She tries to

save Mother, but Brother forcibly holds her back. The house and their guilty secret turn to cinders before their eyes.

They run away without turning back and reach the city. At last, they can breathe the air of freedom. Brother works on a construction site and Sister finds employment in a restaurant. They pose as a couple that's engaged, but have to sleep in separate dormitories. They seize fleeting moments together in public squares.

Conscientious by nature, Sister wins approval at the restaurant. Contrary to her, Brother slides back into laziness, and is discharged by his foreman. He urges her to venture further afield – to Guangzhou, where easy money can be made. Egged on by him, Sister steals from the cash registry to pay for the journey

In Guangzhou, Brother again works on a building site while Sister apprentices as a hairdresser. Their shabby hut becomes a love nest. However, the options and seductions of urban life cause the demise of their relationship. Brother finds non-manual work in a modeling company and turns his interest to a girl in the office. Kept in the dark, Sister struggles to make ends meet. Then one day, he disappears. She learns that he has quit his job.

Devastated, Sister is determined to search for him, wherever he is. But how does one look for a needle in a haystack?

### ■ Director's Statement ■

*My Brother, My Sister* is not simply a story of incest. Incest between siblings is not uncommon in rural communities that are illiterate, backward and insular. Due to their genetic condition, a man and a woman are forbidden to love each other. Yet, put them in a new environment where no one knows about their blood relationship, is it possible for them to lead their lives like any ordinary couple? This is what I wish to explore in the film.

As China undergoes changes at top speed, the city and the countryside become two worlds, like polar opposites. A huge chasm is created between the rich and poor. This is a serious problem in China. I want to examine the themes of love and human nature against the broad social canvas of our contemporary era.

The Brother is 20 while the Sister is 18. They are in the prime of youth. Ultimately, *My Brother, My Sister* is a love story brimming with the first flush of youth.

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