

Turn The Army Into A Working Force [Chp. 6]

For several days there was no reportable news. Jin and Liang spent long hours editing the visit to Red Sow, which was broadcast the evening of Fifth Day as planned and four more times over the weekend. On Sunday Jin returned to Red Sow to report his suspicions about the oven. Chief Zhou listened attentively and promised to repair the pressure gauge. Loading up Jin's bicycle with pork and presenting him with a bottle of liquor for the coming New Year, Zhou warmly thanked him for the station's help in spreading Red Sow's reputation.

When Jin awoke the next morning, plump flakes were falling from the sky like peach-petals or ashes from a burning building. Jin obtained Young Shi's permission to spend the day shooting snow scenes. He enlisted Old Han, Young Chen, and a driver who took them skidding around Baoding in a tan Nissan. They shot red-faced peasants dragging their wagons, gripping the slick street with cloth shoes; snow-crowned customers waiting in line at the Qing

Family Moslem Chicken Shop; and sentries sporting epaulettes of snow guarding the garrison on Cooperation Road. They shot snow-capped umbrellas floating to class at He Da (there were no demonstrators in evidence); empty, snow-quilted fields (a sequence entirely white on white on gray); and snow-blanketed Army trucks, headlights on at midday, rolling towards Beijing on Vanguard Road. After the noon meal, they shot the sugar-candy caps on the bridge posts and small pavilions of the Ancient Lotus Pool Academy, where during the Fourth Revolutionary Civil War Jin's Red Mansion Faction had fought all day and into the night to dislodge Han's comrades of the Workers Command. Finally, they shot the snow-jacketed cedars, pines, and concrete statues at the Revolutionary Martyrs' Memorial Park, where Jin had often walked with Young Xiang. Where on the day the Chairman ascended Jin had watched a sobbing, crew-cut Rightist bloody his head on the hem of the Chairman's coat.

Jin and Han patched together a twenty-minute sequence and set it to mournful erhu music for broadcast on the evening news. The dense scrim simplified the scenery, effacing any background more than twenty meters away. Han said it was like returning to the early days of television. Young Shi showed the snow scenes five more times that week.

By air-time on Third Day, most of the snow had melted away, but not the black-out on news of the demonstrations.

In addition to the general anxiety, a special sadness weighed on the station and the citizens of Baoding. At 3:47 p.m., the Queen of England's husband had passed through the city on an express train.

Many had hoped he would make an unscheduled stop. The air was still and cold, the sky was a deep, glowing blue, and the sun beat down on sooty patches of snow. Baoding had been the capital of Zhili province in imperial times, and there were many places worth visiting, such as the Ancient Lotus Pool Academy, the Pavilion of Great Mercy (still under repair), the Baoding Iron Ball Factory, the Baoding Ornamental Cloth Factory, the award-winning Factory Number 482, the North China Institute of Electrical Power, and the Revolutionary Martyrs Memorial Park. The Baoding Zoo had a giant panda, which the Duke of Scotland would surely want to see. The station's actors, with their professional interest in royalty, had wrung permission to greet him from Old Sui and had assembled in full opera regalia on the railway platform with their orchestra. But although the musicians flailed their gongs and drums and the actors shook their banners and red-tasselled spears, the train roared through the station like an East Wind rocket, peppering their greasepaint with a stinging whirlwind of soot. No one even glimpsed the duke in a window.

Sharing the disappointment of his comrades, but charged with providing the missing five minutes of programming, Jin worked furiously on a series of humorous interviews at the zoo. Old Yin would question the animals about the political situation and Young Chen would read their replies. This would serve as a voice-over for some footage Young Liang had shot on National Day, including a scene of the giant panda playing with his toes. Foreigners adored the lethargic creatures, so Chinese viewers adored them too. Call it slavish worship of foreign interest in Chinese things, a form of spiritual pollution too subtle to target in a campaign.

As he worked Jin wondered how his own bloodline compared with the Scottish duke's. Like many Han people, Jin was part Manchu. His mother, a doctor's niece born near Siping, was a Yellow Banner Manchu and probably had a drop or two of imperial blood creeping through her veins. Jin had never discussed the matter with Zhu (for her own protection), but someday he would mention it to Xingxing. After all, Premier Zhou's own father had served in the Emperor's household, and no one but the Gang of Four had ever dared impugn his patriotism. Criticize Lin Biao and Kong. If the political situation changed, Xingxing might inherit his ancestors' lands.

While Jin was leafing through the dictionary in search of a synonym for gallstones, Young Song brushed past his

desk and dropped a small wad of paper. Keeping his eye on the dictionary, Jin palmed it and leaned back in his chair. "The dark forces harming the masses must be exposed," the note said. "A Communist is not afraid of ghosts." The Chairman's words. Jin rolled up the note and slipped it into his sock.

Two minutes later, Young Tun also dropped a pellet of paper on his desk. Jin smiled at her. He had not seen her since the last political study meeting. So much for luck. Without looking around he knew that every eye in the newsroom was measuring her slender white neck.

"Here's the address of that carpet shop you wanted," she said sharply. "Are you reporting on the Duke of Scotland?"

"No, on the coronation of the acting zookeeper," Jin said. "You know, King Scotland says we have slitty eyes." He pulled back the corners of his eyes. "He also thinks we should keep a studbook for pandas. You know what that is?"

