

Bombard The Headquarters [Chp. 10]

The lean-faced Uighur boy led them swiftly through a maze of lanes tucked between Palace Well Street and the Gate of Lofty Benevolence. His curly hair bobbed ahead in the darkness like a pair of black wings. He knocked at the door of a low brick house where lace curtains hung in steamed-up windows. The door opened and a short heavy woman exchanged some words with the boy, then withdrew.

Jin followed the others into a hot bright room. He shivered and his glasses fogged over. His fever was soaring. An announcer's voice from Central Television was blaring the highlights of a championship volleyball match as part of a summary of the year in sports. Jin removed his glasses. The woman was only a girl, no more than twenty, with wide-set, rabbit-like eyes, tawny skin and a long masculine jaw. A plaid skirt covered the tops of her thighs and a maroon sweater molded the bulges of her trunk. She looked like a Hebei peasant in the costume of a high cadre's daughter.

As Han examined the girl, an indulgent smile creased his cheeks. Then he glared at her like a dyspeptic teacher. The Uighur boy knelt at the sideboard under the booming television set and took out some tumblers and a bottle of brandy. Han shouted over the noise of the television:

"You're supposed to be Western! But your hair is black, your skin is yellow, your nose is flat and your eyes are no rounder than mine!"

Jin scarcely followed Han's butchered Mandarin but the girl caught his meaning and shouted back in staunch Beijingsese.

"I'm Uighur, that's Western! My hair is chestnut, not black! Look at these eyes!" She thrust her face into Han's and pulled down one eyelid. "Look! As green as grass!"

"They're brown! You're Chinese!"

"They're green!" the girl cried. "You're a foreigner yourself, what do you know?"

Han turned to his comrades. No one was smiling. "I want my money back," he said roughly. "I gave Old Ismail a hundred and twenty American yuan."

The Uighur boy stepped forward and laid his fingers on Han's chest.

"Take it easy, comrade," he said quietly. "You've known my uncle for many years. You trust each other,

right? Good. He's your friend. You're his friend. He's my uncle. She's my cousin. I tell you she's Uighur. Do you want to meet her mother and father?"

Han glowered.

"It doesn't matter, Old Han," Old Ye said nervously. "We're here, it's warm, we should have some fun, OK?"

Han turned to Jin and scowled darkly. "I paid a hundred and twenty American yuan for a Western girl. She's Chinese. I want back sixty yuan. American."

Jin stared at him. His brain stumbled under its burden of drink, fever and fatigue. This senior devil, this capitalist, this depraved exploiter of the toiling classes was asking him, a Party member, to award him a partial refund from a prostitute. Shouldn't they both be in prison? Jin rifled his brain. Unity and stability. It's OK if some people lead the way. He saw that the others were staring at him. He spoke with effort.

"Mr. Han, in my opinion we should trust the Uighur people. The Uighur people are also Chinese, one of the five stars on the flag of our fatherland. They've lived in North China for hundreds of years and they helped us fight the Nationalists and the Japanese. There are even Uighurs on the Central Committee." He turned to the boy and girl. "Uighur friends, tonight you should show your friendship and not think too much about money."

"That's right, we won't think too much about money," the boy said. "We're friends, right? How would we dare cheat our friends? Besides, as my uncle says, money is only a game. It brings us together to play, God willing. Please have a seat."

With a quick smile he gestured towards the table that occupied the kitchen half of the room. Jin collapsed on a folding chair and was soon joined by Ye and Ah-Jeff. Han remained standing. The girl stepped over to the sideboard where a cassette player the size of a suitcase stood beside the trumpeting television. The overheated room exploded with throbbing music. Jin thought of Empress Wu's drums. The boy poured the brandy.

"To our Chinese friends!" he cried. "Ganbei!"

Echoing the toast, Ye, Ah-Jeff and Jin threw back the brandy, which cauterized Jin's sore throat. (A single spark can start a prairie fire!) The girl led Han to the bed that occupied the other end of the room, made up with an orange bedspread like a bed in a hotel. Maybe she worked in a hotel, the Golden Flower or the Jian Guo where rich foreigners stayed. She turned down the covers then peeled her sweater over her head, leaving her chestnut hair in disarray. Han, still scowling, wriggled out of his tan raincoat.

Jin began to sweat. His coat was buttoned to the neck, a coal stove pumped heat at his back, an electric

heater burned at the foot of the bed and the brandy smoldered in his belly. The music pounded relentlessly. Looking up he saw pillowcases dangling from a line, a set of winter underwear, two brassieres and a cream-colored blouse with scalloped collar. The boy doled out another measure of brandy.

"Time for Old Han to comb the horse's mane!" Ah-Jeff cried over the sound.

"The dragon crawls, the tiger stalks!" Ye shouted in reply.

"The monkey leaps, the locust grips!"

