LIFE AND DEATH IN SHANGHAI

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Witch-hunt

THE PAST IS FOREVER with me and I remember it all. I now move back in time and space to a hot summer's night in July 1966, to the study of my old home in Shanghai. My daughter was asleep in her bedroom, the servants had gone to their quarters, and I was alone in my study. I hear again the slow whirling of the ceiling fan overhead; I see the white carnations drooping in the heat in the white Qianlong vase on my desk. Bookshelves line the walls in front of me, filled with English and Chinese titles. The shaded reading lamp leaves half the room in shadows, but the silk brocade of the red cushions on the white sofa gleams vividly.

An English friend, a frequent visitor to my home in Shanghai, once called it "an oasis of comfort and elegance in the midst of the city's drabness." Indeed, my house was not a mansion, and by Western standards, it was modest. But I had spent time and thought to make it a home and a haven for my daughter and myself so that we could continue to enjoy good taste while the rest of the city was being taken over by proletarian realism.

Not many private people in Shanghai lived as we did seventeen years after the Communist Party took over China. In this city of ten million, perhaps only a dozen or so families managed

to preserve their old lifestyle, maintaining their original homes and employing a staff of servants. The Party did not decree how the people should live. In fact, in 1949, when the Communist army entered Shanghai, we were forbidden to discharge our domestic staff lest we aggravate the unemployment problem. But the political campaigns that periodically convulsed the country rendered many formerly wealthy people poor. When they became victims, they were forced to pay large fines or had their income drastically reduced. And many industrialists were relocated inland with their families when their factories were removed from Shanghai. I did not voluntarily change my way of life, not only because I had the means to maintain my standard of living, but also because the Shanghai municipal government treated me with courtesy and consideration through its United Front Organization. However, my daughter and I lived quietly, with circumspection. Believing the Communist Revolution a historical inevitability for China, we were prepared to go along with it.

The reason I am so often carried back to those few hours before midnight on July 3, 1966, is not only that I look back with nostalgia upon my old life with my daughter but mainly that they were the last few hours of normal life I was to enjoy for many years. The heat lay like a heavy weight on the city even at night. No breeze came through the open windows. My face and arms were damp with perspiration, and my blouse was clammy on my back as I bent over the newspapers spread on my desk reading the articles of vehement denunciation that always preceded action at the beginning of a political movement. The propaganda effort was supposed to create a suitable atmosphere of tension and mobilize the public. Often careful reading of those articles, written by activists selected by Party officials, yielded hints as to the purpose of the movement and its possible victims. Because I had never been involved in a political movement before, I had no premonition of impending personal disaster. But as was always the case, the violent language used in the propaganda articles made me uneasy.

My servant Lao-zhao had left a thermos of iced tea for me on a tray on the coffee table. As I drank the refreshing tea, my eyes strayed to a photograph of my late husband. Nearly nine years had passed since he died, but the void his death left in my heart

remained. I always felt abandoned and alone whenever I was uneasy about the political situation, as I felt the need for his support.

I had met my husband when he was working for his Ph.D. degree in London in 1935. After we were married and returned to Chongqing, China's wartime capital, in 1939, he became a diplomatic officer of the Kuomintang government. In 1949, when the Communist army entered Shanghai, he was director of the Shanghai office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kuomintang government. When the Communist representative, Zhang Hanfu, took over his office, Zhang invited him to remain with the new government during the transitional period as foreign affairs adviser to the newly appointed mayor of Shanghai, Marshal Chen Yi. In the following year, he was allowed to leave the People's Government and accept an offer from Shell International Petroleum Company to become the general manager of its Shanghai office. Shell was one of the few British firms of international standing—such as Imperial Chemical Industries, Hong Kong–Shanghai Banking Corporation, and Jardines—that tried to maintain an office in Shanghai. Because Shell was the only major oil company in the world wishing to remain in mainland China, the Party officials who favored trade with the West treated the company and ourselves with courtesy.

In 1957, my husband died of cancer. A British general manager was appointed to succeed him. I was asked by Shell to become his assistant with the title of adviser to management. I worked in that capacity until 1966.

Successive British general managers depended on me to steer the company clear of the many pitfalls that often surrounded a capitalist enterprise maintaining an office in Maoist China. It was up to me to find ways to resolve problems without either sacrificing the dignity of Shell or causing the Chinese officials to lose face. My job was to manage the staff and act as liaison between the general manager and the Shell Labor Union, analyzing the union demands and working out compromises. I drafted the company's more important correspondence with the Chinese government agencies, which had to be in the Chinese language. Whenever the general manager went on home leave or to Beijing for talks with Chinese government corporations, I acted as general manager. I thought myself fortunate to have a

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job I could do well and enjoyed the distinction of being the only woman in Shanghai occupying a senior position in a company of world renown.

