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At the Center of the Storm

From May to December 1966, the first seven months of the Cultural Revolution left me with experiences I will never forget. Yet I forgot things almost overnight in that period. So many things were happening around me. The situation was changing so fast. I was too excited, too jubilant, too busy, too exhausted, too confused, too uncomfortable . . . The forgotten things, however, did not all go away. Later some of them sneaked back into my memory, causing me unspeakable pain and shame. So I would say that those seven months were the most terrible in my life. Yet they were also the most wonderful! I had never felt so good about myself before, nor have I ever since.

In the beginning, the Cultural Revolution exhilarated me because suddenly I felt that I was allowed to think with my own head and say what was on my mind. In the past, the teachers at 101 had worked hard to make us intelligent, using the most difficult questions in mathematics, geometry, chemistry, and physics to challenge us. But the mental abilities we gained, we were not supposed to apply elsewhere. For instance, we were not allowed to question the teachers' conclusions. Students who did so would be criticized as "disrespectful and conceited," even if their opinions made perfect sense. Worse still was to disagree with the leaders. Leaders at various levels represented the Communist Party. Disagreeing with them could be interpreted as being against the Party, a crime punishable by labor reform, imprisonment, even death.

Thus the teachers created a contradiction. On the one hand, they wanted us to be smart, rational, and analytical. On the other hand, they forced us to be stupid, to be "the teachers' little lambs" and "the Party's obedient tools." By so doing, I think, they planted a sick tree; the bitter fruit would soon fall into their own mouths.

When the Cultural Revolution broke out in late May 1966, I felt like the legendary monkey Sun Wukong, freed from the dungeon that had held him under a huge mountain for five hundred years. It was Chairman Mao who set us free by allowing us to rebel against authorities.

As a student, the first authority I wanted to rebel against was Teacher Lin, our homeroom teacher—in Chinese, *banzhuren*. As *banzhuren,* she was in charge of our class. A big part of her duty was to make sure that we behaved and thought correctly.

Other students in my class might have thought that I was Teacher Lin's favorite. As our Chinese teacher, she read my papers in front of the class once in a while. That was true. (Only she and I knew that the grades I got for those papers rarely went above 85. I could only imagine what miserable grades she gave to others in our class.) She also chose me to be the class representative for Chinese, which meant if others had difficulties with the subject, I was to help them. In spite of all these, I did not like Teacher Lin! She had done me a great wrong in the past. I would never forget it.

In my opinion, Lin was exactly the kind of teacher who, in Chairman Mao's words, "treated the students as their enemies." In 1965, we went to Capital Steel and Iron Company in the far suburb of Beijing to do physical labor. One night there was an earthquake warning. We were made to stay outdoors to wait for it. By midnight, no earthquake had come. Two o'clock, still all quiet. Three o'clock, four o'clock, five . . . The night was endless. Sitting on the cold concrete pavement for so many hours, I was sleepy. I was exhausted. My only wish at the moment was to be allowed to go into the shack and literally "hit the hay." Without thinking I grumbled: "Ai! How come there is still no earthquake?"

Who should have thought that this remark was overheard by Teacher Lin? All of a sudden she started criticizing me in a loud voice.

"The workers and the poor and lower-middle peasants would never say such a thing! Think of all the property that will be damaged by an earthquake. Think of all the lives that may be lost! Now you are looking forward to an earthquake! Only class enemies look forward to earthquakes! Where did your class feelings go? Do you have any proletarian feelings at all? . . . "

She went on and on. Her shrill voice woke up everybody, my classmates as well as students in the other five parallel classes. All were sitting outside at the moment. Everybody turned to watch us. Three hundred pairs of eyes! It was such a shame! I felt my cheeks burning. I wanted to defend myself. I wanted to tell Teacher Lin that although there might be some truth in what she said, I had never been in an earthquake. I was merely tired and wished the whole thing over. Besides, I was only half awake when I said that. I was not looking forward to an earthquake!

In fact, what I really wanted to tell her was that I knew why she was making such a fuss about my remark, which if she had not seized would have drifted away and scattered in the morning breeze like a puff of vapor: she was using this as an opportunity to show off her political correctness in front of all these teachers and students. At my cost! Later she might be able to cash in on it, using it as her political capital . . .

But of course I knew it would be crazy for me to talk back like that. Contradicting the teacher would only lead me into more trouble. So I swallowed the words that were rolling on the tip of my tongue and lowered my head. Hot tears assaulted my eyes. Tears of anger. Tears of shame. I bit my lips to force them back. *Let's wait and see, Teacher Lin. Someday I will have my revenge. On you!*

Now the time had come for the underdogs to speak up, to seek justice! Immediately I took up a brush pen, dipped it in black ink and wrote a long *dazibao* (criticism in big characters). Using some of the rhetorical devices Teacher Lin had taught us, I accused her of lacking proletarian feelings toward her students, of treating them as her enemies, of being high-handed, and suppressing different opinions. When I finished and showed it to my classmates, they supported me by signing their names to it. Next, we took the *dazibao* to Teacher Lin's home nearby and pasted it on the wall of her bedroom for her to read carefully day and night. This, of course, was not personal revenge. It was answering Chairman Mao's call to combat the revisionist educational line. If in the meantime it caused Teacher Lin a few sleepless nights, so be it! This revolution was meant to "touch the soul" of people, an unpopular teacher in particular.

Teacher Lin, although she was not a good teacher in my opinion, was not yet the worst. Teacher Qian was even worse. He was the political teacher who had implemented the Exposing Third Layer of Thoughts campaign. In the past many students believed that he could read people's minds. Now a *dazibao* by a student gave us a clue as to how he acquired this eerie ability. Something I would not have guessed in a thousand years! He had been reading students' diaries in class breaks, while we were doing physical exercise on the sports ground. The student who wrote the *dazibao* felt sick one day and returned to his classroom earlier than expected. There he had actually seen Qian sneak a diary from a student's desk and read it. The student kept his silence until the Cultural Revolution, for Qian was his *banzhuren*.

So this was Qian's so-called "political and thought work"! What

could it teach us but dishonesty and hypocrisy? Such a "glorious" example the school had set for us, and in the past we had revered him so much! Thinking of the nightmare he gave me, I was outraged. "Take up a pen, use it as a gun." I wrote another *dazibao* to denounce Teacher Qian.

Within a few days *dazibao* were popping up everywhere like bamboo shoots after a spring rain, written by students, teachers, administrators, workers, and librarians. Secrets dark and dirty were exposed. Everyday we made shocking discoveries. The sacred halo around the teachers' heads that dated back two thousand five hundred years to the time of Confucius disappeared. Now teachers must drop their pretentious airs and learn a few things from their students. Parents would be taught by their kids instead of vice versa, as Chairman Mao pointed out. Government officials would have to wash their ears to listen to the ordinary people. Heaven and earth were turned upside down. The rebellious monkey with enormous power had gotten out. A revolution was underway.

Looking back on it, I should say that I felt good about the Cultural Revolution when it started. It gave me a feeling of superiority and confidence that I had never experienced before. Yet amidst the new freedom and excitement, I ran into things that made me very uncomfortable.

I remember one day in July, I went to have lunch at the student dining hall. On the way I saw a crowd gathering around the fountain. I went over to take a look. The fountain had been a pleasant sight in the past. Sparkling water swaying in the wind among green willow twigs, making the air fresh and clean. In Beijing it was a luxury ordinary middle schools did not enjoy. When the Cultural Revolution broke out, the water was turned off. Now the bottom of the fountain was muddy, littered with wastepaper and broken glass.