"Fixing a flat tire by the side of the road!"

"Lighting a cigarette in a stiff wind!"

"Do you study the bedroom arts in the South?" Jin cried.

"That's right!" Ye shouted. "In the South, we're all experts in the Four Stages!"

"And the Five Desires!"

"And the Nine Essences!"

The girl had stripped down to an egg-yellow brassiere and was sitting cross-legged on a pillow. Han's ribbed, darkling face hovered over a striped tent of shirt. He had a belly like a basketball and the knobby legs of a camel. Before Jin could look away, Han had squirmed under the bedspread. "Ox-ghosts and snake-monsters," Jin muttered. "Disgusting."

"Yin yang matters!" Ah-Jeff cried, turning to Jin.

"Are you married?"

"Married?" Jin shouted back. A surge of blood flooded his face.

"See, he blushes!" Ye cried. "A newlywed, maybe!"

"It's the brandy!" Jin called back, fanning the air.

"I feel very hot!"

"Are you married!" Ye asked their young host.

"No!" the boy said. He poured more brandy.

"Do you have many girlfriends?"

"Right, many girlfriends!"

"And you, you have many girlfriends?" Ah-Jeff asked Jin.

Jin laughed ostentatiously. "Not too many!" he shouted. "I think one is two too many!"

Ah-Jeff raised his glass. "To our girlfriends! May they grow ever younger!"

"To our wives!" Ye cried with a laugh. "May they grow ever younger!"

They drank again. Jin sank into his chair. He was no longer wearing his coat but he felt uncomfortably warm. He thought he might have fallen asleep despite the thunderous music. He felt very tired. He checked his bare wrist.

"Do you know the story of Ouyang Hei?" he asked, shouting over the noise. "A famous general during Sui

times! His wife was kidnapped by a white ape! When she came back, she was pregnant! She later bore a son! He became a famous general under the Tang!" He lifted his glass.

The boy produced a ball of aluminum foil. Ah-Jeff handed around a packet of Marlboros. Jin lit a cigarette and passed his lighter to Ye. His hands were shaking. He now felt weak and cool and his throat hurt. The boy was using a small ornamental dagger to carve a corner from a chunk of clay. He boy crushed the fragments into crumbs and added some shreds of tobacco. Taking a short jade pipe from his pocket, he added a pinch of the mixture to the bowl. Ye had Jin's lighter ready. He set his cigarette on the edge of the table and winking at Jin, put the jade pipe to his lips. Jin glanced over at the bed, where Han and the girl were watching television.

Without exhaling Ye handed the pipe and lighter to Jin, who set his cigarette on the edge of the table. Ye retrieved his cigarette, tapped the ash and still without exhaling took another drag. "Good," the boy said to Jin, "your friend's an expert." "Now watch Ah-Jin," Ah-Jeff said. "He's both red and expert." Jin eyed the tiny blackened hole and held the tepid stone to his lips. He inhaled slowly, his eye fixed on the miniature coals, though he was distracted for a moment by a flash of orange chenille. The room was the cabin of an elevator in which

he and his new comrades were plunging thunderously into the underworld.

He handed the pipe and lighter to Ah-Jeff. Without exhaling, he drained his tumbler. Ye and Ah-Jeff applauded and the boy poured another centimeter of brandy. Ah-Jeff lamented that Jin had finished the pipe but the boy added tobacco and stirred the bowl with the point of his dagger. Jin reached for his cigarette and almost tumbled from his chair. The same song had been playing for at least an hour.

Jin heard the boy ask Old Ye where they were from and what they were doing in Beijing. He felt Ah-Jeff seize him by the arm and ask him where he lived. Through the pounding he heard words about different regions of China, about women and the public security bureaus.

Jin muttered "Baoding" to no one in particular. His brain seemed fused like an overloaded circuit. After a tranquil but all too brief hiatus, the music resumed with popular songs from television. Ye and Ah-Jeff sang. "Ali Baba was a happy youth . . . Open sesame!" The boy grinned hospitably. Jin felt as though his skull itself had become the elevator. He recalled Kang Youwei's lament when flying over Baoding. "The blue sky and the round earth are only a huge prison." The girl appeared at the boy's shoulder, her face flushed and swollen. "Cigarettes?" she asked. Ah-Jeff gave her the remaining Marlboros while

the boy tilted out a drop of brandy. Jin stared at the girl's garish bathrobe. Its ruffled gladioli gaped like purple fish among green reeds.

A card game began but Jin played only a few hands. Ah-Jeff had become Old Han and was urging the boy to join the girl. He offered more gray banknotes but the boy laughed repeatedly and insisted that it was not convenient.

Ye had become Ah-Jeff. Han was again on the bed, the orange bedspread draped over his shoulders and his black socks digging at the mattress.