In the spring of 1966, Shell closed its Shanghai office after negotiating an "Assets against Liability Agreement" with a Chinese government agency. We handed over our assets in China, and the Chinese government agency took over our staff with the commitment to give them employment and provide retirement pensions. As a member of management, I was not included in the agreement; its scope was limited to our staff who belonged to the Shell Labor Union, a branch of the Shanghai Labor Union, which is a government organization for the control of industrial and office workers.

When the agreement was signed, my daughter, a young actress of the Shanghai Film Studio, was performing with her unit in North China. I thought I would make a trip to Hong Kong when she came back. But while I was waiting for her return, the Cultural Revolution was launched. My daughter's group was hastily summoned back to Shanghai by the film studio to enable its members to take part in the Cultural Revolution. Since I knew that during a political movement government officials were reluctant to make decisions and that work in government departments generally slowed down, if not came to a complete standstill, I decided not to apply for a travel permit to Hong Kong and risk a refusal. A refusal would go into the personal dossier that the police kept on everyone. It might make future application difficult. So I remained in Shanghai, believing the Cultural Revolution would last no longer than a year, the usual length of time for a political campaign.

The tea cooled me somewhat. I got up to go into my bedroom next door, had a shower, and lay down on my bed. In spite of the heat, I dropped off to sleep. The next thing I knew, Chen-ma, my maid, was gently shaking me to wake me up.

I looked at the clock on my bedside table. It was only half past six, but sunlight was already on the awning outside the windows, and the temperature in the room was rising.

"Qi and another man from your old office have come to see you," Chen-ma said.

"What do they want?" I asked her drowsily.

"They didn't say. But they behaved in a very unusual manner.

They marched straight into the living room and sat down on the sofa instead of waiting in the hall as they used to do before the office closed."

"Who is the other man?" I asked as I headed for the bathroom. Qi, I knew, was the vice-chairman of our office branch of the Shanghai Labor Union. I had often conducted negotiations with him as part of my job. He had seemed a nice man: reasonable and conciliatory.

"I don't know his name. He hasn't been here before. I think he may be one of the guards," Chen-ma said. "He's tall and thin."

From Chen-ma's description, I thought the man was one of the activists of the Shell union. We had no Party members. From the way the few activists in our office behaved, I knew they were encouraged to act as watchdogs for the Shanghai Labor Union. Since I had no direct contact with the activists, who were mostly guards or cleaners, I learned of their activities mainly from the department heads.

There was a knock on the door. Lao-zhao, my manservant, handed Chen-ma a tray and said through the half-open door, "They say the mistress must hurry."

"All right, Lao-zhao," I said. "Tell them I'll be down presently. Give them a cold drink and some cigarettes."

I did not hurry. I wanted time to think and be ready to cope with whatever was coming. The visit of these two men at this early hour of the morning was unusual. However, in China, when one had to attend a meeting to hear a lecture or political indoctrination, one was seldom told in advance. The officials assumed that everybody should drop everything whenever called upon to do so. I wondered whether these two men had come to ask me to join one of their political indoctrination lectures. I knew the Shanghai Labor Union was organizing classes for the ex-staff of Shell so that they could be prepared for their assignment to work with lower pay in government organizations.

While I ate toast and drank my tea, I reviewed the events leading to the closure of the Shell office and reexamined my own behavior throughout the negotiations between the company and the Chinese government agency. Although I had accompanied the general manager to all the sessions, I had not taken part in

any of the discussions. It was my job only to observe and advise the general manager afterwards, when we returned to our office. I decided that if I was asked questions concerning Shell I could always procrastinate by offering to write to London for information.

I put on a white cotton shirt, a pair of gray slacks, and black sandals, the clothes Chinese women wore in public places to avoid being conspicuous. As I went downstairs I reflected that those who sent the men to call on me so early in the morning probably hoped to disconcert me. I walked slowly, deliberately creating the impression of composure.

When I entered the living room, I saw that both men were sprawled on the sofa with a glass of orangeade untouched on the table in front of each of them. When he saw me, Qi stood up from force of habit, but when he saw that the activist remained seated, he went red in the face with embarrassment and hastily sat down again. It was a calculated gesture of discourtesy on the part of the other man to remain seated when I entered the room. In 1949, not long after the Communist army entered Shanghai, the new policeman in charge of the area in which I lived had made the first of his periodic unannounced visits to our house. He brushed past Lao-zhao at the front door, marched straight into the living room, where I was, and spat on the carpet. That was the first time I saw a declaration of power made in a gesture of rudeness. Since then, I had come to realize that the junior officers of the Party often used the exaggerated gesture of rudeness to cover up their feeling of inferiority.

I ignored Qi's confusion and the other man's rudeness, sat down on a straight-backed chair, and calmly asked them, "Why have you come to see me so early in the morning?"

"We have come to take you to a meeting," Qi said.

"You have been so slow that we will probably be late," the other man added and stood up.

"What's the meeting about?" I asked. "Who has organized it? Who has sent you to ask me to participate?"

"There's no need to ask so many questions. We would not be here if we did not have authority. All the former members of Shell have to attend this meeting. It's very important," the activist said. In a tone of exasperation, he added, "Don't you know the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has started?"