On this day I saw a teacher in the fountain, a middle-aged man. His clothes were muddy. Blood was streaming down his head, as a number of students were throwing bricks at him. He tried to dodge the bricks. While he did so, without noticing it, he crawled in the fountain, round and round, like an animal in the zoo. Witnessing such a scene, I suddenly felt sick to my stomach. I would have vomited, if I had not quickly turned round and walked away. Forget about lunch. My appetite was gone.

Sitting in an empty classroom, I wondered why this incident upset me so much: *This is the first time I've seen someone beaten. Moreover this person isn't a stranger. He's a teacher at 101. Do I pity him? Maybe*

a little? Maybe not. After all I don't know anything about him. He might be a counterrevolutionary or a bad element. He might have done something very bad; thus he deserved the punishment. Something else bothers me, then—not the teacher. What is it?

Then it dawned on me that I was shocked by the ugliness of the scene. *Yes. That's it! In the past when I read about torture in revolutionary novels, saw it in movies, and daydreamed about it, it was always so heroic, so noble; therefore it was romantic and beautiful. But now, in real life, it happened in front of me. It's so sordid! I wish I'd seen none of it! I don't want the memory to destroy my hero's dream.*

This teacher survived; another was not so fortunate. Teacher Chen, our art teacher, was said to resemble a spy in the movies. He was a tall, thin man with sallow skin and long hair, which was a sign of decadence. Moreover, he seemed gloomy and he smoked a lot. "If a person weren't scheming or if he didn't feel very unhappy in the new society, why would he smoke like that?" a classmate asked me, expecting nothing but heartfelt consent from me. "Not to say that in the past he had asked students to draw naked female bodies in front of plaster statues to corrupt them!" For these "crimes," he was beaten to death by a group of senior students.

When I heard this, I felt very uncomfortable again. The whole thing seemed a bad joke to me. Yet it was real! Teacher Chen had taught us the year before and unlike Teacher Lin and Teacher Qian, he had never treated students as his enemies. He was polite and tolerant. If a student showed talent in painting, he would be delighted. On the other hand, he would not embarrass a student who "had no art cells." I had never heard complaints about him before. Yet somehow he became the first person I knew who was killed in the Cultural Revolution.

Living next door to Teacher Chen was Teacher Jiang, our geography teacher. While Teacher Chen was tall and lean, Teacher Jiang was short and stout. Both were old bachelors, who taught auxiliary courses. Before the Cultural Revolution Teacher Jiang was known for two things. One was his unkempt clothes. The other was the fact that he never brought anything but a piece of chalk to class. Yet many students said that he was the most learned teacher at 101. He had many maps and books stored in his funny big head.

If Teacher Jiang had been admired by students before, he became even more popular after the revolution started and Teacher Chen was killed. Since August 1966 Red Guards were allowed to travel free of

charge to places all over China. Before we set off, everybody wanted to get a few tips from him, and afterwards we'd love to tell him a few stories in return. It was our chance to show off what we had learned from the trips. Thus from August to December, Teacher Jiang had many visitors. Happy voices and laughter were heard from across the lotus pond in front of his dorm house. At night lights shone through his windows often into the small hours. Geography turned out a true blessing for Teacher Jiang, while art doomed Teacher Chen.

In contrast to the teachers who lost control over their lives in 1966, we students suddenly found power in our hands. Entrance examinations for senior middle school and college were canceled. Now it was entirely up to us to decide what we would do with our time. This was a big change. In the past, decisions had always been made for us by our parents, teachers, and leaders. At school, all courses were required and we took them according to a fixed schedule, six classes a day, six days a week. College was the same as middle schools. After college, the state would assign everybody a job, an iron rice bowl. Like it or not, it would be yours for life.

Now those who had made decisions for us—teachers, parents, administrators—were swept aside by the storm. We were in charge. We could do things on our own initiative. We made plans. We carried them out. So what did we do? Instead of routine classes, we organized meetings at which we shared our family history. (People who spoke up at such meetings were of course revolutionary cadres' children. Others could only listen.) I remember Wu, a girl from a high-ranking cadre's family, told a story that left a deep impression on me.

In 1942 Japanese troops raided the Communist base in the north. At this time Wu's older brother was only several months old. He was a beautiful baby boy, with a chubby face and the mother's large brown eyes. The mother gave him the name Precious. Day and night she longed for the father to come back from the front to meet his firstborn.

But before the father returned, the Japanese invaders came. Wu's mother took the baby and fled to the mountains. She and many others hid in a cavern. The enemy soldiers came near, searching for them. At this moment the baby woke up and was about to cry. Her mother had no choice but to cover his mouth with her own hand. Or else all would have been found and killed by the Japanese.

The baby was in agony. He struggled with all his might for his life. His lovely little face turned red and then blue. His tiny hands grabbed

at his mother's, desperately trying to push it away so that he could breathe. His plump little feet kicked helplessly. The mother's heart was pierced by ten thousand arrows, but she did not dare loosen her grip. Finally the Japanese went away. By then the baby had turned cold in her arms.

Wu burst into tears and we all cried with her.

Why does she cry like that? Yes. I understand. The brother! Because he died so tragically, he will always be loved most by the parents. The perfect child. The most "precious" one, the one they sacrificed for the revolution. Wu and her other siblings cannot rival him, no matter how good they are . . .

But of course that was not why she cried or why we cried with her on that day. We cried because we were deeply moved by the heroic struggle and tremendous sacrifice made by our parents and older brothers and sisters. The stories we told at such meetings convinced us that our lives were on the line: if we should allow the revolution to deteriorate, the evil imperialists and beastly Nationalists would come back. As a slogan of the thirties went, "Cut the grass and eliminate the roots"—if we did not act, they would kill our parents who were revolutionary cadres and make sure that none of us would survive to seek revenge on them.

Suddenly I felt that these classmates of mine were dearer to me than my own brothers and sisters. I loved them! They loved me! Today we shed tears in the same room. Tomorrow we would shed blood in the same ditch. I was willing to sacrifice my life for any of them, while before the Cultural Revolution I mistrusted them, seeing them as nothing but my rivals.

In fact, it was not fear for our lives but pride and a sense of responsibility that fired us up. Chairman Mao had said that we were the morning sun. We were the hope. The future of China and the fate of humankind depended on us. The Soviet Union and East European countries had changed colors. Only China and Albania remained true to Marxism and Leninism. By saving the revolution in China, we were making history. We must uproot bureaucracy and corruption in China, abolish privileges enjoyed by government officials and the intelligentsia, reform education, reform art and literature, reform government organizations . . . In short, we must purify China and make it a shining example. Someday the whole world would follow us onto this new path.

Aside from sharing family history, we biked to universities and middle schools all over Beijing to read *dazibao* and attend mass rallies where

Lin Biao, Zhou Enlai, and Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, showed up to give speeches. I first heard the term "Red Guard" in late June at Middle School attached to Qinghua University, two months before most Chinese would hear of it. It was an exciting idea. On our way back, my schoolmates and I were so preoccupied with the notion that our bikes stopped on a riverbank. Next thing I remember, we were tearing up our red scarves, which only a month before had been the sacred symbol of the Young Pioneers. Now they represented the revisionist educational line and to tear them up was a gesture of rebellion. We tied the strips of red cloth around our left arms in the style of workers' pickets of the 1920s. When we rode away from the spot, we had turned ourselves into Red Guards.