Ye and Jin moved chairs to the foot of the bed, where Han and Ah-Jeff sat with the girl. The picture seemed quite poor, with purple halos around the actors. Jin's eyeballs ached as a series of Chinese, white and African gallants, apparently sailors on shore leave in Hong Kong, drove their girlfriends into extravagant ecstasies. The bedroom arts. "Birth without name, source without form..." he heard the cassette player sing.

The girl appeared before him, her eyes glinting like gold. Her expansive cheeks were now purple. "Don't you have a job?" someone asked. "Does your mother live here?" Before the girl answered, "Fifteenth Moon" began to play. "Like a Western girl, a Western girl!" Han called from the bed. "Part the grass to find the snake!" someone called. "The wasp crawls into a cave!" The girl straddled Jin's thighs. "I'm a Party member," Jin said. "You don't have

Ai Si disease, do you?" she asked, hovering over him. "The white ape offers fruit!" "The swallow holds mud in its beak!" Jin felt something hard press his neck. The girl's parted robe revealed two rows of yellowish dugs. Jin closed his eyes. The cadre's dead daughter. He was poisoned, like the Yongzheng emperor.

The next thing he knew Jin was on his knees in the dust, gagging and retching. When he stopped he felt he must have choked up all of his viscera, though the light from the open doorway revealed only a little damp patch in the dust. He stood and brushed off his knees.

"Ei, the drunken pig!" the girl exclaimed when Jin returned to his chair. She was sitting between Ah-Jeff and Han. Jin closed his eyes. His face felt like a mask of wet clay, his throat burned, his skin hurt all over. It was only natural that sooner or later he would fall in with ghosts and monsters. Soon he would have to lay his neck on the rails. Who knew what delusions Wei Jingsheng suffered after seven years in Qincheng?

When Jin awoke the lights were out. He seemed to have spent the night on the chair. His throat felt like baked clay. Someone was telling him to go. In the gray light filtering through the curtains he could see people sleeping on a bed.

He made his way north and west. The temperature was well below freezing. Elderly men and women were

exercising. Setting the world right before they died. He heard the tinny clatter of aluminum pots being filled at communal faucets and passed a stand where a woman in a white turban was frying oil twists. Jin bought two and a bowl of tea. He sipped the tea and went on his way, following the north wall of the palace. As he reached the bus stand at North Sea Park, "The East Is Red" burst over the loudspeakers. He boarded a bus, stepped down at the zoo and boarded another.

Jin stepped down in front of a small shop and followed the road to the ruins of the Summer Palace. He stopped in a wide clearing surrounded by evergreens, where the pathway was hidden by dry grass. Little was left but a scattering of gray stone blocks. Lord Elgin's Marbles. He clambered on a slab and sat on his heels. The black trees drew a curtain around him, the tawny grass swayed gently and the sky, though as gray as stone, did not threaten snow. Jin was overcome with fatigue. Enough, he said. Despite the cold, he lay down on the slab with his hand for a pillow.

When Jin opened his eyes, a boy and a girl were staring at him from the pathway. They were holding hands.

"He's awake," the boy said.

"Are you all right?" the girl asked.

"I'm thirsty," Jin said.

They came nearer. "OK, let's find something to drink, OK?" the boy said. "Can you walk?"

Jin sat up and shivered. His throat throbbed and burned, and his neck and back were stiff.

The girl was studying chemistry, the boy computer science. The girl was from Changchun, the boy from Tianjin. Jin asked why they were in Beijing during the holidays. They exchanged glances.

"We want to stay together," the girl said.

"What work do you do?" the boy asked.

Jin wondered. Did he still have work? He saw no reason to tell them that he was a depraved anti-socialist pest under surveillance of the masses. "I'm a journalist," he said.

"Ah, a pity," the girl replied.

"You're not Liu Binyan, are you?" the boy asked.

"No. He's more than sixty years old."

"We just heard. The leaders have expelled him from the Party."

"Kill the chicken," Jin said.

The two said nothing. They entered the eastern gate of the university. At a distance Jin saw a few young persons carrying thermos bottles, but most of the students had gone home, no doubt at the urging of the authorities. There were no traces of big-character posters. Jin spotted some foreigners, mostly Africans. An athlete ran past them and disappeared. Jin glanced at the windows of empty classrooms. How different his life would have been had he

been born two decades later! Today's students knew nothing of wandering peasants, struggle meetings or beating, smashing and looting. They were as foreign as overseas Chinese.

They came to a dormitory. The boy told the girl he would meet her at the dining hall and kissed her cheek. It was smooth and fine, a child's cheek, like Xingxing's.

When they came to his room the boy introduced himself as Sun Ming. His roommate whom he introduced as Young Zhou greeted Jin from an upper bunk. "Let's drink some tea-water, OK?" Sun said, unstopping a red thermos bottle. Jin fell into a chair.

"Do you work in Beijing?" Sun asked.