"What has a cultural revolution got to do with us? We worked for a commercial firm, not a cultural establishment," I said.

"Chairman Mao has said that everybody in China must take part in the Cultural Revolution," Qi said.

They both said rather impatiently, "We are late. We must leave at once."

Qi also stood up. I looked at the carriage clock on the mantelpiece; it was a quarter past eight.

Chen-ma was waiting in the hall with my handbag and a navy blue silk parasol. As I took them from her I smiled, but she did not smile back. She was staring at me anxiously, obviously worried.

"I'll be back for lunch," I tried to reassure her.

She merely nodded.

Lao-zhao was standing beside the open front gate. He also looked anxious but said nothing, simply closing the gate behind us.

The apprehension of my servants was completely understandable. We all knew that during the seventeen years of Mao Zedong's rule innumerable people had left their homes during political campaigns and had never come back.

There were few people in the streets, but the bus was crowded with solemn-looking passengers. It took a circuitous route, so that we did not get to our destination until after nine o'clock.

A number of young men and women were gathered in front of the technical school where the meeting was to be held. When they caught sight of us approaching from the bus stop, a few ran into the building shouting, "They have come! They have come!"

A man came out and said to my escorts irritably, "Why have you been so long? The meeting was called for eight o'clock."

The two men turned their heads in my direction and said, "Ask her!" before hurrying into the building.

This man now said to me, "Come this way." I followed him into the meeting room.

The large room was already packed with people. Among those seated on narrow wooden benches in front of the assembly, I saw Shell's physician and other senior members of the staff. The drivers, guards, elevator operators, cleaners, and clerks sat behind them among a large number of young people who were

probably the students of the school. Quite a number stood in the aisles and in the space at the back of the hall. Hot sun streamed into the stifling room through bare windows, but very few people were using their fans. The atmosphere in the room was tense and expectant.

Although we had worked in the same office and seen one another daily for almost nine years, not one of the senior staff greeted me or showed any sign of recognition when I brushed past them to take up the seat allocated to me in the second row. Most of the men averted their eyes; the few whose gaze met mine looked deeply troubled.

I wondered what these men had been through in the months since Shell had closed its office. They were the real losers in the "Assets against Liability Agreement" reached between Shell and the People's Government agency authorized to take them over. Nearly all the men had been with Shell for a very long time, some since the 1920s. During the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, some of them made the long and arduous journey from Shanghai to the company's office in the wartime capital of Chongqing, abandoning home and family; others remained in the city and suffered great economic hardship rather than work for the Japanese oil company that had taken over Shell's premises. Most of the men were nearly sixty and approaching retirement. The agreement specified that they were all to be given jobs in Chinese organizations. What was not mentioned was that they would not be given jobs commensurate with their former positions in Shell but would be employed as clerks or translators at a low rate of pay with much-reduced retirement pensions. None of them had dared to oppose the terms of the agreement since it was what the government wanted them to accept. Both the last general manager and I tried to obtain assurances from the union chairman, but we were told that every member of our staff was pleased with the terms of the agreement.

At my last meeting with the Shell union chairman, he had said to me, "Everybody is extremely pleased at the prospect of being freed from the anomalous position of working for a foreign firm. They all look forward to making a contribution to socialism as workers of a government organization." That was the official line, in which even the union chairman himself could not possibly have believed. Senior members of the staff who came to my

office during those last days would shake their heads and murmur sadly, *"Meiyou fazi!"*—a very common Chinese phrase meaning, "Nothing can be done," or "It's hopeless," or "No way out," or "There's no solution."

From nine o'clock to lunchtime, when the meeting might be adjourned, was more than three hours. The room was bound to get a great deal hotter as time went on. I knew I had to conserve energy while waiting for events to speak for themselves. The narrow wooden bench was just as uncomfortable as the one I had sat on during the war in a cave in Chongqing while Japanese planes rained incendiary bombs on the city. Perspiration was running down my face. I opened my bag to get a handkerchief. I saw that Chen-ma had put in it a small folding fan made of sandalwood with a painting of a peony on silk done by my painting teacher. I took it out and fanned myself to clear the air of the unpleasant odor of packed humanity.

Suddenly there was a commotion at the rear. Several men dressed in short-sleeved shirts and baggy cotton trousers came through the door at the back and mounted the low platform. One of them came forward to a small table covered with a white cloth while the others sat down in the row of chairs behind him. One could no longer assess a man's station in life by his clothes in China because everybody tried to dress like a proletarian, a word the Chinese translated as *wuchanzhe,* which meant "a man with no property." To look poor was both safe and fashionable for the Chinese people. So, while I could not tell the approximate rank or position of the man in charge of the meeting, I thought he must be an official of the Shanghai Labor Union.

"Comrades!" he said. "Our Great Leader Chairman Mao has initiated and is now personally directing the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. With our Great Helmsman to guide us, we shall proceed to victory without hindrance. The situation is excellent for us, the proletariat!