People in the street noticed our new costume: faded army uniforms that had been worn by our parents, red armbands, wide canvas army belts, army caps, the peaks pulled down low by girls in the style of the boys . . . Some people smiled at us. Some waved their hands. Their eyes showed surprise, curiosity, excitement, admiration. I don't think I saw fear. Not yet.

When people smiled at us, we smiled back, proud of ourselves. Our eyes were clear and bright. Our cheeks rosy and radiant. Red armbands fluttered in the wind. We pedaled hard. We pedaled fast. All of us had shiny new bikes, a luxury most Chinese could not afford at the time. (In my case, Father had bought me a new bike so as to show his support for the Cultural Revolution. Being a dreamer himself, he believed, or at least hoped, that the Cultural Revolution would purify the Communist Party and save the revolution.)

When we rang the bells, we rang them in unison, for a long time. It was not to warn people to get out of our way. It was to attract their attention. Or maybe we just wanted to listen to the sound. The sound flew up, crystal clear and full of joy, like a flock of white doves circling in the blue sky. At the time, little did I know that this was the first stir of a great storm that would soon engulf the entire country.

On August 18, 1966, I saw Chairman Mao for the first time. The night before, we set off from 101 on foot a little after midnight and arrived at Tian'anmen Square before daybreak. In the dark we waited anxiously. Will Chairman Mao come? was the question in everybody's mind. Under a starry sky, we sang.

"Lifting our heads we see the stars of Beidou [the Big Dipper], lowering our heads we are longing for Mao Zedong, longing for Mao Zedong . . . "

We poured our emotions into the song. Chairman Mao who loved the people would surely hear it, for it came from the bottom of our hearts.

Perhaps he did. At five o'clock, before sunrise, like a miracle he walked out of Tian'anmen onto the square and shook hands with people around him. The square turned into a jubilant ocean. Everybody was shouting "Long live Chairman Mao!" Around me girls were crying; boys were crying too. With hot tears streaming down my face, I could not see Chairman Mao clearly. He had ascended the rostrum. He was too high, or rather, the stands for Red Guard representatives were too low.

Earnestly we chanted: "We-want-to-see-Chair-man-Mao!" He heard us! He walked over to the corner of Tian'anmen and waved at us. Now I could see him clearly. He was wearing a green army uniform and a red armband, just like all of us. My blood was boiling inside me. I jumped and shouted and cried in unison with a million people in the square. At that moment, I forgot myself; all barriers that existed between me and others broke down. I felt like a drop of water that finally joined the mighty raging ocean. I would never be lonely again.

The night after, we celebrated the event at 101. Everybody joined the folk dance called *yangge* around bonfires. No one was shy. No one was self-conscious. By then, we had been up and awake for more than forty hours, but somehow I was still bursting with energy. Others seemed that way too. After dancing a couple of hours, I biked all the way home to share the happiness with my parents. By this time, they no longer minded that I woke them up at three o'clock in the morning. In fact, they had urged me to wake them up whenever I got home so that they could hear the latest news from me about the revolution.

Seeing Chairman Mao added new fuel to the flame of our revolutionary zeal. The next day, my fellow Red Guards and I held a meeting to discuss our next move. Obviously if we loved Chairman Mao, just shouting slogans was not enough. We must do something. But what could we do? By mid-August the teachers at 101 had been criticized and some were detained in "cow sheds." Even the old school principal, Wang Yizhi, had been "pulled down from the horse" because of her connection with Liu Shaoqi, the biggest capitalist-roader in the Party. On campus, little was left for us to rebel against. Therefore, many Red Guards had walked out of schools to break "four olds" (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits) in the city.

This was what we should do. Only first we had to pinpoint some "four olds." I suggested that we go to a nearby restaurant to get rid of

some old practices. Everybody said: "Good! Let's do it!" So we jumped onto our bikes and rushed out like a gust of wind.

Seeing a group of Red Guards swarming in, everybody in the restaurant tensed up. In August, people began to fear Red Guards who summoned the wind, raised the storm, and spread terror all over China. Small talk ceased. All eyes were fastened on us.

I stepped forward and began ritualistically: "Our great leader Chairman Mao teaches us, 'Corruption and waste are very great crimes.'" After that, I improvised: "Comrades! In today's world there are still many people who live in poverty and have nothing to eat. So we should not waste food. Nor should we behave like bourgeois ladies and gentlemen who expect to be waited on by others in a restaurant. From now on, people who want to eat in this restaurant must follow new rules: One, go to the window to get your own food. Two, carry it to the table yourselves. Three, wash your own dishes. Four, you must finish the food you ordered. Otherwise you may not leave the restaurant!"

While I said this, I saw some people change color and sweat broke out on their foreheads. They had ordered too much food. Now they had to finish it under the watchful eyes of a group of Red Guards. This was not an enviable situation. But nobody in the restaurant protested. Contradicting a Red Guard was asking for big trouble. It was like playing with thunderbolts and dynamite. So people just lowered their heads and swallowed the food as fast as they could. Some of them might develop indigestion afterwards, but I believed it was their own fault. By showing off their wealth at a restaurant, they wasted the blood and sweat of the peasants. Now they got caught and lost face. This should teach them a lesson!

While my comrades and I were breaking "four olds" at restaurants, other Red Guards were raiding people's homes all over the city. News of victory poured in: Red Guards discovered guns, bullets, old deeds, gold bars, foreign currency, yellow books and magazines (pornography) . . . Hearing this, people in my group became restless. But somehow I was not eager to raid homes, and I did not ask myself why. "We are busy making revolution at restaurants, aren't we?"

Then one day an old woman stopped us in the street and insisted that we go with her to break some "four olds" in the home of a big capitalist. None of us could say No to this request. So she led us to the home of a prominent overseas Chinese, where the "four olds" turned out to be flowers.

The courtyard we entered was spacious. A green oasis of cool shade, drifting fragrance, and delicate beauty: tree peonies and bamboo were planted next to Tai Lake rocks. Orchids and chrysanthemums grew along a winding path inlaid with cobblestones. A trellis of wisteria stood next to a corridor. Goldfish swam under water lilies in antique vats . . .

Strange! Why does this place look familiar? I am sure I've never been here before. Could it be I've seen it in a dream? . . .

Suddenly the answer dawned on me: *this place looks just like Nainai's home. Nainai's home must have been raided. Maybe several times by now. Is she still there? Did they kick her out? Is she all right? And what happened to the beautiful flowers she and Third Aunt planted? . . . No use thinking about such things! I can't help her anyway. She is a capitalist. I am a Red Guard. I have nothing to do with her!*

The question in front of me now is what to do with these flowers. Smash them! Uproot them! Trample them to the ground! Flowers, plants, goldfish, birds, these are all bourgeois stuff. The new world has no place for them. My fellow Red Guards have already started. I mustn't fall behind.

So I lifted up a flowerpot and dropped it against a Tai Lake rock. Bang! The sound was startling. *Don't be afraid. The first step is always the most difficult.* Bang! Bang! *Actually it isn't so terrible. Now I've started, I can go on and on. To tell the truth, I even begin to enjoy breaking flowerpots! Who would have thought of that? . . .*

After a while, we were all out of breath. So we ordered the family to get rid of the remaining flowers in three days, pledging that we'd come back to check on them. Then we left. Behind us was a world of broken pots, spilled soil, fallen petals, and bare roots. Another victory of Mao Zedong thought.