Young Tun peered at him doubtfully and turned away. Jin waited until she left the room, then unrolled the pellet. 28 South Support Agriculture Road. Probably a shop. On the reverse, seven o'clock Five-Seven and Sunflower Road. What was she. Aiya, an illicit meeting! And after the secretary's warning! Jin's face burned. He slipped the note in his other sock. It was the beginning of a ridiculous adventure, Young Tun's version of Tunnel

Warriors or The Little Red Baton. The foolhardy boy and girl get themselves in a fix, and a brave Red Army man comes to the rescue. The people love the Army. Could he cancel the meeting? Stay home? But maybe she needed help. Jin checked his Army watch. 5:30. She had already left and he needed to finish his piece.

A night-time market was in progress when Jin arrived at the appointed corner. He coasted to a halt amid tinkling bicycles and roaring buses and trucks. Dimly lit by streetlights overhead, the market occupied an expanse of damp earth bounded by the intersecting roadways and the brick wall of a factory.

He walked his bicycle around the dark perimeter. Under pipe-fed oil lamps and low-wattage bulbs, between the shifting shapes of shoppers, he glimpsed colorful displays of cigarettes, black plastic shoes, jars of face creams. He was squinting at a rack of perfume when he nearly collided with a woman in a plaid jacket. He muttered an excuse and stepped aside. She stepped in the same direction. Jin stepped aside again, lifting his bicycle. He heard the woman grunt but could not make out her face, save when a sweeping headlight revealed weathered cheeks and a drunken smile. She seemed to totter on the verge of speech, as if she were going to offer sex or as if she recognized him from television. Jin felt oddly shaken. He excused himself again and soon came across Young Tun, who

was rifling a collection of stylish blouses an enterprising trader had brought from Guangzhou. Jin called to her from the shadows.

"You like it?" she cried over the traffic noise, holding up a crew-neck jersey with a broad diagonal white and navy stripe.

"Good for summertime!" Jin cried. When he showed no further interest in the jersey, she draped it over the rack.

"I was worried you wouldn't come," she said, looking up at him with a grin. "I thought you might think I was too direct, or maybe you wouldn't want us to be seen together."

Her frankness alarmed him. Passing shoppers turned to inspect her face.

"No, Young Tun," he said softly, taking her arm to steer her away from the crowd, "my warmest thanks for the risk you've taken in meeting me here. You're a diligent student of Lei Feng, serving others with no thought for your own safety."

"My parents think I'm at the East Is Red Theater," she said with childish pleasure. "When the movie is over, I should go find my friend."

Jin stopped and studied her eyes in the dim light. What did she mean him to infer? That she had a boyfriend, someone her own age, anxiously checking his watch outside

the theater? That a girlfriend had agreed to provide cover?

"You're right, Young Tun," Jin said calmly, "and there's always a danger of people spying."

They turned their backs on the marketplace and followed the row of sycamores along Sunflower Road. Truck traffic shook the ground and bicycles jingled, while sparse shapes of solitary men drifted between the trees, their legs and the mottled bark illuminated by passing beams.

"Mr. Jin— Comrade Jin— Do you think I'm a bad woman?"

Jin's cheeks contracted in a strenuous grin. "No," he said warmly, "I think you're a brave, honest girl, kind-hearted too. You just want to help a middle-aged comrade." He was flattered, but he wanted to tell her never again to summon him to a public place. Old Sui had warned them. No illicit relations. "Young Tun, I'm not harboring any black plots against our leaders. But I warn you, if there's any danger, run. 'Of the thirty-six strategies, the best is running away.' I'll say I deceived you and tried to use you for my own pernicious, double-dealing ends."

Young Tun halted and looked up at him, eyes glistening with youthful courage. "Wuming, don't say that. If you were in danger—I would defy the whole world!"

Jin's throat tightened and squeezed hot moisture into his eyes. Poor thing, he said to himself. Where did she

get such ideas? Biting like a fish at Lord Tai's line—unless he was doing the biting, and she was the bait dangled by Lord Sui. But it didn't matter. Even if she were spying, it was he who had called on her for help. She was a solitary girl, easily persuaded by a crafty old schemer like the secretary. If she and Jin were alone on the Wolf's Tooth, facing an advancing pack of Japanese pirates, she would seize his hand and together they would take the great leap. Poor, poor thing. Fortunately, his old Phoenix and many layers of clothing stood between him and her jade form.

"Wuming," she said, tentatively using his given name, "Wuming, I'm afraid."

Jin glared into the oncoming headlights, then rang his bell to ward off a cyclist.

"Maybe you'd better go home," he said harshly, "or go join your boyfriend. It was a stupid idea to meet at a market like this. My mistake in asking you for help in the first place. A young person with no experience. Excuse me, I'm telling you to go."

Young Tun stared at the damp ground. The beam of a headlight brushed past and Jin saw she was wearing navy hose and white pumps stained with mud. The temperature was below freezing.

"OK," she said.

"Good," Jin said, wheeling his bicycle around. They went a few steps without speaking, Young Tun studying the ground while Jin scowled at the shadows of other walkers.

"There's just one thing," Young Tun said without raising her head. Jin felt fear grip his chest. "It's something I heard. From a friend. Do you know Young Bing? Secretary Sui and Old Jia were talking in his office. Old Sui mentioned your name. He said, 'That Comrade Jin. I just don't understand him.'"