"The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is an opportunity for all of us to study the Thought of Mao Zedong more thoroughly and diligently than ever before so that our political awareness is sharpened. Only then can we truly differentiate between those who are in the ranks of the People and those who are on the side of the Enemy.

"The enemies of socialism are cunning. Some of them raise

the red flag to oppose the red flag, while others present us with smiling faces to cover up their dirty schemes. They cooperate with the imperialists abroad and the capitalist class within to try to sabotage socialism and lead the Chinese people backwards to the misery and suffering of the old days. Should we allow them to succeed? Of course not! No! A hundred times no!

"It's seventeen years since the people of Shanghai were liberated. Yet, until recently, foreign firms remained in our city. Their offices occupied prominent locations, and their cars sped through our streets. The foreigners and the few Chinese who forgot their national identity and worked with them swaggered around with insolence. We all know these firms were agents of the imperialists, who hoped to continue their exploitation of the Chinese people. We could not tolerate this state of affairs, so we have closed their doors and thrown out the foreigners. Most of the Chinese on their staffs have been contaminated, and their way of thinking is confused. But we must also recognize the fact that some of them are downright reactionaries. It's our job to implement our Great Leader Chairman Mao's policy of educating and reforming them. For several months we have conducted political indoctrination classes for them. But no one can be reformed if he himself does not come face to face with reality and recognize and admit the facts of his own mistakes. Self-criticism and confession are the first steps towards reform. In order to make a real effort at self-criticism, a man must be helped by the criticism of others. Today's meeting is called to criticize Tao Feng and to hear his self-criticism.

"You all know who Tao Feng is. For nearly thirty-five years he was a faithful running dog of Shell Petroleum Company, which is an international corporation of gigantic size with tendrils reaching into every corner of the world to suck up profit. This, according to Lenin, is the worst form of capitalist enterprise.

"Capitalism and socialism are like fire and water. They are diametrically opposed. Tao Feng could not have served the interests of the British firm and remained a good Chinese citizen under socialism. For a long time we have tried to help him see the light . . ."

I was surprised to learn that Tao Feng, the former chief accountant of our office, was the target of the meeting, because I had always thought the Party looked upon him with favor. His eldest son had been sent to both the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia for advanced studies at the government's expense in the fifties, and the young man had later joined the Party. I knew that when a student was selected to go abroad, the Party always made a thorough investigation of his background, including his father's character, occupation, and political viewpoint. Tao Feng must have passed this test at the time his son was sent abroad. I could not understand why he had now been singled out for criticism.

Since the very beginning of the Communist regime, I had carefully studied books on Marxism and pronouncements by Chinese Communist Party leaders. It seemed to me that socialism in China was still very much an experiment and no fixed course of development for the country had yet been decided upon. This, I thought, was why the government's policy was always changing, like a pendulum swinging from left to right and back again. When things went to extremes and problems emerged, Beijing would take corrective measures. Then these very corrective measures went too far and had to be corrected. The real difficulty was, of course, that a state-controlled economy stifled productivity, and economic planning from Beijing ignored local conditions and killed incentive.

When a policy changed from above, the standard of values changed with it. What was right yesterday became wrong today, and vice versa. Thus the words and actions of a Communist Party official at the lower level were valid for a limited time only. So I decided the meeting I was attending was not very important and that the speaker was just a minor Party official assigned to conduct the Cultural Revolution for the former staff of Shell. The Cultural Revolution seemed to me to be a swing to the left. Sooner or later, when it had gone too far, corrective measures would be taken. The people would have a few months or a few years of respite until the next political campaign. Mao Zedong believed that political campaigns were the motivating force for progress. So I thought the Proletarian Cultural Revolution was just one of an endless series of upheavals the Chinese people must learn to put up with.

I looked around the room while listening with one ear to the speaker's tirade. It was then that I noticed the banner on the wall

that said, "Down with the running dog of imperialism Tao Feng." The two characters of his name were crossed with red *X*'s to indicate he was being denounced as an enemy. This banner had escaped my notice when I entered the room because there were so many banners with slogans of the Cultural Revolution covering the walls. Slogans were an integral part of life in China. They exalted Mao Zedong, the Party, socialism, and anything else the Party wanted the people to believe in; they exhorted the people to work hard, to study Mao Zedong Thought, and to obey the Party. When there was a political campaign, the slogans denounced the enemies. Since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the number of slogans everywhere had multiplied by the thousand. It was impossible to read all that one encountered. It was very easy to look at them without really seeing what was written.

The man was now talking about Tao's decadent way of life resulting from long association with capitalism. It seemed he was guilty of having extramarital relations, drinking wine and spirits to excess, and enjoying elaborate meals, all acts of self-indulgence frowned upon by the Party. These accusations did not surprise me, because I knew that when a man was denounced, he was depicted as totally bad and any errant behavior was attributed to the influence of capitalism.