On my way home, surprise caught up with me. I was stopped by a group of Red Guards whom I did not know. They told me that my long braids were also bourgeois stuff. Hearing this, I looked around and saw Red Guards stand on both sides of the street with scissors in their hands. Anyone who had long or curly hair would be stopped by them, their hair cut off on the spot in front of jeering kids. Suddenly I felt my cheeks burning. To have my hair cut off in the street was to lose face. So I pleaded with them, vowing that I would cut my braids as soon as I got home. They let me go. For the time being, I coiled my braids on top of my head and covered them with my army cap.

Fearing that other surprises might be in store for me in the street, I

went straight home. There I found Aunty in dismay. It turned out that she too had seen Red Guards cutting long hair in the street. So she did not dare leave home these couple of days and we were about to run out of groceries.

"What shall I do?" she asked me. "If I cut my hair, won't I look like an old devil, with short white hair sticking up all over my head?" Her troubled look reminded me that since her childhood, Aunty always had long hair. Before she was married, it was a thick, long braid. Then a bun, for a married woman, which looked so elegant on the back of her head. Even in Switzerland, she had never changed her hairstyle. But now neither she nor I had any choice. If we did not want to lose face in the street, we'd better do it ourselves at home.

While Aunty and I were cutting each other's hair, my parents were burning things in the bathroom. The idea was the same: to save face and avoid trouble, better destroy all the "four olds" we had before others found them out. So they picked out a number of Chinese books, burned them together with all the letters they had kept and some old photographs. The ash was flushed down the toilet. Repair the house before it rains. That was wise. No one could tell whose home would be raided next. Better be prepared for the worst.

Now suddenly it seemed everybody in my family had trouble, including Lian, who was eleven. His problem was our cat, Little Tiger. Lian found him three years ago playing hide and seek in a lumber yard. Then he was a newborn kitten. So little that he did not even know how to drink milk. Aunty taught us how to feed him. Put milk in a soupspoon. Tilt it to make the milk flow slowly through the depression in the middle of the handle. Put the tip of the handle into the kitten's tiny mouth. He tasted the milk. He liked it. He began to drink it. By and by the kitten grew into a big yellow cat with black stripes. On his forehead, three horizontal lines formed the Chinese character *wang,* which means king. We called him Little Tiger because in China the tiger is king of all animals.

Little Tiger's life was in danger now, for pets were considered bourgeois too. This morning Lian had received an ultimatum from kids who were our neighbors. It said we had to get rid of Little Tiger in three days or else they would come and take revolutionary action. This time we could not solve the problem by doing it ourselves. Little Tiger was a member of our family. We had to think of a way to save his life.

Aunty suggested that we hide him in a bag, take him out to a far-

away place, and let him go. He would become a wild cat. Good idea. Only I did not want to do this. What would people say if they found that I, a Red Guard, was hiding a cat in my bag? So I told Lian to do it and went back to school. Since the Cultural Revolution started, I had a bed in the student dormitory and spent most of the nights there.

A few days later when I came back home, Aunty told me what had happened to Little Tiger. (Lian himself wouldn't talk about it.) When Lian took him out, he was spotted by the boys who had given him the ultimatum. Noticing something was moving in his bag, they guessed it was the cat. They grabbed the bag, swung it round, and hit it hard against a brick wall. "Miao!" Little Tiger mewed wildly. The boys laughed. It was fun. They continued to hit him against the wall. Lian started to cry and he begged them to stop. Nobody listened to him. Little Tiger's blood stained the canvas bag, leaving dark marks on the brick wall. But he was still alive. Only his mewing became weak and pitiable. Too bad a cat had nine lives! It only prolonged his suffering and gave the boys more pleasure. Bang! Bang! Little Tiger was silent. Dead at last. Lian ran back and cried in Aunty's arms for a long time.

A week after our cat was killed by the boys, a neighbor whom I called Guma killed herself. On that day, I happened to be home. I heard a commotion outside and looked. Many people were standing in front of our building. When I went out, I saw clearly that Guma was hanging from a pipe in the bathroom. Another gruesome sight I could not wipe from my memory.

Why did she kill herself? Nobody knew the answer. Before she died, she was a typist at the college. A quiet little woman. She had no enemies; no historical problems. Nobody had struggled against her. So people assumed that she killed herself for her husband's sake.

The love story between her and her husband must have been quite dramatic. Mother said a writer had interviewed them because he wanted to write a book about it. Guma's husband, whom I called Guzhang, was a professor in the French department. I used to like him a lot because of his refined, gentle manner and the many interesting books he owned. Recently, however, it became known that Guzhang had serious historical problems. In his youth he had studied in France and joined the Communist Party there. Later somehow he dropped out of the Party and turned away from politics. Because of this, he was accused of being a renegade. A renegade he seemed to me, like one who was a coward in revolutionary novels and movies. The following story would prove my point.

After Guma killed herself, Guzhang wanted to commit suicide too. He went to the nearby Summer Palace and jumped into the lake. But the place he jumped was too shallow. After a while he climbed out, saying the water was too cold. When people at the college heard this story, he became a laughingstock. Even Aunty remarked: "You may know people for a long time and still you don't know their hearts. Who should have thought that Guma, a woman so gentle and quiet, was so resolute, while Guzhang, a big man, did not have half her courage."

These words seemed sinister. To tell the truth, I was alarmed by them. Just a couple of days before a nanny had killed herself at the nearby University of Agriculture. The old woman was a proletarian pure and simple. So why did she kill herself?

Her death was caused by a new chapter in the breaking "four olds" campaign. The idea was actually similar to mine: in the past bourgeois ladies and gentlemen were waited on hand and foot by the working people. In the new society such practices should be abolished. The working people would no longer serve and be exploited by bourgeois ladies and gentlemen. Thus the new rule said those who were labeled bourgeois ladies and gentlemen were not allowed to use nannies. As for those who were not labeled bourgeois ladies and gentlemen, they were not allowed to use nannies either. Because if they used nannies, it was proof enough that they were bourgeois ladies and gentlemen, and bourgeois ladies and gentlemen were not allowed to use nannies. Thus according to the new rule, no family was allowed to use nannies.

As a result, the old woman killed herself, because she lost her job and had no children to support her. Though she had saved some money for her old age, another new rule had it all frozen in the bank.

Aunty was in exactly the same situation. When she first came to work for us, she was forty-six. Then her son died. Now she was sixty-two, an old woman by traditional standards. Right now all her savings were frozen in the bank. Whether someday she might get them back or not, and if yes when, was anybody's guess. Now the deadline set by the Red Guards of the college for all the nannies to leave was drawing near. Recently Aunty made me uneasy. I was frightened by her eyes. They were so remote, as if they were in a different world. I could not get in touch with them. Then she made that strange comment about being resolute. Could she mean . . . ?

On the evening before Aunty left (fortunately she had kept her old home in the city, to which now she could return), Father gathered our

whole family together. Solemnly he made a pledge to her. He said that he would continue to support her financially for as long as she lived. Although for the time being she had to leave, she would always be a member of our family. She needn't worry about her old age.

That was, in my opinion, the exact right thing to say at the right moment. Even today when I look back on it, I am proud of Father for what he said on that hot summer evening thirty years ago. By then tens of thousands of nannies were being driven out of their employers' homes in Beijing, and who knows how many in the whole country. But few people had the kindness and generosity to say what Father said.

Aunty said nothing in return. But she was moved. From then on, she took our family to be her own. Instead of a burden, she became a pillar for our family through one storm after another. She did not quit until all her strength was used up.

14

Red Guards Had No Sex

After Aunty left, I returned home even less often. Home was no longer the safe haven I once loved to hide in. Now it had become a nest of troubles, making me feel frustrated and vulnerable. So why not stay away from it? The things one's eyes do not see will not disturb one's heart.