Jin stared ahead, the blood warming his face. The shoppers looked like bandits in the forest skulking around a campfire.

"You know," he said drily, "starting rumors is a serious crime. You could be sentenced to labor reform."

Young Tun said nothing.

"Sorry, I was joking."

They continued walking.

"When did Bing overhear this serious criticism?" Jin asked.

"I don't know," Tun said. "Maybe last week."

"Did they say anything else?"

"I don't know."

"Well, thank you."

They reached the market and stopped at the side of the roadway.

"Ei, it doesn't matter, Young Tun. Don't worry. It's Comrade Secretary's job to analyze our ideological situation. The Party is our father and our mother."

"Maybe our secretary is jealous of you. Your great abilities. And your family background."

"I don't think so. But maybe he's worried someone will think he failed to combat spiritual pollution. Maybe he's studying Chen Yun's discipline commission. Like those arrests in Hainan. Kill the chicken to scare the monkey. But the monkey is clever. He knows they'll just keep killing chickens."

"True," Young Tun said. "I know there are all kinds of rumors. I never believe anything I hear."

They walked a few steps and halted. Jin looked down at Young Tun's upturned face, lit dimly in the penumbra of the streetlights. "That Secretary Sui," Jin said bitterly, "is a double-dealing, bureaucrat-capitalist, renegade-revisionist, feudal-fascist—thing!" He laughed.

Tun paused. "I know," she said calmly.

They reached the intersection. Jin removed and wiped his glasses, already reproaching himself for having spoken so boldly. He consulted his watch, thanked Young Tun for her help, and pushed off on his bicycle.

"Wuming!" Tun cried as he jolted over the curb. He pedaled with all his might. "Wuming!" she cried again, her

voice fading. "Wuming! I admire your revolutionary spirit!"

Jin shivered as he coasted past an invisible raft of slower-moving cyclists. Young Tun was very young indeed. She could not have been more than ten when the Chairman ascended. She had grown up being told to take socialist modernization, not class struggle, as the key link. Jin knew that to thrive in the age of Comrade Deng he must learn from the younger generation, but it seemed unwise to plunge head-long into out-and-out bourgeois liberalization. Chen Yun, for one, put little stock in economic reform. Young Tun knew nothing of caution. Hiding her thoughts was alien to her straightforward Hebei nature. Though she knew well enough how to shout his name in the marketplace. To involve her friends in his campaign. To keep a diary for all to see.

Too perturbed to go home, Jin changed course for the railway workers' building. Han's family was eating supper while watching television. Jin ate a bun and a few bites of cabbage and stayed for a cigarette and a cup of tea-water. When Jin wondered aloud what would happen to Party leaders who supported the students, Old Han's indifference surprised him.

"There are two kinds of leaders," Han said, lighting a Golden Flower. "Some of them believe in democracy. But they know that high officials don't like to listen to

others. They expect to be sacrificed in the struggle. Then there are those who only say what they think the big shots want to hear. They'll be OK. And the big shots won't sacrifice too many of the first kind either, because the fatherland can't afford to squander their talents."

Old Xi invited Jin to stay for a rerun of the Mexican serial drama that Central Network had broadcast during the summer. Jin declined. When he reached home it was after nine o'clock. Young Zhu, Old Ba, and Xingxing were watching the Mexican serial. The room was dark except for the TV screen on which wealthy foreigners berated each other in crisp Beijing accents. When it first aired, the whole nation sat fascinated night after night as a series of schemes, betrayals, and emotional explosions unrolled against a background of beach resorts and hilltop palaces. Now Jin found it grotesque. As if the wealth for which the Chinese people were striving with all their might would only make them hateful and cruel.

"Not bad," Jin said when it was over.

"Mexicans are very rich," Old Ba remarked. She and Zhu prepared Xingxing's cot. Jin apologized for coming home late, but Zhu said nothing. When Xingxing was tucked in, Jin sat beside him and asked if he had liked the program. "I liked it," Xingxing replied, pulling the quilt to his chin. Jin withdrew to the bedroom, where Zhu was undressing with her back to the door. Stripping off his

outer clothes, Jin slid under the quilt. To warm his feet he rubbed them on the sheets. Zhu switched off the light and slipped into bed. Jin felt a pang of alarm. Zhu lay curled on her side, facing the wall.

"You've got a fishbone in your throat, Young Zhu," Jin said after a time, rising on one elbow. "I can tell. You won't even look at me."

"It's nothing," she said, her voice muffled. "Be quiet. Let Xingxing sleep."

Jin lay down again. How stupid he had been to wander around the marketplace with Young Tun. That Jin. I just don't understand him.

In the morning he dreamed he was in Xi'an with the other four of the Five Revolutionary Comrades. With old Type 53s slung from their shoulders, they walked along a street of shops under new spring leaves. The upper storeys, of weathered wood with old-style lattice windows, overhung the narrow sidewalk. Despite the loveliness of the scene, Jin awoke with a sense of dread pressing his chest. Young Zhu was gone.

He found her in the other room where she was pulling on her quilted nylon coat. Old Ba and Xingxing had already left.

"Feeling better?" Jin asked timidly.

She turned to face him. A shiver ran along his neck. Her eyes were swollen, red and wet.

"Ai, Young Zhu," Jin murmured, moving towards her.

"Don't touch!" she yelled, recoiling.