"Baoding," Jin said.

"Ah, the big prison. Do you write for the newspaper?"

"For television. I would tell you about it, but I'm so tired I can barely sit."

"Please lie down," Sun said, rising from the lower bunk. Jin stretched out, shivering in his overcoat under the quilt. Young Sun said he would be back with food in an hour.

When Jin awoke, the light was failing. He was alone in the room. So this is what it's like to be a student, he thought. He reached for the mug of tea-water, but his throat felt as though it had been scoured with a rope. As

he sat on the edge of the bed with the quilt over his shoulders, Young Sun returned with a covered bowl.

"I'm afraid the food is cold," he said, uncovering.

"It doesn't matter."

The bowl felt tepid and smooth to Jin's tender fingers. Mm, buns and stew with potato, turnip, carrot, a shred of greens, sunk in greasy gravy. Suddenly ravenous, having fasted for twenty-four hours, Jin began shoveling stew into his mouth. Swallowing was an ordeal he avoided for as long as he could, peeling the food with his tongue from the roof of his mouth and herding it under his molars. He attacked a bun, tearing its spongy flesh with his incisors. By the time he finished the second, wiping up the last smear of gravy, the room was almost dark. His jaws ached and his face felt flushed and swollen.

"Thank you," he said.

"It doesn't matter," Sun said. He sat in the chair and frowned. Jin understood he could not remain in the dormitory, so he rose from the bunk and began retying his scarf. He felt chilled and his clothing chafed his skin, but he could walk. Young Sun waved him down again.

"Comrade Jin," he said after clearing his throat.

"We, I mean several students and young teachers, are going to the Middle South Sea compound. To deliver a petition. Will you go with us? It's good luck that we met a journalist."

Jin shivered and grinned uneasily. "The Middle South Sea compound? The high cadre compound? Isn't that dangerous?"

"We just want to hand them a piece of paper."

"I see. Good. Well, I don't think I can join you. I'm a Party member and that would be a breach of Party discipline. Maybe you don't know the Party constitution. Besides, you should not endanger yourselves unless you can really accomplish something."

Sun did not return Jin's grin. "Some of us are League members, some are Party members. I don't know which provisions of the Party constitution you mean. I just know that a Party member must step forward bravely in times of danger, fearing neither difficulty nor death."

"But there's still Party discipline," Jin said.

"It's just a piece of paper."

Jin smiled as if he were weighing the boy's words, meanwhile patting his chest to find his cigarettes. How ridiculous, he thought, how ridiculous to invoke Party discipline, to defend the Party when it has you under its heel. He offered Sun a Spring City. They smoked in silence. Jin nodded thoughtfully. He felt a vibration of dread, like the vibration of a far-off train felt in the rails. He thought of the girl with cracked cheeks. His prisoner. His assassin. Tears sprang to his eyes.

"You're risking your lives and your careers," Jin said hoarsely. "For what? A gesture. You should stay indoors tonight."

"The leaders need to hear what people think. We'll tell them. It's not so difficult. Or dangerous."

Jin wiped his eyes. "You underestimate—" he began. What did they underestimate? It was not as though they were about to launch an assault. Young Sun slid an ashtray across the table.

"We're going," he said.

"I know," Jin said. "Well, let's go."

At the main gate they joined about twenty young persons and boarded a city bus. It was half empty because of the holiday. Sun sat with his girlfriend. Jin, feeling sad and foolish, was joined by Young Zhou who showed him the petition. It was only a single worn page of stenciled writing paper, but attached to it were several pages of signatures. Jin frowned. He sensed Zhou was waiting for his reaction, but he did not like what he saw. Apparently the kids did not accept the theory that class enemies would seize state power if the Party allowed political discussion. Jin nodded and returned the petition. He looked out the window. The bus was rattling down Sea Mud Street.

"Young Sun says you're a Party member," Zhou said.

"That's right," Jin said.

"I'm also a Party member. Junior to you, of course. But I think the Party should compete for the people's loyalty in free elections preceded by free discussions, even if that means becoming a minority party."

Jin looked at Zhou's red eyes and the beads of sweat that had formed on his forehead. Even his upper lip was sweating. The sun had sunk behind the Western Hills and his skin glowed blue. Like Jin he seemed to fear that something would happen. Was he a security officer? An informer, maybe? Jin refused to bite.

"As Comrade Deng has said, 'Let a hundred flowers bloom,'" Jin said. "Is that the idea?"

Zhou did not answer.

"All right, I'll sign," Jin said, "but I want to add a line to the petition."

Zhou handed it to him. Jin scrawled as neatly as the jolting bus allowed a demand for the reversal of all reprisals against journalists. They dismounted at West Item Avenue North and dispersed. Jin followed at a distance, shivering, his eyes burning with tears. Young Sun and the girl walked hand in hand along the high purple walls, their black hair invisible, their white socks flashing as they crossed the fields of shadow between streetlights.