Starting in late August 1966, Red Guards were beginning to travel to all parts of China free of charge. Our task was to spread the idea of the Cultural Revolution. We were seeds of fire. Chairman Mao was the spring wind. The trains and buses were waiting for us. The only thing I needed to do was to make up my mind about a target place.

I thought Guangzhou was a good idea, a semitropical city. Coconut trees stood tall, waving their fronds on the banks of the Pearl River. More than a hundred years ago, Lin Zexu, Emperor Daoguang's high commissioner, had confiscated opium from foreigners and destroyed it here. Later seventy-two revolutionary martyrs had rebelled against the Qing empire and laid down their lives for a dream of a republic. But for me, Guangzhou's attraction lay primarily in its geographic location: it was the southern tip of China, far away from Beijing. After I made revolution there, I could take my time and tour many other places on my way back.

My mind made up, I asked my fellow Red Guards where they wanted to go. "Shanghai." "Hunan." "Sichuan." "Heilongjiang." One girl said she was going to Tibet and it took her a month to reach Lhasa. Another went to Yunnan and reached the border of Vietnam. In the end it turned out that nearly thirty Red Guards from 101 wanted to go to Guangzhou. We formed a combat team.

Overnight we obtained our train tickets. The next day we were ready to set off. No one in our team had any luggage. All I took for this expedition of over two thousand miles were the little red book, a fountain pen, a notebook, a couple of undergarments, a hand towel, a toothbrush, toothpaste, and thirty yuan that Father gave me. A grass-green canvas bag was large enough to hold all of these.

We were not tourists. Our trip was not for fun and comfort. We were soldiers going out to war against an old world. In fact many of us thought at the time that this trip would be a turning point in our lives, the beginning of our careers as "professional revolutionary experts."

From now on, we no longer need envy our parents for their heroic deeds in revolutionary wars and feel sorry because we were born too late. Like the forerunners we admired, now we are going to places where forces of darkness still reign and dangers lurk. We will enlighten and organize the masses, dig out hidden enemies, shed our blood, and sacrifice our lives for the final victory of the Cultural Revolution.

Our train left Beijing in the evening. As we were given hard-sleeper tickets, we slept through the night. The next morning, I woke up at dawn. Too excited to go back to sleep. I sat down next to a window and put my left arm on the windowsill. The cool morning air rushed in and plucked at my Red Guard's armband, turning it into a small ball of fire. After a while I took off my cap and let the wind blow through my hair.

By this time I had cut my hair very short. About two inches on top of my head and shorter underneath. Yet I was not the most radical female Red Guard at 101. I knew that a couple of girls had shaved their heads, and they were very proud of it. I envied their courage, but I could not bring myself to do such a thing.

Besides my hair, my face had been blackened by the sun. My limbs were firm and nimble. After riding the bike all over Beijing for two months, I had lost fat and grown muscles. My clothes had a sour smell of sweat day and night. My fingernails sheltered much dirt. When I took off my sneakers, my feet gave out a stench that was worse than that of the boys. *I know Mother and Aunty would be very upset if they saw me like this. But I like it this way!*

A while later a boy and a girl who were about ten came over and I gave them some candies. They called me "Uncle Red Guard." Even their mother, who sat down on the opposite seat, did not seem to notice that I was not an "uncle." This was a nice surprise! I did not correct their mistake. Somehow I really liked the kids (who were only four or five years younger than me) calling me "Uncle Red Guard."

Then the loudspeaker announced that breakfast was ready. Three Red Guards in our group volunteered to go to the dining car to get box meals for everybody. Later when we asked them how much we owed them, they said: "Forget it. Money is not important. Private ownership men-

tality is on its way out. Our money is yours. Your money is ours. We are comrades-in-arms. We are of the same family." This idea appealed to all of us. So from then on we took turns to buy meals for the whole team.

Between meals there wasn't much for us to do except watch the landscape. The trip was long, over forty hours before we could reach Guangzhou. After a while we all got a bit bored. So we decided to make a revolution on the train.

The idea was to inquire into the family background and class status of all passengers in sleeping cars and make those who were not workers, poor and lower-middle peasants, or soldiers give up their beds to those who were in hard-seat cars. Once we made this plan, we carried it out. No need to waste our time asking permission from anyone. Chairman Mao was our commander. We were his "little red devils." He put power in our hands. We were responsible only to him.

So in less than an hour we purified the sleeping cars. Well, almost. It turned out that nearly half the passengers had problems in either one or both categories. We told them to leave. They obeyed. All of them except a group of five young men and women who were from Shanghai.

As these people failed to see the significance of our revolutionary act, we tried to reason with them.

"Workers, poor, and lower-middle peasants are masters of our country. So they should travel as masters, not as second-class or third-class citizens. Moreover, on this train, you see, some of them are old. Some are suffering from illnesses. Some have small children. You people are young and healthy. Is it right that you let them sit on those hard seats for two nights in a row while you sleep on these comfortable beds?"

"Well," one of them talked back, "frankly I don't see anything wrong in that. If they want, they too can buy tickets for sleeping cars and have beds here. But they don't want to spend the money. They prefer to go hard seats. If that's their choice, you respect their choice. As for us, we have spent our money on the more expensive tickets, we are entitled to travel more comfortably. Our right is guaranteed by law. And law is sacred!" Thus a debate started between us in a sleeping car that was already half empty. Debate was what we Red Guards had been doing these two months. We all loved to debate.

"You said 'law is sacred.' That is not right!" I retorted. Point of needle against sharp blade. "Not all laws are sacred. We should do a class analysis first. If the laws are made by capitalists and landlords to protect their property and interests, they are not sacred to the revolution-

ary people! We ought to violate them! We need to abolish them! That is what revolution is all about! Otherwise how can old orders be toppled? How can workers and peasants ever stand up? Where would new China have come from? How can we liberate humankind? . . . "

The debate went on along this line. I thought our argument was very convincing. If it failed to enlighten our opponents, it was because they lacked proletarian feelings. After all, they were all from petty bourgeois families. Now they had run out of things to say. Yet they refused to budge. After a few minutes of tense silence, one of them burst out.

"If you say giving up beds to workers and poor peasants is a revolutionary act, not a punishment, why don't you do it yourselves? Why do you order other people to do it? You are even younger than us! You don't really need the beds either. Red Guards should have the deepest proletarian feelings for the workers and peasants. Red Guards should set examples for others. Give up your beds first!"

Hearing this, we all became indignant. *What impudence! Now these people are not debating. They are attacking us! Is this class revenge? We must heighten our vigilance! Who has heard of such a thing: Red Guards get kicked out by a bunch of bastards from bourgeois families? Of course we won't let them have their way! We can't give in on a matter of principle!*

Just as my comrades and I were about to counterattack, the train pulled into a big station. Wuhan or Changsha, I don't remember exactly which. When the carriage doors opened, it became clear that in the hard-seat cars as well, Red Guards were making a revolution. They too had checked out the passengers' class status and rounded up a group of capitalists, landlords, and other bad elements. Now they were driving these class enemies off the train.

The "snake demons and cow ghosts" were all old men and women, driven out of Beijing by the revolutionary masses. All had been severely beaten on the train. As they walked past our window on the platform, one old woman especially caught my attention. She had what the Chinese called "looks of good fortune," which means she was rather heavy. Now her weight and her bound feet gave her a great deal of difficulty as she walked. Her hair was completely white. From her head blood poured down like a stream. It fell on her white shirt. The shirt was a mess. Although she looked ready to drop to the ground at any moment, a female Red Guard about my age was still thrashing her on the head with an iron-buckled army belt.