Jin froze. "What is it?" he murmured.

"Do you want a divorce, is that what you want?" she cried, glaring fiercely. Her tears spilled from her eyes, painting glazed trails on her cheeks. "Shall we meet this afternoon at the Social Affairs Office? A famous man like you shouldn't be saddled with an ugly wife."

"No, I don't want a divorce," Jin said, his mouth contracting in a grin. "What is this nonsense? Have you been listening to rumors about Class Enemy Number One, the ultra-'Left'-deviationist, decadent Right-opportunist, Jin Wuming?" He reached for her hand. Zhu snatched it away.

"What harm have I done you?" she cried.

"Stop this nonsense," Jin said. "Tell me why you're so angry."

Young Zhu paused. "Why soil my lips with your filth? You know what you've done. But excuse me for being delicate. I know you don't expect that in a daughter of the toiling classes."

"At least tell me what you're talking about," Jin said, smiling crookedly.

"You just tell me what diseases your little friend has so I can get treatment," Zhu said. "Unless she has Ai Si disease." She clenched her fist and slammed the wardrobe door, which rebounded and struck her on the nose.

Jin stepped back, shaking his head. "My little friend? Oh, you must mean Young Tun. Sorry, I don't even know her given name. She's not a friend, she's a worker at the station. It's true she's not very big, and she's a pretty girl, but there's nothing —" Before he finished his explanation, Young Zhu sprang across the two meters that divided them and beat his chest with her fists while emitting a strange nasal whine.

"Young Zhu! Zhu! Young Hong!" Jin tried to grip her wrists. "Xuehong, listen! There's nothing! There's nothing between us!" Zhu's whine modulated to a breathless bleating, then subsided into panting sobs. She fell on his chest and her tears soaked through his underwear. But when he tried to embrace her, she pushed him away. He lost his balance and fell back on the television, which rocked back and struck the wall. He scrambled to his feet and moved towards his wife, his head swimming with fury.

"Listen, you idiot!" he shouted. "I tell you there's nothing between me and that girl. Someone told you I met her at the night market, right? That's's true, but it was only to get information about my situation at the station. No other reason. I'm trying to stop that rotten secretary from driving us out of this rotten city. Is that clear? Is that clear?"

"I guess she had a lot of 'information,'" Young Zhu hissed, the blood draining from her face, "since you took half the night to squeeze it out of her."

"We only met for twenty minutes," Jin said, lowering his voice, "then I went to see Han Lixin."

"To wash off her stink," Zhu whispered, "and get your alibi straight with Old Han."

Jin saw that the tears had dried on her cheeks. "Look, Young Zhu, she's a young idiot, completely without interest. She's too stupid to engage in an affair. You know what she did yesterday? She passed me a note written on a little ball of paper, then said in a voice that everyone could hear that she was giving me a note with an address I wanted. Have you ever heard of anything so stupid? I had asked her to let me know anything she heard about my situation. She left before I could tell her that meeting together was a stupid idea. I spent the rest of the evening at Old Han's, you can ask his wife. Besides, it was only a little after nine when I got home."

"Almost nine-thirty."

"Nine-twenty," Jin said, grinning and stepping towards her. "But I'm curious about how you found out. Is some public security dog-leg on my tail? Informing on me for Comrade Secretary?"

Zhu backed away. "Don't come near me," she warned. "Even if I'm not your number three wife, do you think I want to be number two?"

"What, is there more?" Jin asked. "You have been talking to Old Sui!"

Zhu flushed. "I didn't learn a thing from him," she said. "She came to me herself."

Jin smiled. This was ridiculous. If he was sure of anything, he had never been married to anyone but Young Zhu. But for some reason, Zhu was working very hard to justify a separation. Was it a splittist plot to free her to marry her Moslem boyfriend? Maybe the boyfriend was behind it, the brave Red Army man, or maybe Sui.

"Who came to you, then," he scoffed, "Wu Zetian? Jiang Qing? The empress dowager?"

"No, an old friend of yours. A very good friend. You were separated. Now she has returned and you're trying to find her a job at the station. No, don't touch me, you—you thing!"

Jin felt suddenly cold and weak. He shivered but tried to appear indifferent. It was unbelievable. A nightmare. Young Xiang. Young Xiang had tracked him down. He had refused to help her. Now she was taking her revenge.

"Now I've got you," Zhu cried triumphantly, tears again sliding down her cheeks. "You have nothing to say,

Old Jin. You turned as white as a sheet. I saw you, Old Jin. White as paper. She's not lying. Your wife," Zhu choked on the word, "you rotten, degenerate, double-dealing—"

"Listen, Young Zhu. It may just be some crazed viewer. That happens all the time. They send letters, they watch us come out of the station. If it is an old friend, she was never my wife. We knew each other as kids. That's all. In middle school. During the Cultural Revolution. I haven't seen her since. I thought she must have gone back to her commune." He worked a dried noodle loose from the floor with his toe. "I haven't seen her for, let's see, fifteen years, not since she went to Shanxi. Look, Young Zhu, I tell you there's nothing between us. I'd almost forgotten about her. I'm not trying to get her a job. If she's saying things like that, well, maybe she's mentally ill. I'm sure she's had a hard life."