When the man had thoroughly dissected Tao's private life and exposed the corrosive effect of capitalism on him, his tone and manner became more serious. He turned to the subject of imperialism and aggression against China by foreign powers. To him Tao's mistakes were made not because he was a greedy man with little self-control but because he had worked for a firm that belonged to a nation guilty of acts of aggression against the Chinese people more than a hundred years ago. He was talking about the Opium War of 1839–42 as if it had taken place only the year before.

Though he used the strong language of denunciation and often raised his voice to shout, he delivered his speech in a leisurely manner, pausing frequently either to drink water or to consult his notes. He knew he had a captive audience, since no one would dare to leave while the meeting was going on. A Party official, no matter how lowly his rank, was a representative of the Party. When he spoke, it was the Party speaking. It was unthinkable not to appear attentive. However, he had been speaking for a long time. The room had become unbearably hot, and the audience was getting restive. I looked at my watch and found it was nearly twelve o'clock. Perhaps the speaker was also tired and hungry, for he suddenly stopped and told us the meeting was adjourned until one-thirty. Everybody was up and heading for the exits even before he had quite finished speaking.

Outside, the midday sun beat relentlessly down on the hot pavement. In the distance, I saw a pedicab parked in the shade of a tree. I ran to it and gave the driver my address, promising him double fare to encourage him to move away quickly.

The man who had led me into the building in the morning dashed outside, shouting for me to stop. He wanted me to remain there and eat something from the school kitchen so that I would not be late again. So anxious was he to detain me that he grabbed the side of the pedicab. I had to promise him repeatedly that I would be back on time before he let go.

My little house, shaded with awnings on the windows and green bamboo screens on the verandah, was a haven after that hot, airless meeting hall. The back of my shirt was wet through, and I was parched. I had a quick shower, drank a glass of iced tea, and enjoyed the delicious meal my excellent cook had prepared for me. Then I lay down on my bed for half an hour's rest before setting out again in the pedicab, which I had asked to wait for me.

When I got to the meeting hall I was a little late, but by no means the last to arrive. I found a seat in the second row next to a pillar so that I could lean against it when I got too tired and needed support. I had brought along a shopping bag in which I had put a bottle of water and a glass, as well as two bars of chocolate. Secure in the knowledge that I had come well prepared, I settled down to wait, wondering what the speaker was leading up to.

The hall gradually filled. At two o'clock, the same number of men mounted the platform and took up their positions. The speaker beckoned to someone at the back. I was astonished to see Tao Feng being led into the room wearing a tall dunce cap made of white paper with "cow's demon and snake spirit" written on it. If it had not been for the extremely troubled expression on his face, he would have looked comical.

In Chinese mythology, "cow's demon and snake spirit" are evil spirits who can assume human forms to do mischief, but when recognized by real humans as devils they revert to their original shapes. Mao Zedong had first used this expression to describe the intellectuals during the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. He had said that the intellectuals were like evil spirits in human form when they pretended to support the Communist Party. When they criticized the Party's policy, they reverted to their original shapes and were exposed as evil spirits. Since that time, quick to adopt the language of Mao, Party officials had used the phrase for anyone considered politically deceitful. During the Cultural Revolution it was applied to all the so-called nine categories of enemies: former landlords denounced in the Land Reform Movement of 1950–52; rich peasants denounced in the Formation of Rural Cooperatives Movement of 1955; counterrevolutionaries denounced in the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign of 1950 and Elimination of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign of 1955; "bad elements" arrested from time to time since the Communist Party came to power; rightists denounced in the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957; traitors (Party officials suspected of having betrayed Party secrets during imprisonment by the Kuomintang); spies (men and women with foreign connections); "capitalist-roaders" (Party officials not following the strict leftist policy of Mao but taking the "capitalist road"); and intellectuals with bourgeois family origins.

Often the phrase was shortened to just "cows," and the places in which these political outcasts were confined during the Cultural Revolution were generally referred to as "cowsheds." As the scale of persecution expanded, every organization in China had rooms set aside as "cowsheds," and the Revolutionaries of each organization had full power to deal with the "cows" confined therein. Inhuman treatment and cruel methods were employed to force the "cows" to confess. In many instances, they fared worse than those incarcerated in regular prisons.

How changed Tao Feng looked! When we were working in the same office, he was always full of self-assurance. Now he looked nervous and thoroughly beaten. He had lost a great deal of weight and seemed years older than only a few months ago. The young people behind me snickered. When Tao was brought to

the platform, the crowd at the back stood up to have a better view and knocked over some benches. So a man pushed a chair forward on the platform and told Tao Feng to stand on it. When Tao climbed onto the chair and stood there in a posture of subservience in his tall paper hat, the snickers became uncontrolled laughter.

Someone in a corner of the room, obviously planted there for the purpose, stood up. Holding the Little Red Book of Mao Zedong's quotations (so called because of its red plastic cover), which everybody had to have by his side, he raised it high in the air and led the assembly to shout slogans.

"Down with Tao Feng!"

"Down with the running dog of the imperialists, Tao Feng!"

"Down with the imperialists!"

"Down with the capitalist class!"

"Long live the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution!"