I could not watch such a scene. Yet I could not turn my eyes away from it. In my heart of hearts I really pitied the old woman and wished that I could do something to save her, although rationally I believed that violence was both inevitable and necessary to a great revolution. "This poor old woman," I thought, "she's on her last legs. She will probably not be able to make it. Her family in Beijing and her relatives in the countryside will never find out what happened to her. Actually it is better that they never find out! That female Red Guard is really something!"

Finally the bell rang and the train started to move. I heaved a sigh of relief and turned to face our opponents once again. But to my great surprise, I found that they had all disappeared. They must have sneaked out of the sleeping car after they saw what happened on the platform. So the victory belonged to us, as it always did. But this time it was not so sweet. We lost our chance to win the debate. And debate was a great way to kill time.

Today as I write about this incident, I am amazed by how honest people were in 1966. On that train who would know if they lied about their family background and class status? Most of them were traveling alone. There was no way for us to verify what they said. And we did not even intend to. We simply took their word for it. Yet so many people told us the truth, and we punished them for it. Ten years down the road such an incident would be unthinkable. By that time, almost all Chinese had learned to tell a few lies. We could lie with confidence. We could lie with passion. At first it was to protect ourselves. Then we got used to it. Today millions of people in China are cheating one another, telling big and small lies without blushing, to gain something, to brag, or just to make fools of others. Who is to blame for this degeneration of our moral character? The Chinese Communist Party? The Western influence? But what about us? What about me? It pains me to think about what I have done to the younger generation who cannot believe that once upon a time people had been so foolishly honest in China . . .

When we arrived at Guangzhou, we stationed ourselves temporarily at a middle school. We decided that as "professional revolutionary experts" we should spend a few days investigating the situation before we mobilized the people. So by day we went out in small groups to middle schools, universities, and various work units to read *dazibao* and talk to people.

In early September, Guangzhou was still as hot and humid as a huge

steamer. The local people were all wearing shorts and T-shirts. Most of them had no shoes on. Even so they'd much prefer to sit in the shade and fan themselves with round palm-leaf fans. Old people drank Noon Tea, a very bitter herb tea, and the kids ate red bean ice to drive the fire out of their bodies.

When we went out, however, we always put on the complete outfit of a Red Guard: army uniforms with long sleeves and long pants, caps on our heads, belts around our waists, armbands, army sneakers, canvas bags, and little red books. The local people looked at us with amazement as well as sympathy. Sweat rained down our foreheads and soaked our clothes. But we would not wear skirts, blouses, and sandals. Anything that would make girls look like girls was bourgeois. We covered up our bodies so completely that I almost forgot I was a girl. I was a Red Guard. Others were Red Guards too. And that was it.

Thanks to the outfit, once I almost fainted on the sports ground of a middle school, where I talked to a thousand people about what had happened recently in Beijing. In those days we were all such vehement speakers that we could easily go on for hours, talking about class struggles, line struggles, struggles inside the Party and outside the Party. Elaborate on historical lessons. Analyze the revolutionary situation in and outside the country. Discuss policies and strategies. Stir the audience till they shed tears and ground their teeth. On that day my speech lasted more than three hours. Afterwards the audience had many questions.

"Is it right to beat people?"

"Are all books feudal, capitalist, and revisionist except Chairman Mao's works? Should we burn all of them?"

"Are all cadres capitalist-roaders?"

And so on.

It was past three o'clock in the afternoon. The sun was a big ball of fire. No. It was a huge bag of hot, long needles as a Chinese folktale describes it. The needles attacked my head. Suddenly my ears started ringing. Things turned yellow and green in front of my eyes. I was short of breath. Dizzy. I had to sit down before I finished my answer to avoid making a scene in front of all those people.

At night we all returned to our base. We slept in the same classroom, boys and girls, young men and young women. The oldest among us were eighteen, the youngest fourteen. Female Red Guards on one side and male Red Guards on the other. No screen, no sheets, nothing was

put up to separate us. It was not necessary. At night we did not take off our clothes. We did not have sex or even think about it.

Sex was bourgeois. No doubt about it! In my mind, it was something very dirty and ugly. It was also extremely dangerous. In the books I read and the movies I saw, only the bad guys were interested in sex. Revolutionaries had nothing to do with it. When revolutionaries fell in love, they loved with their hearts. They didn't even touch hands.

Of course at the time it never occurred to me to ask: if our revolutionary parents had nothing to do with sex, where did we come from? In fact, I was too ignorant about human reproduction even to raise such a question. The subject had never been taught at school. Nor was it ever discussed at home. So I did not know what the word "sex" really meant. But I knew from Aunty's stories, the books I read, and the news that it had caused women to commit suicide and men to be executed or locked up in prison for ten, fifteen, twenty years. Recently it had also caused many officials to fall from people's esteem. So I sincerely wished I'd never have anything to do with it, just as we Red Guards should not smoke or drink alcohol.

At that time I thought my conviction accorded with Chairman Mao's teaching that a revolutionary should be "a pure person, a noble person, a virtuous person, a person who is free of vulgar desires, a person who is valuable to the people." These shining words came from his famous essay "Serve the People," which we had memorized. Only years later did I realize that such an attitude toward sex in a woman had another name, an ancient one. It was chastity, my dear Aunty's name. "Guard thy body like a piece of jade." This notion undoubtedly belonged to the "four olds." Yet somehow instead of breaking it, my fellow Red Guards and I had defended it as if it were a sacred teaching of Chairman Mao. What happened on the fifth night of our sojourn in Guangzhou might be understood in this light.

On that night, two female Red Guards who were senior students did not come back until after nine o'clock. We were beginning to worry about them. Then we saw them return with a "captive," who was a big, stout man in his thirties. They explained to us why they had "arrested" this man.

In the afternoon the two Red Guards got lost in the city. Because of the directions this man gave them, they ended up in an abandoned cathedral in the suburbs. In twilight the two young women wandered about the ruin, trying to figure out what went wrong and how to get back to

the city. Around them the weeds were tall and the trees were casting long shadows. The wind rustled and insects chirped. Suddenly they heard a commotion behind them. It turned out that a group of local people had seized a man.

It was the same man who had given them the wrong directions; then he followed them all the way to the cathedral. The female Red Guards did not notice him, but the local people, whose revolutionary vigilance had been heightened, became suspicious. They knew that rape had been committed on this site.

Hearing this, I was shocked. Rape! In my mind, it was a crime almost as bad as murder. So we interrogated him. What he said about his name, age, and profession has escaped me completely. We must have inquired into his family background and class status too. Probably he did not belong to the Five Red Categories (workers, poor and lower-middle peasants, revolutionary cadres, revolutionary servicemen, revolutionary martyrs), or else what happened that night might not have happened. In my memory even his face is fuzzy, like a picture out of focus. The only thing I remember clearly is the pair of white cotton shorts he had on that night.

To our angry question of why he had tricked our two comrades into the deserted cathedral, he could not gave a satisfactory explanation. That convinced us that he had harbored evil intentions toward our class sisters. We closed in on him. Hands on hips. Fingers pointed at the tip of his nose. Some were already unbuckling their belts. Our questions became sharp.

"So do you hate Red Guards? Tell us the truth! Or else we'll smash your dog head!"

"Yes. I hate the Red Guards."

"Then do you hate the Cultural Revolution too? Do you want to sabotage the Cultural Revolution?"

"Yes. Yes. I hate . . . I want to sabotage . . . "

"Are you a class enemy?"