"Go on, Old Jin, go on and tell your lies. You have a great talent for it. She's not in Shanxi. She's in Baoding. Staying with her aunt. I'm sure you can have her whenever you like. She said she'd be back. With your son. She saw you meet that girl last night and then came here. To help us, she said. To tell us something. Because we're so happy. What a joke. Maybe she's jealous. Of the girl, I mean. Not Old Three. Not your younger son's mother."

"I don't understand," Jin said. "We had no child. We never even — she was always a straightforward girl, rather fierce. Of course she's much older now. I wonder how she got away from her commune? She must be mentally ill."

"There aren't any more communes. You're not a very good liar, Old Jin."

"I haven't even thought of her for a long time."

Young Zhu seemed calmer. "OK, Jin," she said, wiping her nose on her hand, "I have to go. Maybe she really is crazy. Try to keep her away. I'm afraid of her. And her son. Please do something to keep them away." She knotted her scarf and pulled her gloves from her pocket. "You should talk to the public security bureau. They can send her back to Shanxi. Or lock her up. Is that clear?"

"Don't worry, Young Zhu," Jin said, placing a hand on her shoulder. "I only care about you and Xingxing. And your mother. We'll win in the end. Against Comrade Sui. Against the whole world."

Young Zhu pressed her nose against his neck and sniffed. Her cheeks had dried. Jin stroked her back. He felt less oppressed, as if a stone weight had been lifted from his chest. But when his wife slipped through the door and pulled it behind her, he bowed his head and ground his fists in his eyes.

On Sixth Day afternoon, Jin and his family took a bus to West Horse Pool, where his parents lived in a tract of two-storey houses built for high officers of the 38th Army. Jin left Xingxing in front of the new television set and followed his father upstairs among the books and scrolls and brushes of his study.

"My ba," Jin said softly, "I have a small problem at the station. It's also a Party problem."

The commander's hair was still iron gray, but the skin on his face was creased and stained and the whiskers on his jaw were white as frost. He gestured at a chair beside the bookcase. Jin took a seat, crossing his legs and attentively leaning forward.

"I heard something about it," the commander said, circling behind the writing table where he rummaged in a drawer. He offered Jin a pack of Yunnans, then took one for himself, his wrinkled lips puckering around it. With his hand so unsteady, how could he write? Sitting on the edge of the table, the commander lit first one side, then the other. Jin said nothing while they smoked. He spoke only when the commander threw his cigarette to the floor. A shred of tobacco clung to his lip.

"So, you heard something," Jin said. "I'm surprised."

"Your branch secretary issued a warning."

"Not officially," Jin said. "But I guess he's talking about me with the other cadres." His face warmed. The commander frowned.

"Why?"

"It's not too clear. Maybe he just wants to hurt my career. To help his young cousin, to make himself feared, I don't know."

The commander peered long at Jin, who lowered his eyes and dropped his cigarette butt. He watched his toe smear the ash on the concrete. When he looked up again his father was still staring.

"What about supporting the demonstrations?" the commander said. "Did you speak up for the students? Or for the Party members who supported them?"

"Never," Jin said warmly.

"Do you think the Party should permit Party members to announce that 'Socialism has failed' and that 'Marxism is irrelevant to modern China'? You understand that Western democracy is just the 'borrowed knife' on a national scale. We tried it here for thirty years. The result was weakness and chaos. The fatherland was a pile of loose sand. A ready prey for the Japanese militarists."

"I agree," Jin said. "But our society should encourage the masses to give their views. Otherwise you end up with weakness and chaos. Like during the Cultural Revolution. Was that the result of 'bourgeois

liberalization'? No. Some leaders promoted terror against so-called revisionists and counterrevolutionaries. That gave mass action a bad name. But I didn't talk about that at the station. I never even mentioned the people's right under the constitution to put up big-character posters and march in parades. I wasn't invited to report on the demonstrations."

The commander eyed him with a skeptical smile, amused, it seemed, that his son had ideas of his own. He rummaged for another cigarette. Offering the pack to Jin, who declined, he lit another for himself. He turned and gazed out the window, where the sun threw a golden screen over the fields.

"I heard something about a woman," the commander said at last. "You know, a branch secretary has to maintain discipline in his unit. Don't you remember the Eight Points of Attention? Someday I should tell you about Lin Biao's son. Examining dozens of potential wives. I'm not saying—well, if you have too many women, you become arrogant and lose touch with reality. Your work-style suffers. You become a pig."

Jin's face burned. "I didn't do anything," he said. "All that happened was this. I spoke with two of our women comrades about my situation at the station. Nothing more."

The commander studied Jin impersonally, his sagging lip thrust forward like an elderly frog's. He sucked at his cigarette.

"Good," he said, hopping from the edge of the table. His fist clenched, he paced the small room. He looked as he must have looked in Korea when pondering a difficult logistics problem, or in Jilin when preparing for one of Lin Biao's attacks across the Songhua River. Jin said nothing. He hoped his father was cooking up a plan. That was why he had come. And to reassure Young Zhu. Not that he planned to raise the housing problem. Or the Army school problem. Or the problem of shipping Young Xiang back to her Dazhai-style commune. Or of shipping the Moslem boyfriend back to Iran.

"In a situation like this," the commander said, "action is often worse than no action. Everyone thinks the problem is serious. You then have a serious problem for life."

"Right," Jin nodded. A problem for life. Like his father's service under Marshal Lin.