Jin wiped his eyes. He had tumbled into a dream. These children had no guns, no Selections, no wooden clubs

tucked under their belts. They were more like scholar-officials submitting a memorial to the sovereign, humbly calling his attention to a troubling distemper in the empire. Not knowing that the emperor was a prisoner and that a clique of evil eunuchs ruled in his stead.

The students converged before the guards noticed their approach, forming a small semicircle. The guards glared from under their high fur hats, booted feet apart, gloved hands on the grips of small automatic weapons equipped with silencers. Their faces looked dull and muddy under the mercury vapor streetlight. Were these the heirs of the Chairman's palace guard, the assassins of Marshal Lin, the famous Unit Number 8341? They were certainly not the good fellows in cloth shoes and wide-skirted tunics who ambled hand in hand down the streets of Baoding.

The guard on the left barked harshly at the students. His breath hovered like smoke around his face. Jin wiped his eyes and swallowed painfully.

Young Zhou spoke. "Comrade," he said, a tremor in his voice, "we are a delegation from Beijing University. We want to speak with the acting General Secretary. We are Youth League members and Party members and we support the Central Committee and the State Council."

"Good," the guard said. "That's good, but he's very busy. You have to make an appointment. He's very busy."

Jin became aware of the intense chill. His skin felt as dry as tinder.

"We understand the concrete situation on the campuses," Zhou said quietly. "We can help Comrade Zhao with the present tasks facing the Party." His hands were hidden in his coat. Jin felt an ominous tingle on the back of his neck.

"Good," it was the guard's favorite word, "but without orders I can't let you in."

"We understand," Zhou said, "and we're happy to wait while you or your colleague send word."

"Sorry," the guard said. "We can't leave our post. If someone inside wants to see you he'll send an escort. Is that clear?"

Zhou's face was as gray as dirty snow in the white light. His jaw tightened. Jin wiped his eyes and shivered.

"We understand, comrade," Zhou said, "therefore we have a request to make." He took the petition from his coat pocket and read with the sharp formal clarity of an educated Beijingsese. "On behalf of the Beijing University chapter of the Young Communist League, the Beijing University chapter of the Union of Chinese University Students, and the undersigned citizens"— He unfolded the paper and read a series of names, names of students, professors, administrators, workers at the university,

other workers and cadres. Most of the signers worked in Beijing, though the students had also collected signatures in Tianjin.

The long list ended with "Jin Wuming, Journalist, Baoding." Jin shuddered. But the guards were unimpressed. Obviously they had not been selected for their interest in political affairs. Jin saw that the guard who had spoken was now looking over Zhou's head, while the other was scanning the kids' bodies and hands. He met Jin's eyes. Jin looked at Zhou. When Zhou had finished reading, he folded the petition and proffered it respectfully to the guard.

The guard looked at the petition and looked at Zhou and looked at the petition again, his hands immobile on his weapon.

"I can't take it," he said. "Mail it or make an appointment."

Zhou continued to hold out the folded papers to the guard. They trembled silently under the streetlight. There was no wind. A city bus hurried past on West Item Avenue. Again Zhou spoke firmly and clearly:

"In Qing times a memorial had to be written on special paper and delivered in a special box by a special courier. We did not think it would be so difficult to communicate with officials of the People's Republic. Do you refuse to deliver this petition to the office of the General

Secretary at the request of the undersigned citizens?

Please consider your response."

"I told you, mail it or make an appointment," he said. "Your requests are beyond our authority. You should leave. Immediately."

"Comrades," Zhou said, still facing the guard, "Comrade Soldier refuses to deliver our petition." The others said nothing, but frowned and shrugged their shoulders against the cold. Zhou pulled something from his other pocket, a white cotton sock with a stone in the toe. He slipped in the petition, tightened the opening, and swung back his arm. Jin wanted to step forward to stop him, but before he could budge the guard bounded towards him. Jin and the others watched like statues as in one rapid motion the guard knocked Zhou off his feet, bashed his face with his palm as he went down and seized his arm, which he bent backwards over his forearm as he dropped to one knee. Jin heard a muffled pop and Zhou shrieked with pain and sudden terror. The statues cried out and stepped forward. The other guard shouted, "Get back! Get back!" and raised his weapon to his hip. Jin attempted to intercede. "Comrade, comrade!" he cried, "enough, that's enough!" He stood over the guard. "He's only a child," he said, and then he was falling as if he had slipped on a patch of ice, but the sidewalk was dry, and as he fell he saw the dull red-gray sky and when the back of his head

struck the sidewalk the sky lit up in a purple flash. "He's only a child," Jin said again, before a boot or a truncheon struck the side of his head.