"Yes. I am a class enemy."

"Are you a Nationalist agent?"

"Yes. I'm an agent. I came from Taiwan."

"Do you hope the Nationalists come back?"

"Yes. I do . . . "

"Do you have guns?"

"Oh yes. I have guns. I have grenades too. I even have a machine gun."

"And a transmitter-receiver to contact Taiwan?"

"Sure. I have a transmitter-receiver."

"Where did you hide these?"

"I buried them in my backyard. You come with me. I'll take you there. You can dig them out."

As the interrogation went on, the man confessed that he had committed all the crimes we could think of. The words that dropped out of his mouth turned into facts in our minds. And these "facts" fueled our hatred toward him. He was no longer a suspect. He had become a criminal, a real class enemy. We started to beat him.

The next thing he did was a real shock to all of us. In a shower of fists, kicks, curses, and thrashes, he suddenly straightened up and pulled his white cotton shorts down. He had no underwear on. So there was his thing, his penis. Large and black. It stuck out from a clump of black hair. To me it seemed erect, nodding its head at all of us.

I couldn't help staring at it. I was dumbfounded. I was embarrassed. I was furious. My hands were cold and my cheeks were on fire. For a few seconds none of us moved. We were petrified. Then the dike burst. Torrents of water rushed out. All the female Red Guards ran out of the classroom. We stayed in the corridor. The male Red Guards charged forward. On their way they picked up long bamboo sticks to hit him.

We all hated him! I could not tell who hated him more. The female Red Guards hated him because he had insulted all of us. The male Red Guards hated him too, because he was a scum of their sex. By exposing himself, he had exposed all of them. They were stripped. They were shamed. This time they beat him hard. No mercy on him. He did not deserve it. He was a bad egg!

The sticks fell like rain. In a few minutes, the man dropped to the ground. The sticks stood in midair. Then someone pulled his shorts back up. After that we streamed back into the classroom. We looked. He did not move. He did not breathe. This man was dead!

We stared at one another, in dismay. *How can a man die so easily? It's unbelievable! Now we are in trouble. Big trouble! We'd better call the public security bureau immediately. This man was a class enemy anyway! Right? We recorded his confession. Of course he did not sign it. That might be a problem. But everyone in our team is a witness. We all heard him confess to these terrible crimes.*

So we braced ourselves and called the municipal public security bureau (the police) of Guangzhou. We told them that a man had just died

here. In fact, he had been beaten to death by us. We begged them to send someone here to investigate the case. "Please come as quickly as possible!" Our voices were shaky as we pleaded.

At the other end, the policemen demanded to know who we were. So we told them that we were Red Guards from Beijing. Hearing this, their voices suddenly became warm and cordial. They said that they were *zaofanpai,* the rebellious faction, who had seized power at the public security bureau. They trusted Red Guards who came from where Chairman Mao was and they firmly supported our revolutionary act. Therefore they believed that there was no need to investigate this case any further. The case was closed. They would call up the crematorium and ask them to remove the corpse.

Hearing this, we all felt greatly relieved. Who could believe that we were let off the hook so easily? In fact, it was too easy. We began to feel uncomfortable. Thus we tried to persuade the policemen that at least they should send someone here to record the case. "No. It is not necessary." That was their answer. So that was it.

For the rest of the night, I could not sleep. Not because I was afraid of the ghost. The way I was brought up, I did not believe that there were such things as ghosts. It was my thoughts that disturbed me and kept me awake.

What a pity this man died! But really he was so stupid! If he had said no to all our questions, I'm sure he would have been alive. Maybe the answer would make some of us angry and he'd get beaten. In that case, well, he'd just have to stand it stoically. If he could bear the pain and show us he had courage, even if others wouldn't, I know I'd have put in a word for him and somehow saved his life. Red Guards all admire heroes. My comrades are not unreasonable. But this man, he was anything but a hero! He was such a coward! What a pity he understood nothing about us Red Guards!

Besides, even if he'd said yes to our questions, if he hadn't done that abhorrent thing, pulling down his shorts and . . . he would not have been beaten to death. At least not so fast. So in the final analysis, everything he said and did was wrong! It was his own fault he was beaten to death. He was so sordid! So disgusting! A real rapist and counterrevolutionary, he deserved what he got, every bit of it!

So after we killed this man in the evening, I killed him once more at night, in my mind. I killed him because I had to, or else I would not be able to sleep. When I passed my death sentence on him in the court of

my heart, I forgot the fact that I never believed his confession. None of us did. That was why we never bothered to go to the address he gave us to check out the backyard. The policemen at the public security bureau did not even ask us about his address. Perhaps they too assumed that he was a liar.

The next morning, we moved out of the middle school to Shengwei, a big yard in which the provincial Party committee of Guangdong was located. This big yard, like the one I grew up in, was guarded by armed Liberation Army soldiers. The soldiers, however, would only stop "masters of the country" at the gate. "The servants of the people" came in and out on four wheels, saluted by the guards. We were Red Guards from Beijing; when we insisted that we station ourselves here to spread the fire of the Cultural Revolution, eventually the soldiers were told to let us enter and exit as we wished.

So we moved in. We put up at a place called *bingshi* (the ice room), where we could buy red bean ice any time of the day. After we settled down, we went out to see the big yard. It was rather nice with a large lake surrounded by blooming jasmine trees. Thousands of tiny snow-white flowers. The breeze here was fresh and cool, laden with fragrance, while the air outside was hot and suffocating, carrying a hundred city smells and noises. Here it was quiet, like a Shangri-la. But that was why we came. We came to break the bourgeois peace and stir up a red storm right at the headquarters.

From the investigations we made we concluded that the atmosphere in Guangdong province was not right. Everywhere we went, there was no smell of gunpowder and no battle cries of the Cultural Revolution. Only the soft singing of Yue opera and the bone-melting Guangdong music. Restaurants and markets were still full of people, eating, drinking, chitchatting, and shopping around. Numerous privately owned stores were doing good business all over the city. Capitalism was thriving here. In our opinion, the root of the problem was Zhao Ziyang, the first secretary of the Communist Party committee of Guangdong province. We decided that we would "grant him an interview" and try to persuade him that things should not go on like this in Guangdong.

Soon a meeting was arranged between Zhao and representatives of Red Guards from Beijing. Throughout the meeting Zhao was bombarded by questions and criticism, for others shared our opinion about the class struggle situation in Guangdong. Soon drops of sweat began to show on his forehead, despite big electric fans running at top speed in the

conference room. He took out a handkerchief and wiped them. At that meeting, Zhao was extremely cautious. He talked very slowly. His attitude was patient and amiable. "Red Guard young generals," he called us from time to time. But that doesn't mean that he was going to take our advice. In fact, he resisted us and refused to give in on any of the issues under discussion. That frustrated and irritated us. Eventually the meeting ended with no results.

At the end of the meeting, I was convinced that Zhao Ziyang was no good and beyond help. He was one of the worst high-level Party officials who was determined to champion capitalism in China. A big red umbrella covering all the bloodsuckers and parasites in Guangdong! (Little did I foresee that twenty-three years later sitting in front of a TV, I would consider him one of the best Chinese leaders who did not want to kill people at Tian'anmen to save the rule of the Party.) *All right then. Since Zhao Ziyang refuses to change the ways he "leads" the Cultural Revolution in Guangdong, we will take that leadership away from him and do things our way! We do not need his permission, nor his cooperation. Let him be the Jade Emperor sitting up on high for the time being. We will be the monkey and turn his heaven upside down. Let's see who has real power.*

So we sat down and drafted an order, which demanded that all privately owned shops and restaurants in Guangzhou City go out of business on that very day; those who dared ignore our order would be responsible for all the consequences. Next, we took the article to a printing factory. The officials there did not dare interfere and the workers supported our revolutionary act. They put other jobs aside and printed out ten thousand copies of our order.