"I guess shutting you out of important projects is a serious problem. But do you know if he put a warning in your file?" Jin shook his head. "If he thinks you're cooperating, maybe he'll let you work and pull any bad reports. But if he's determined to crush you, you may have

to struggle. Now tell me, what do you know about our friend? You don't chase sparrows blindfolded."

Jin knew that Old Sui's wife worked for the city committee and was quite rich and that her cousin was vice-mayor of Baoding. Old Sui had found a job for her nephew, who unfortunately had real talent. Sui himself had come to Baoding from Handan several years back when the city committee was urged to transfer supporters of the Two Whatever's faction to less sensitive positions. His predecessor ended up as the deputy secretary in the Chinese Department at the university. Sui's father had organized railway workers in Handan before Liberation and after Liberation had become an official. His brother had grown rich in the trucking business.

To conclude, Jin said, Sui's work-style was abrasive and high-handed, he knew nothing about Marxism or journalism, and he was incapable of distinguishing working class interests from personal aggrandizement. But he was cunning and ambitious and knew how to cultivate connections with higher cadres.

"Aiya, truly a weed!" the commander exclaimed. Jin assented. "But his father was a good man. And Sui has his good points. Despite her capitalist background, his wife has always been red in thought and deed. He has never tried to get ahead by denouncing her. I know about the brother, though. There's a group in Baoding. I've just

heard about it. They buy oil at the fixed price in one city, and sell it at the market price in another. Well, flies forage, dogs maraud. It's a good story for a journalist." He inspected the tip of his cigarette. "As you see, the old soldier is not so stupid." Jin shook his head in agreement. "Their uncle led the Hebei Transportation Department many years ago," his father continued. "He still lives in Shijiazhuang. Jackals from the same grave. All Party members, of course. You know how the wife got rich?"

Jin saw that time had not diminished his father's contempt for cadres involved in business. Such contempt was no longer entirely in step with the views of Party leaders. Comrade Deng had said that some people must be allowed to "lead the way." Even before Liberation, commercial and industrial capitalists, unlike landlords, had been considered a progressive class. Jin replied that as far as he knew, Sui's father-in-law had been a capitalist in Handan. Jin pictured a well-groomed old fellow in a Western-style hat and a Western-style suit with broad lapels.

The commander enlightened him. "He supplied bricks and concrete to the Japanese, then to the Nationalists, who also paid so-called 'subsidies.' He always lived simply and dressed like a rich peasant, and when there were contracts to meet he paid the workers well. But when he

didn't have any work, he shut down the kilns and mills and the workers had to find work in their villages. When Handan fell to our One-Eyed Dragon, the district government took control of his factories, but he still collected 'interest' on his 'investment.' Maybe he paid high taxes. But with bank accounts overseas, he had a good income, no doubt. Earned from the sweat and fear and hunger of the workers." The commander paused and blew a stream of smoke.

"Why did he latch on to Young Sui?" Jin asked. "Wasn't he a very small fish at that time?"

"People wanted to improve their class status by marriage. Old Lin was worried that his family might not keep their wealth in the next Suppress The Counterrevolutionaries Campaign. No relation to our Invincible Marshal, by the way. He was a Southerner."

"What does this all have to do with my situation at the station?" Jin asked, failing to conceal his impatience.

"You should know your enemy's way of thinking. You should know your goal. Would you be willing to move to another unit?"

"Why not? But no one has invited me. So my main goal now is to keep my post."

"Well, I don't know the details. Maybe if you just kowtow to Sui, you'll be OK. Maybe you should just wait. But maybe you'll have to drive Old Sui from the station or even from the Party."

"I don't know."

The commander fell silent, slowly stroking his jaw with the tops of his fingers. He discovered the swath of uncropped whiskers and measured its length and breadth. He slid off the table and motioned Jin towards the door.

"My son, we can't fight on an empty stomach. After dinner we'll visit old friends. The 38th Army is still the main force in this district."

Jin descended to the kitchen. When he stepped through the doorway he was enveloped in warm steam, the scent of chopped meat, and the racket of falling cleavers. His mouth tasted metallic and he felt hungry. The kitchen maid, a young woman soldier from the countryside, was chopping pork on the oaken block, his mother was chopping scallions, and Young Zhu was leaning against the wall. To Jin's intense surprise, his sister Wumei was counting peppercorns into a saucepan. Wumei turned to greet him (like Comrade Shi, she was nearly as tall as he was), but her pasty oval face, divided by black-framed glasses, gave no hint of sisterly affection, and her voice bore a burden of disapproval at his latest experiment in childish misfeasance. How well he knew this face, this voice. Disapproving of his activities Red Mansion. Of his friendship with Young Xiang. Of his return from the Army farm, his work at the battery factory, his work at the newspaper, at Baoding TV, of his marriage with Zhu. She

even disapproved of Xingxing. And yet she had fed Jin and washed his clothes all through childhood.

Wumei's waist had thickened since he last had seen her, though to be fair, the Army's bell-shaped tunic and closely tailored trousers would have made even Yang Guifei look like a fish. Jin asked how long she was staying. Wumei explained that business in the capital (she was a financial officer in the 27th Army) kept her from joining her family in Nanjing.

After dinner, during which Wumei ignored Young Zhu and Xingxing except to speak of her sons' achievements, Jin heard a muffled beep in the street. The commander explained to Young Zhu that he was taking Jin to visit some old comrades. Zhu stared uncertainly at Jin. Her face was heavy and red, the result of several glasses of beer. She murmured that she and Xingxing should go home. The commander offered to drop them at the battery building.