Jin later remembered fleeing through dark alleys with a heavy rifle, a standard Type 56. He could not have taken it from the guard. He met up with Han Lixin at a dark streetcorner, tied a strip of cloth around Han's bleeding neck and bore Han on his back to the next open boulevard, where their comrades were trading fire with an enemy faction. The streetlights had been shot out but the combatants had built fires behind the barricades, and occasionally one side sent up a flare to reveal the other's position. Jin took aim with his Type 56 and squeezed off single shots at the shadows that drifted like sunspots across the fires. The rifle against his cheek sounded thin and remote, like a hammer pounding several blocks away at a construction site. Han sat on the sidewalk wrapped in an Army coat, his face taut and dry in the firelight. Jin brought him water.

At one point Jin thought he had merely dreamt the nighttime battle. He seemed to be curled on a wet floor. His throat burned like parched earth, his skull throbbed like a drum, but then he was kneeling again beside Old Han. A flare burst overhead, bathing the comrades in white light. They looked up, dazzled, and as it faded the ground began to rumble as if a freight train were rolling down the

street. We must be near the station, Jin thought. From behind the enemy's barricade came the methodical roar of a diesel engine and the grinding of steel treads on pavement. A set of headlights swung slowly around a corner. "Tank!" cried the comrades. Aiya! Had the 38th Army thrown in with the revisionists? Was Jin's father supplying the anarchists of the Workers Command? An explosion in the rear knocked Jin to the ground.

After a lapse he opened his eyes. The street was dark and quiet. The tank had passed. The sound of gunfire was coming from another quarter of the city. An orange light briefly lit the faces of the buildings as a flame-thrower was fired through a doorway. Jin perceived a handful of shadowy figures advancing silently along the boulevard. The orange light faded but he continued to watch the bulky shapes approach. At intervals they would halt and stoop down, performing some lengthy operation, identifying the dead or searching for weapons. Again the flame-thrower shed its warm glow. The figures were carrying sacks.

Jin sensed something bending over him. An enormous hand with thick callused fingers seized his hair. Jin cried out. "Ei, this one's still alive," a guttural voice muttered. Jin was hoisted into the air as if he weighed no more than a captured sparrow. He shrieked and flailed his arms and kicked his feet to regain his footing. "What are you doing?" he cried, his voice eerily thin and faraway.

"Time to meet Marx," his assailant growled. "Wait, ei, ei, I'm not— I should say good-bye. To Young Zhu and my father and Xingxing. Don't—" "It's too late. You're not going to show reactionary ideas now are you, just at the end? The Chairman's good little soldier? Come now—the glorious struggle of China's red youth against revisionism will live forever in our hearts!"

The horny fingers tightened their grip in Jin's hair. Jin heard the quick rush of the flame-thrower. The burst of light revealed a bristly trotter reaching for a cleaver, a green ear flopping from an orange-tufted head, a bristly green snout fenced in with contorted yellow tusks. "The Pig Ghost!" Jin gasped, as the cleaver flashed. He did not feel the blade touch his neck or slice through his spinal marrow, but felt only a sudden upward lift as the weight of his body fell away.

"Pig Ghost?" the voice growled. "Wrong. I'm a monkey."

Jin swung from the pole of a litter, head up, head down, shivering with fever in the baking sun and damp shade that alternated like days and nights along the mountain trails. He was now Mister Su Wei Ai, the great rebel. His remnant Army, in a column that stretched out over thirty li, was strategically retreating through southern Jiangxi

to escape General Jiang's Fifth Extermination Campaign. Advised by the German generals Fan Zei-Ke and Fan Fa-Ken-Hao-Sen, Jiang had encircled the infant Soviet Republic in ring within ring of concrete blockhouses.

Emerging from his fever, Su peered through a gap in the gauze curtain, which opened on a deep wooded gorge. He slid his hand into his pocket. Where were— Nothing. Aiya! Someone had stolen his iron balls! No wonder he was so ill! He patted his empty pockets and shivered violently. There was no doubt who was responsible. The foreigner Li De and the twenty-eight Bolsheviks, "Left"-opportunists all, had fled the wreckage of the Shanghai underground and now had usurped power in the vagrant State. They had made Su a prisoner of his own Army and now were only waiting for one of his loyal bearers to lose his footing. Then no more Su. The Army would fall into their hands.

Su shuddered. Had he left his iron balls back in Ruijin? Did Li De have them in his pocket? Disgusting! The remnant Army was descending towards the Xiang River. Su swung violently as his bearers struggled down the damp slippery stairs chipped from the naked granite by generations of unknown workers. Suddenly, Jiang struck. Artillery fire shook the earth and tore the air with whizzing metal. Fighter planes strafed the wide beach and dropped small bombs on the baggage train. Su was

paralyzed. The copying machine! Someone must save it! He struggled with the tangle of gauze and bedding, then lay back exhausted. He would have to trust Young Deng. Ai, poor Deng! He had learned to operate the copying machine in Paris at the knee of Premier Zhou, but during the Anti-Anti-Bolshevik Campaign, the twenty-eight had stripped him of his rank.