After that, we called the transportation team in the big yard for a vehicle. A jeep soon arrived. We loaded the leaflets onto the jeep and drove through the entire city. The leaflets flew out from the back of the jeep, falling like snowflakes. People in the street fought with one another to grab them. Children ran after us. Many of them. Their bare feet drummed the street. Their hands stretched out. "Gei-zang-wo! Gei-zang-wo! (Give one to me!)" they shouted eagerly in chorus. The news spread like wildfire. On busy streets, at shopping centers, blocks were set up. Local Red Guards, loudspeakers in hands, read our order in Cantonese dialect. That was also part of our plan.

We returned to our base after dark, feeling really good about ourselves. Now revolution had been made. No more hotbeds of capital-

ism in Guangzhou. Socialism won . . . But just as we were congratulating ourselves, a group of cadres filed in with big portfolios under their arms. They said that they came from the municipal government: since late afternoon it had been surrounded by hundreds of shop owners who demanded that their privately owned shops be taken over by the state.

"Good! Then the state should take them over."

"But it's not so simple. The city doesn't have the money to take over these businesses. You see, if these privately owned shops were taken over by the state, the shop owners and their assistants would all become state employees. In the future, no matter whether their shops make money or not, the city has to pay them fixed wages, plus health insurance, welfare, benefits, old-age pensions, provide housing and child care for them . . . That is why the owners of these shops are eager to have their shops taken over by the state. That means from now on they'd all have iron rice bowls . . . "

This was something we had not thought of. But we were unwilling to call the whole thing off, or else our revolution would be aborted. So we talked with these officials into the small hours. On our side, we lectured them on the danger of capitalist restoration and the great significance of the Cultural Revolution, telling them not to let economic concerns cloud over political ones. They, on the other hand, showed us statistics and calculated the costs that would be incurred by such a change. Our rhetoric soared in the sky. Their argument crawled on the ground. Our speeches never converged.

Yet before daybreak somehow they managed to persuade us that the time was not ripe yet for such a drastic move. Or maybe we were not persuaded, but we gave in because we were so exhausted that our minds shut down. We no longer cared about the order we had given. Anyway we had dealt capitalism a fatal blow and the bloodsuckers should know that their days were numbered. Besides, we had not expected that the adults, government officials, and those shop owners would take us so seriously. The mere fact that the officials thought we had authority and came to negotiate with us gave us satisfaction. So in the end we agreed that we would not enforce the order immediately, which actually meant that we would never enforce it.

Although we were unable to wipe out the privately owned enterprises in Guangzhou, we did set Zhao Ziyang's backyard on fire. Some cadres here got our message about the Cultural Revolution. They were inspired. They turned themselves into rebels. Others remained in the old camp

and were called *baohuangpai* (loyalists). Colleagues argued and fought against colleagues. Old friends fell out. Couples debated at night, for they had joined different teams. Kids rebelled against their parents. Red Guards blew the wind and spread the fire. The big yard boiled up like a huge pot of porridge.

Our influence reached to as far as Zhao Ziyang's home. His children, a boy and a girl who were both in elementary school, came over to us. They said that they wanted to rebel against their father. They offered to take us to their home to ambush their old man. We declined their offer and told them to teach us some Cantonese instead. So they taught us how to count from one to ten. We became good friends. Zhao's children were naive. They trusted us. We liked them. In spite of their father. Or maybe because of their father. After all, we were of the same roots. Our parents had all been revolutionary cadres. Only recently some of them had become capitalist-roaders.

While children were naive, adults could be really mean and base when their vested interests were in jeopardy. This we found out from a *dazibao* that accused us Red Guards from Beijing of smoking, drinking, stealing public property, and sleeping together, which meant having sex. Shameless fabrications pure and simple! The last charge was especially vicious. In China this was the most effective weapon to ruin a person's reputation, making him or her, especially her, as odious as dog shit.

Needless to say, we were all infuriated. If we could get hold of this rumormonger, we would bombard him with cannonballs and fry him in boiling oil, shoot ten thousand arrows through him, and smash his dog head . . . But the *dazibao* was anonymous. At the end, it merely said "several revolutionary people." We did not know whose dog head to smash. Even so, we could not afford to ignore it. Our reputation might be ruined by these lies. In this big yard, few knew us personally but many would read this *dazibao*. This was the first time I realized that *dazibao* did not always reveal the truth. It could tell lies and spread rumors too! It might be used by people to make a revolution. It might also be used by some to make personal attacks. Often it was impossible for readers to tell which was which. It could do irreversible damage to innocent people.

So we wrote a *dazibao* overnight to refute the charges. This *dazibao* I remember quite clearly. At the time, I felt it was absolutely convincing. Today, however, its logic really escapes me. Our main argument was this: since we were all Red Guards whose families belonged to the

"five red categories," naturally we were endowed with all the good qualities: We had profound class feelings toward Chairman Mao. We hated class enemies. We were determined to carry the Cultural Revolution through . . . By the same token, we were immune from all bad habits such as smoking, drinking, stealing, and having sex. Those who had attacked Red Guards anonymously with such malicious slanders must be harboring dark motives. Revolutionary people should heighten their vigilance and be aware of those who were pulling strings behind the scenes. This, we concluded, was a new and desperate move made by the capitalist-roaders. We vowed that we would leave no stone unturned to get to the bottom of this matter.

Perhaps the threat we made worried the higher-level officials. Soon afterwards, we were invited to talk with Wu Zhipu, deputy Party secretary of central southern China, who was Zhao Ziyang's superior. This old man was even more patient and amiable than Zhao Ziyang. For hours he listened to our criticism of Zhao. Then he offered to arrange another meeting for us to "help Zhao Ziyang face to face."

"No. We have no time to help him. We have more important things to do." I do not remember what those important things were. Looking back on it, I think by that time I was really fed up with political struggle that was very different from what I had imagined. It was not just theories and manifestos, inspiration, debate, and noble sacrifice. It was a fight for power, ugly and ruthless. Enough was enough. Before September was over we decided to leave Guangzhou.

By the time we left Guangzhou, my fellow Red Guards and I were all in bad shape. In my case, I lost my voice completely. No matter how hard I tried, no sound would come out of my throat. It was a weird experience. I guess it was the result of too many excited speeches and debates, battling others with Chairman Mao's quotations at the top of my voice. Perhaps too little sleep and irregular meals had something to do with it too. Sometimes we would not sleep for two or three nights. Sometimes just a single meal or no meal for a whole day.

In fact, I consider myself very lucky to be alive. Shortly before we left Guangzhou, one night, a group of Red Guards, I among them, walked along Zhongshan Street. It was well after midnight. The city was asleep. The street was dim. I was exhausted. My feet were like rocks. I fell behind. Another girl named Wuliang, who was only fourteen, was with me. After a while, we literally fell asleep in the middle of the street.

Other Red Guards went ahead for a mile or so. When they realized

that we were missing, they came back to look for us. Fortunately they found us before we got run over by a car or a truck. Otherwise we would have become martyrs, and martyrs of this sort were later judged to be big fools who sacrificed their lives for a wrong cause. Now history has pretty much forgotten them. I'd much prefer to be alive so that I can write this book.