The driver of the canvas-topped Jipu greeted the commander and raced the engine. Jin, Zhu, and Xingxing crawled into the back seat. As the driver wrenched the vehicle through a three-point turn, the white beam of the headlights swept across a pair of legs in blue trousers. Jin shivered. Although the figure was instantly swallowed in darkness, his eye retained the image of a startled face as pink as a baby rat's. Was he dreaming? Was it an imperialist spy? Young Zhu had not seen it. She murmured

something, but Jin could not make it out over the bearing-destroying scream of the Jipu's engine. They sped along Middle Three Harvests Road past invisible fields, cold air pouring over them, stopping for a light at Eternal Splendor Road. Jin shivered again. "Are you cold?" he asked Young Zhu. She nodded. The soldier raised the panel of the folding window.

At Jin's direction the driver pulled into the entrance to the battery building. They stopped at the main door.

"Very good, my ba," Jin said.

"Good," the commander said, holding the small door. Xingxing hopped out and Young Zhu followed.

"I wish you a joyous New Year, father-in-law," Young Zhu said. "If I don't see you again before then."

"Good fortune to you, young daughter-in-law," the commander replied. He climbed back into the car and muttered directions to the driver, who backed briskly down the driveway.

Jin felt a thrill when he stepped through Uncle Tang's doorway on the campus of the North China Institute of Electrical Power. He recognized the feeling. It was the thrill of carrying the darkness of night concealed in his eyes and clothes into the well-lit interior of a home. Tang's wife greeted them at the doorway. She invited "General Jin" to have a seat on the sofa, then summoned the driver to the kitchen. She was a Manchu woman like Jin's

mother, and though she was nearly seventy, her skin was as white and smooth as an uncooked dumpling. She and Tang had never had any children. One less rival for Xingxing when the time came to claim the imperial throne.

Jin remembered Uncle Tang as a large-headed, long-armed, broad-bellied man, a rough-hewn Taihang Buddha. During the summers when Jin was growing up, he used to bring melons from his garden for Jin and his sisters. He was a poor peasant in origin and had fought the Japanese as a guerrilla on Qingxu Mountain. He had joined the 38th Army at the outbreak of the Third Revolutionary Civil War and had volunteered to help save Korea. Besides his position as a vice-president of the electrical power institute, he sat on the city Party committee's advisory commission and was an alternate member of the committee.

Uncle Tang appeared bearing a Guangdong pineapple on a tray. He took Jin's hand and guided him to the sofa. He set the tray on the low table in front of the sofa and split the pineapple with a curved and bejeweled Western-style knife. "Don't scratch that good teak tray," the commander warned. They ate the juicy chunks of pineapple with their fingers and asked about each other's health, hobbies and friends until the commander revealed the object of the visit.

Tang sat back on the sofa with his hands on his chest. The commander emphasized Jin's sound ideological position

and the secretary's favoritism and reliance on rumors. As Tang listened, his face darkened to the color of damp earth. Jin's scalp tingled. Surely the old guerrilla was just the man to lead the attack on the secretary's bourgeois headquarters.

"These people," Tang said, facing the commander. "Are they still criticizing Lin Biao and Kong? Finger the mulberry tree and curse the locust." The commander pursed his lips. Tang turned to Jin. "I was on the standing committee when Sui was hired. Your sponsor opposed him," Jin felt his color rise, "but his class background was good and the ministry urged the appointment. At the time he seemed to have no anti-Army or anti-Party tendencies. The Army comrades sniffed a bit of 'copper stink,' but we recognized then and we still acknowledge today that the fatherland needs a strong, modern civilian economy to support a strong, modern national defense force."

The commander assented with a frown. Tang looked shrewdly at Jin. "Sometimes the reformers go too far," he said. "That's only natural, modernization is a complicated process and everyone makes mistakes, but we soldiers have to speak up from time to time. Now that so many soldiers have been sent home, some civilian comrades have suggested that the Army turn over its farm land to civil governments. As if our soldiers never got hungry! As if the Army could go to market like an old woman with a shopping bag on her

arm! Some have said the Army should surrender its land to local peasants. As if our soldiers had not poured their own sweat and blood into the fields! As you well know, Young Jin. The Army is a unique institution, always ready to make the supreme sacrifice. These attacks are a serious matter. Raise the banner of reform, and every enemy of socialism crawls out of his hole. Besides, supplies are a life-and-death matter. Ask an old logistics officer."

"We've never mentioned such discussions on the air," Jin said. "People would just start plotting to carve up the farms."

"Whose idea was that?" Jin's father asked.

"I forget," Tang said, glancing at his nails. "Not Old Sui's." Raising his head, he leveled his black eyes on Jin like twin cannon. "The Army supports reform," he said, his voice vibrant with feeling, "and the Army supports the Four Modernizations and the Four Cardinal Principles. My advice is this. Let the storm blow over. We don't want to make trouble for our friends. I understand your situation is not easy, but wait until the leaders have resolved the problem of the demonstrations. In the meantime, maybe our active members can speak out against reprisals in civilian units. There are too many cadres willing to use political turmoil as an excuse to settle old scores."