The screams of the wounded made Su wonder whether his new wife had been hit. At last his loyal bearers, Si-La-Bing and Mi-Te-Si-Ke-Bing, succeeded in crossing the quaking, shell-torn shore and waded into the Xiang. The icy water soaked Su's hips. They had advanced halfway across the river when a whooshing artillery shell struck just in front of them. Si-La-Bing exploded and Su tumbled into the racing, muscular current of the Xiang.

The water burned like acid on his skin. He struggled in vain as the tangled bedding tightened like a serpent around his neck. He remembered Young Song's theory of the origin of man, which was really no less plausible than Engels' notion that man evolved from one of his thumbs. It went like this. During several millennia of savage warfare between rival tribes of monkeys in the southern jungles, the vanquished tribes drifted ever further west. The weakest of all settled at last on the slopes of the forbidding Kunlun Mountains. In an unrelated sequence of events transpiring in Heaven, the Western Queen Mother,

after failing for several centuries to cajole the Jade Emperor into emitting (which she believed would render her not only immortal but also more powerful in magic), had concocted a scheme that was sure to accomplish her goal.

The senile Emperor had conceived a violent passion for one of his pages, who he said resembled a favorite young consort of his father's. He gave the boy fine clothes and horses and appointed him Minister of Defense. The boy was no fool and exploited his position to amass a huge fortune. In addition to extensive estates, he acquired control of the mines, ironworks, salt works, shipping and harbors. He begged the Emperor to declare him crown prince. When the Emperor demurred, somewhat taken aback by the boy's ambition, the boy (who had bought the ardent support of the prime minister) threatened to seize supreme power and drive the Emperor into exile. This gave the Western Queen Mother her chance. The Minister of Rain, who was loyal to the Western Queen Mother, flooded Heaven, and a turtle bearing a prophecy crawled to the foot of the Emperor's throne.

According to the prophecy, which was carved in trigrams on the turtle's back, the flooding could only be controlled by a hero born of the Emperor and his sister. Various scholars pleaded on behalf of the Minister of Defense that the minister himself was the Emperor's "sister" and that the "hero born of their union" would be the minister too as soon as he was invested as crown

prince. The Emperor was not persuaded. Scholars loyal to the Western Queen Mother argued, on the basis of etymology and astrology, that the Emperor's "sister" was a beautiful young maid in the Queen Mother's service. The Emperor found this more credible. For some reason neither side argued that the prophecy referred to the Western Queen Mother, although everyone down to lowest merchant in Heaven knew she was the Emperor's sister.

The wedding day arrived. The Western Queen Mother contributed two Peaches of Immortality from her garden. When the feast was over she discreetly withdrew. The Emperor went in to his bride and after instructing her in the art of the Three Peaks, the Four Essences, the Five Desires, the Six Positions, the Seven Ills, the Eight Benefits, the Nine Styles, the Ten Fragrances, the Eighteen Touches and the Thirty Ways, immediately fell into a death-like sleep.

His bride left the bedchamber and stepped into the courtyard for some air. There she threw back her head and laughed, her tiger's teeth glittering in the starlight, for she was none other than the Western Queen Mother herself, having deftly slipped in between the Emperor and his false sister. Loosening her seven silken robes and unbinding her leopard's tail, which switched and swayed like a snake in the windless ether, she squatted to relieve herself beside the jade column that joined Heaven and Earth. The ample

flow gained speed, and congealing in the interstellar chill into huge bullets and spears of yellow ice, cascaded through millions of li of empty space. It plummeted past each of the Five Planets and past the the Jade Hare until it crossed into the stratosphere and began to melt. The slush nebula plunged through the blue-gray vapors of the troposphere, boomed like a Jian 8 fighter as it pierced the distended balloon of its own shock wave, and struck the Kunlun Mountains with the force of a thermonuclear warhead.

Thousands of monkeys died instantly when the caves they inhabited collapsed and thousands of others quickly drowned. The acrid flood, compounded of frigid fluid and golden chunks of salt and ice, roared down the mountainsides carrying trees and boulders, dead and dying monkeys, herds of miniature yaks, the wreckage of huts and primitive household utensils. Following the tilt of the earth (the result of Gong Gong's rebellion, but that was another story), the torrent flowed eastward and its chemical action burned the hair and leached the color from the skin of the thousands of monkeys swept along in its course. Those who saved themselves in the first few minutes of the disaster by seizing low-hanging branches or clinging to outcrops of rock eventually became Turks and Moslems. They had spent the least amount of time in the brine and were still quite hairy and dark. Those who floated and struggled but only managed to crawl to shore

after the flood had carried them along the northern slope of the Kunlun Range became Tibetans and Kazakhs. The exhausted ones who staggered choking from the flood after it had raced across Gansu Province and then swung left on its northern expedition became Hui people and Mongols. From Mongolia the flood turned south, then widened and slowed its pace and again resumed its eastward journey.