"Long live our Great Leader Chairman Mao!"

The sound of laughter was now drowned in the thunder of voices. Everybody got to his feet shouting and waving the Little Red Book of Mao's quotations. I had not brought along my copy. Embarrassed by my oversight, I was slow to get to my feet. Besides, I was shocked and surprised to see Tao Feng raising his fist and shouting with gusto the same slogans, including those against himself. By the time I had collected my fan, my bag, my bottle of water, and the glass from my lap, placed them on the bench, and stood up, the others had already finished and had sat down. So I had to pick up my things again and resume my seat. The man sitting next to me was glaring at me with disapproval. He shifted sideways away from me as if he feared contamination by my bad behavior.

When the crowd had demonstrated its anger at and disapproval of the culprit, he was allowed to come down from the chair. As he bent his head to step down, the paper hat fell off. There was renewed laughter from the young students. Tao stared at the man in charge of the meeting with fear in his eyes, obviously afraid of being accused of deliberately dropping the hat. He heaved a sigh of relief when another man picked it up and placed it on the table.

The man in charge of the meeting called upon other members of the company's staff, including the two men who had come to

my house in the morning and some junior clerks in Tao Feng's accounting department, to come forward to speak. One by one they marched to the platform and expressed anger and indignation, repeating the same accusations against Tao Feng made by the speaker during the morning session. The scope and degree of criticism was, I knew, always set by the Party official. It was just as ill advised to try to be original and say something different as not to criticize enough. The Chinese people had learned by experience that the Party trusted them more and liked them better if they didn't think for themselves but just repeated what the Party told them. The criticism of Tao Feng by other members of our former staff went on for a long time. All those who were allowed to speak were workers or junior clerks. None of the senior members of our former staff participated. They sat silently with heads bowed.

Finally the man in charge of the meeting took over again. He told the audience that after several weeks of reeducation and "help" by activists, Tao had finally recognized the fact that he was a victim of capitalism and imperialism. Turning to Tao, the man asked in a voice a stern schoolteacher might have used to address a pupil caught in an act of mischief, "Isn't it so? It was the high salary paid you by the foreign imperialists that turned you into their slave! You sold yourself to them and were ready to do any dirty work for them because of the high salary you received and the money they promised you. Isn't this the case?"

There was a hush in the room as everyone waited for Tao's reaction. But there was no dramatic, tearful declaration of repentance. He merely nodded his head, looking more dejected than ever.

I thought Tao Feng very stupid to agree that he had sold himself for money, because this admission could open the way to all sorts of more serious accusations from which he might find it difficult to disentangle himself. It seemed to me it would have been much better and certainly more truthful to explain that Shell paid its Shanghai staff the same salary after the Communist Party took over the city as it had done before. Since the government did not intervene, naturally the question of reducing the pay of the staff did not arise. What he could also have said tactfully was that working for a foreign firm did not carry with it the personal prestige enjoyed by government workers serving

the people—a point the Party officials would have found hard to refute.

"Tao Feng will now make his self-criticism," the man announced.

Still in a posture of obsequiousness and without once lifting his eyes to look at the audience, Tao took a few sheets of paper from his pocket and started to read a prepared statement in a low voice devoid of emotion. He admitted humbly all the "crimes" listed by the speakers and accepted the verdict that his downfall was due to the fact that he did not have sufficient socialist awareness. He expressed regret for having worked for a foreign firm for more than thirty-five years and said that he had wasted his life. He declared that he was ashamed he had been blinded by capitalist propaganda and enslaved by the good treatment Shell had given him. He begged the proletariat to forgive him and give him a chance to repent. He mentioned the fact that his son was a Party member and had been educated abroad at government expense. His own life of depravity, he said, was an act of gross ingratitude to the People's Government. He assured the assembly that he now recognized the dastardly schemes of the foreign capitalists and imperialists against Communist China and would do his best to lay bare their dirty game in order to show his true repentance. He said he was in the process of writing a detailed confession of criminal deeds he had committed for Shell, which he would present to the officials "helping" him with his reeducation.

It was a long statement full of self-abuse and exaggeration. At times his voice trembled, and sometimes he opened his mouth but no words came. When he turned the pages, his hands shook. I did not believe his nervousness was entirely due to fear, since he must have known that he was not guilty of any real crime. After all, Shell had remained in China because the People's Government had allowed, even wanted, it to be there. And I knew that the company had been scrupulously correct in observing Chinese government regulations. Tao must have known this too. I thought his chief problem was mental and physical exhaustion. To bring him to his knees and to make sure that he submitted readily, those who "helped" him must have spent days, if not weeks, constantly questioning him, taking turns to exert pressure on him without allowing him to sleep. It was

common knowledge that in these circumstances the victim broke down and submitted when he was on the verge of physical collapse and mental confusion. The Maoists named these inhuman tactics "exhaustive bombardment." Many people I knew, including my own brother, had experienced it during the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. The Party officials remained in the background while the activists carried out their orders. When there was excessive cruelty that resulted in death, the officials would disclaim responsibility for an "accident" resulting from "mass enthusiasm."