Uncle Tang, the great Uncle Tang! He had grasped the situation and unerringly identified the principal

contradiction. Jin nodded with satisfaction, though he also wanted to say that he knew of no old score that Sui had to settle. He was about to seize Tang's hand when his father spoke.

"Of course we support reform in the Army, but the Army isn't the only institution that needs to be reformed. We also support reform in the Party and the public organs and in state-owned and private enterprises. Nobody's perfect. That's materialism. It's not enough for civilian leaders to say, 'The Party controls the guns.'" He frowned. Tang shook his head sympathetically. The commander spoke again. "Maybe we should visit Comrade Jia tonight. I'd also like to talk to Young Li."

"Li Shenghuai?" Tang asked with a grin. "OK, good, we'll go together."

Comrade Jia was the Baoding Military District's representative on the city Party committee. He had served as a political officer in the commander's logistics division, but was too junior at the time of the Lin Biao Affair to suffer much harm because of it. Li Shenghuai had served as the commander's driver after the commander withdrew from active duty. With the commander's encouragement, he had joined the 38th Army's youth instruction subsection.

Jia did not look pleased to see his old commander on his doorstep. Almost bald without his hat, he stood before

them in his undershirt, a cigarette dangling from his lip. The heat from inside the small brick house poured from the doorway like a tidal wave. When Jin took his seat on a wooden chair, he counted no less than four electric heaters glowing furiously. A big color television blared an unfamiliar drama.

Jia turned off the television and apologized for his wife's absence—she was putting their child to bed. The commander, unwilling to keep the driver waiting, quickly summarized the situation, again stressing Jin's ideological soundness. Tang nodded, a portrait of righteous severity. Jin perspired into his underwear. As Jia listened, he slumped frowning and fidgeting in his chair. His contempt for his superiors (he was at most Grade 11) was a riddle to Jin, but when the commander ended his speech, Commissar Jia uttered a grunt of assent. He said the issue of reprisals in connection with the demonstrations had been addressed. The Army would not tolerate reprisals in its production units and neither should civilian units. The city committee had already taken a firm stand, but he agreed to see what could be done to ensure obedience to the committee's will.

His last words were lost in the brick-shattering roar of an express train passing nearby. The commander and Tang thanked Comrade Jia and hurried out to the car. Jin paused

in the doorway and raised clasped hands to Jia, who waved him away with a frown.

The driver identified them to the guard at the garrison gate and soon they were knocking on Li's door.

Jin had last seen Young Li a year before at the university. Li had organized a rally in support of the struggle against the Vietnamese puppets. Jin had roamed the audience while Han Lixin taped the speakers onstage. A young soldier had described a shelling by Vietnamese artillery. The soldier was wounded, and another soldier was carrying him on his back, but just as they reached the bunker the other soldier fell, his heart pierced by Vietnamese shrapnel. The soldier had written a letter to the fallen soldier's mother and received back a letter in return. He read her letter to the twelve thousand students, teachers, workers, and cadres who stood shivering in the dusty stadium on a cold gray Eleventh Month day. Li knew his man. The young soldier could have been an actor. His intonation was masterful and his voice was deep and sincere, at times it nearly breaking with emotion.

Li had rolled up his sleeves and was repairing his television set when Jin, Tang and the commander arrived. He was about Jin's age and height, though with squarer shoulders, a flatter belly and neater hair. He greeted them warmly, leading Tang and the commander to the sofa and dragging a folding chair for Jin. Although he was a cadre,

not a fighter, he seemed, with his noble bearing, crisp movements, and black caterpillar brows, the embodiment of military virtue. What was military about courtesy? Unqualified submission to society's rules. It was easy to see why the commander had urged Li to inspire patriotism in local youth.

He called out his wife, an attractive Army doctor with a brilliant smile, who led in their young son and daughter. When she took away the children, Li listened to the commander, gazing at Jin with such touching pity that Jin felt tears spring to his eyes. Li then leapt up before Tang and the commander and struck his chest. He vowed to wage a war of dragons and tigers in defense of Uncle Jin. Jin felt ridiculous. The commander made a gesture of appreciation and told Li that Commissar Jia would keep an ear out at the city Party committee for any discussion of special disciplinary measures. He asked Li to do the same at the city-Army liaison committee.

Apparently mistaking his assignment, Li offered to raise Jin's problem with senior city officials that he knew, such as the mayor of Baoding, the director of the Social Affairs Office, and the Party secretary of the film factory. These were leading comrades, but they had no special affinity for the Army and appealing to them on Jin's behalf would probably do more harm than good. Li

reminded Jin of Comrade Shi, who also believed sincerely in the benevolence of the higher cadres.

The commander explained to Li that he wanted him to scout the terrain, not launch an assault, but Li, though willing to do as he was told, looked so uncertain that the commander asked him simply to inform Commander Lei of Jin's problem. Li looked at his watch and declared with a toothy, photogenic smile (no doubt a source of charm for his similarly gifted wife) that he would move at dawn. The commander began to explain that this was not an order, but checked himself and took a cordial leave.

On the drive back to the battery residence, he declared that Li was a steady, reliable man. "Ah," he exclaimed after a pause, "a good soldier is rarely a good politician. In the end, not even poor Lin Biao."

"Or Marshall Peng," Old Tang added gravely. When they pulled up to the battery building, Jin hopped out at the main entrance, thanked Uncle Tang and his father, and gratefully knocked on the door of the Jipu.