Two monkeys bobbed and floated on the now placid surface of the flood and washed ashore in northern Henan. The hair was almost completely burned from their bodies and their skin was bleached bright yellow. When the flood receded they lay prone in the mud. The flood had nearly drowned them but it had also kept them alive, for it was enriched with residues of the medicinal herbs the Western Queen Mother had imbibed to prepare for her "wedding" and with the mingled essences of the immortal couple. Coincidentally, the monkeys that crawled from the mud were also brother and sister, but they hid themselves in garments of beaten bark from shame of their new-found hairlessness. Later immortalized as Fu Xi and Nu Wa, together they built the first mud city by the banks of the Yellow River and fathered and mothered the Han people. Under the Three Kings and Five Emperors, their descendants spread into southern China, where in the course of two millennia they exterminated the martial tribes that had originally driven their ancestors from their homes.

As Su squirmed for his life in the burning torrent, he thought that if he lived he might become the first communist man. Unfortunately he failed to free himself from the tangle of gauze and bedding that gripped his limbs. His lungs filled with water and he lost consciousness. When he awoke he was pacing a dark empty street in a western village, an old Nagant revolver in his hand. His remnant Army had been wiped out by Jiang's troops, local warlords, cold, starvation and disease. A dog barked and the wind blew dust in his face. He was waiting in the dark, his finger on the trigger, for the renegade and conspirator Zhang Guodao. His comrade from the long past days of Li Dazhao's Red Mansion now commanded the rival Fourth Army.

In another dream Jin was wandering the alleys of old Beijing, armed with a Type 56. Again it was nighttime. He was trying to find his comrades who were attacking the Central Television building. He turned a corner and what looked like a corpse sitting with its back against a wall. It was Branch Secretary Sui. "Comrade Jin!" Sui cried, covering his face with his hands. Pools of blood soaked the empty cuffs of his trousers. "The third of the Five Punishments," Jin said. "No more running the capitalist road for you!" "I can take a taxi," Sui whimpered. Jin hoisted him on his back. As they staggered south and west

towards Central Television, he felt Sui's blood running down his legs.

Somehow Jin found himself alone on the rostrum over the Gate of Heavenly Peace. The vast square, much vaster than Red Square in Moscow, spread out before him to the southern horizon. Campfires filled the square like a multitude of fat red stars, as though the square were the center of the galaxy, and all the peoples of the empire—the Han, the Hui, the Dong and the Zhuang, the Yi, the Bai, the Va and the Dai, the Hani, the Tujia, the Lisu and the Lahu, the Uighur, the Mongol, the Kazakh and the Manchu, as well as the Tibetans—and all classes of people—the peasants, the merchants, the artisans and the scholars, the soldiers, the workers, the landlords and the odd-jobbers, the monks, the loafers, the local tyrants and the dependents of Revolutionary martyrs—in sum, all the fleas on the body of Pan Gu, had descended on Beijing to demand liberation.

Jin gazed at the red fires. Across the square, many li away from the rostrum, stood the Chairman's memorial hall. It was a huge square building, the world's largest pavilion, a Soviet temple. As Jin gazed the roof of the memorial hall seemed to slide backwards out of sight. From the interior of the hall a broad column of red light shone on the low-hanging clouds. Jin half-expected the crystal coffin to shoot out of the opening and circle the square like Ali Baba's carpet, flashing in the brilliant red beam.

Instead he saw to his horror a monstrous pink swollen face, its eyes and mouth sewn shut, rise above the pink-lit rim of the building followed by swollen pink shoulders. The torso and legs slowly followed until a bloated, grotesque pink balloon wearing only a loincloth of olive webbing dominated the square.

Jin stared in fascination as the balloon toppled forward. It hovered over the obelisk to the People's Heroes, then slowly drifted northward, head first, towards the rostrum. As Jin gazed at the pink scalp beneath the tangled screen of wiry hair, he felt the flames of the leaping watchfires sear its belly and chest, as if it were being cupped to purge a disease. The pink face was directly overhead, the bruised eyes stitched shut with cable, the mouth stapled with steel, the nose sunk between the bloated cheeks. Jin cried out in pain and raised his weapon, no longer a Type 56 but an automatic cannon of the kind mounted on Jian 4 fighters, or the kind Rambo used on the Vietnamese, and fired at the balloon's head like Wu Yi of Yin shooting the inflated King of Heaven. The cannon's recoil whirled Jin around and he lost his footing, but as he fell he glimpsed through the stone railing the balloon whizzing feet first back to the memorial.