When Tao had finished, the speaker told the audience that he would be watched to see if his words were spoken in true sincerity. He added that his was only the first meeting of its kind to be held. There were many others like Tao to be dealt with, and Tao himself might speak again. Here he paused momentarily and swept the audience with his eyes. Did I merely imagine that his gaze seemed to linger for a fraction of a moment in my direction? He concluded that it was the duty of the proletariat to cleanse socialist China of all residue of imperialist influence and punish the enemies of the people. Again I thought he turned his gaze in my direction.

I certainly did not think I was important enough for this whole show to have been put on solely for my benefit. But if it was, it failed to frighten me. The emotion my first experience of a "struggle meeting" generated in me was one of disgust and shame that such an act of barbarism against a fellow human being could have taken place in my beloved native land, with a history of five thousand years of civilization. As a Chinese, I felt degraded.

There was more shouting of slogans, but everybody was already on his feet moving towards the door.

The same man who tried to keep me from going home for lunch was waiting in the passage. He said to me, "Will you come this way for a moment? Some comrades would like to have a word with you."

I followed him to one of the classrooms, where the students' chairs and desks were piled up in one corner. The man in charge of the meeting and another one who had been on the platform were seated by the teacher's desk. There was a vacant chair. They motioned me to sit in it.

"Did you hear everything at the meeting?" the man in charge asked me.

I nodded.

"What did you think of the meeting? I believe this is the first time you have attended one of this kind."

Obviously I couldn't reveal what I really thought of the meeting, nor did I want to lie and flatter him. So I said, "May I ask you some questions that have been in my mind the whole day?"

He looked annoyed but said, "Go ahead."

"What organization do you represent? What authority do you have to call a meeting like this? Besides the ex-staff of Shell, who were the others present?"

Clearly he resented my questioning his authority. Making a visible effort to control himself, he said, "We represent the proletarian class. The meeting was authorized by the committee in charge of the conduct of the Proletarian Cultural Revolution in Shanghai."

I asked him to explain the purpose of the Proletarian Cultural Revolution. He said that it was a revolution to cleanse Chinese society of factors that hindered the growth of socialism. He repeated an often quoted saying of Mao Zedong: "If poisonous weeds are not removed, scented flowers cannot grow." He told me that everybody in China without exception had to take part in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

"You must assume a more sincere attitude and make a determined effort to emulate Tao Feng and do your best to reform," he said.

"I'm not aware of any wrongdoing on my part," I said, my voice registering surprise.

"Perhaps you'll change your attitude when you have had time to think things over," said the second man. "If you try to cover up for the imperialists, the consequences will be serious."

"What is there to cover up? Every act of the imperialists is clearly recorded in our history books," I answered.

The man raised his voice. "What are you talking about? We are not concerned with what happened in the past. We are talking about now, about the firm you worked for. Tao has already confessed everything. We know the Shell office in Shanghai 'hung up a sheep's head to sell dog's meat' [a Chinese expression meaning that the outward appearance of something

is not the same as the reality]. We are also clear in our mind about the important role you played in their dirty game. You must not take us for fools."

"I'm completely at a loss as to what you're referring to," I said. "As far as I know, the company I worked for never did anything either illegal or immoral. The People's Government has an excellent police force. Surely if anything had been wrong it would have been discovered long ago."

Both men glared at me. Almost simultaneously they shouted, "You are trying to cover up for the imperialists!"

I said indignantly, "You misunderstand me. I'm merely stating the facts as I know them. Why should I cover up for anybody? Shell's Shanghai office is closed, and the British general manager has left. No one needs my protection."

"Yes, yes, the British general manager has gone, but you are still here. You know just as much as he did. Your husband held the post of general manager for many years. After he died you joined the firm. You certainly know everything about it."

"It's precisely because I know everything about the Shanghai office of Shell that I know it never did anything wrong," I said.

The other man intervened. "I suggest you go home now and think things over. We'll call you when we want to speak to you again. What's your telephone number?"

I gave them my number and left the room.

Outside, it was already dusk. There was a pleasant breeze. I decided to walk home on the tree-lined sidewalks by a roundabout route to get some exercise and to think things over.

When I passed the No. 1 Medical College, I saw my friend Winnie emerging from the half-closed gate, followed by a number of her colleagues. We waved to each other, and she joined me to walk home, as she lived in the vicinity of my house.

"Why are you out walking at this time of the evening?" Winnie asked me.

"I've just attended a struggle meeting. I've been told to take part in the Proletarian Cultural Revolution."

"Is that because Shell has closed its Shanghai office? Tell me about it."

"I will. Can you join me for dinner?" I asked her. It would be good to hear what Winnie had to say about my experience. She had been through quite a number of political movements and

was more experienced than I was in dealing with the situation, I thought.

"All right. I'll phone home from your house. Henry comes home very late these days. He has to pay a price for being a professor whenever there is a political campaign. Professors always seem to become the targets," Winnie said. Henry, her husband, taught architecture at Tongji University.

"Is Henry in trouble?" I inquired anxiously.

"No, not so far, thank God," Winnie replied, taking a comb out of her bag to smooth her hair. "Your servants will have a fit if they see me coming to dinner looking so disheveled."

Though she was over forty-five and had three sons, Winnie had kept her slim figure and managed to look attractive in the ill-fitting Mao jacket and baggy trousers she was obliged to wear as a teacher of English and Latin at the medical college. After getting a degree in English literature at a New England women's college, she and her husband, a graduate of Britain's Cambridge University, returned to China at the end of the Sino-Japanese War. Henry was appointed professor of architecture at Tongji University and soon became dean of the department. But in those days of galloping inflation, the salary of a professor could not keep pace with rising prices. To supplement the family income, Winnie gave Chinese lessons to Europeans living in Shanghai. Disillusioned by the inability of the Kuomintang government to cope with pressing postwar economic problems and institute reform, they welcomed the Communist takeover in 1949 as an opportunity for peace and stability.

In those days, because of the Kuomintang blackout of all news about the Communist area, very few Chinese living in Shanghai had any real understanding of Marxism, the Chinese Communist Party, or Mao Zedong. Almost no one knew about the persecution of intellectuals carried out in Yanan in 1942 or the periodic witch-hunts for "spies of the Kuomintang and the imperialists" in the Communist Party and army. The only source of information for Chinese intellectuals about the Chinese Communist Party before 1949 had been the glowing accounts written by some Western journalists and writers who made fleeting visits to the Communist-held area of China. Most of these men were liberal idealists. They were impressed by the austerity, discipline, and singleness of purpose of the Communist leaders,

but they did not have a deep understanding of either the character of these men or the philosophy that motivated them. When the Communist Party intensified its propaganda effort through its underground in Kuomintang-governed cities prior to the final military push to take over the country, its promises of peaceful national reconstruction, of a united front including all sections of Chinese society, and of a democratic form of government sounded an attractive alternative to the corrupt and ineffectual rule of the Kuomintang. And the Chinese intellectuals accepted the propaganda effort as a sincere and honest declaration of policy by the Chinese Communist Party.

After the Communist army took over Shanghai, women were encouraged to take jobs. Winnie became a teacher at the medical college in 1950. In the following year, Mao Zedong, anxious to put all universities under Party control, initiated the Thought Reform Movement. Winnie and Henry had their first rude awakening. Although they both survived this campaign more or less unscathed, they suffered the humiliating experience of having to make self-criticism of their family background, their education abroad, and their outlook on life as reflected in Henry's architectural designs and in their teaching methods. Repeatedly they had to write their life histories critically; each time, the Party representative demanded a more self-searching effort. At the end of their grueling and degrading experience, Henry was judged unfit to continue as dean of the architectural department, which was now to use exclusively Soviet materials for teaching. Both Chinese traditional work and architectural designs from the West were scorned as feudalistic and decadent.

After the Thought Reform Movement was concluded in 1951, Party secretaries were appointed to every level of university administration. They controlled every aspect of the life and work of the teaching staff, even though the majority of them had little education and had never been teachers. Henry and Winnie lived in premises assigned to them, accepted the salary given to them, did their work in the way the Party secretaries wanted. These two well-educated, lively, and imaginative young people, full of goodwill towards the Communist regime, were reduced by Mao Zedong's suspicion and abuse of the intellectuals to teaching machines. But they were the fortunate ones. Many others from universities all over China did not fare as well. Some

were sent to labor camps, while others were thrown out of the universities altogether.

When the Korean War ended, Mao Zedong's witch-hunt for dissidents temporarily relaxed. Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, aware of the plight of the Chinese intellectuals, tried then to improve their condition. As a result of a more lenient policy, Henry and Winnie were given a more spacious apartment near my home. There were also fewer constraints placed on their professional activities. Winnie often dropped in to read the books and magazines I was able to have sent from Hong Kong and England through the office or to listen to my stereo records.

In 1956 Mao Zedong launched the campaign "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom and Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend." The Party secretaries in every organization, and even Mao himself, urged the people to offer frank and constructive criticism of the Communist Party. Believing the Party sincere in wishing to improve its work, tens of thousands of intellectuals and more than a million Chinese in every walk of life poured out their grievances and suggestions. But Winnie and Henry refrained from speaking out. They escaped persecution when Mao Zedong swung his policy around in 1957 and initiated the Anti-Rightist Campaign. He labeled all those who had offered criticism "Rightists." Many of them lost their jobs, became nonpersons, and were sent to labor camps; others had their pay reduced and were demoted in rank. The treachery of Mao Zedong in repeatedly inviting frank and constructive criticism and then harshly punishing those who gave it completely cowed the Chinese intellectuals, so that China's cultural life came to a virtual standstill.

When Winnie and I reached my house, the front gate swung open before I pressed the bell. Lao-zhao was standing there anxiously waiting for my return. He told me my daughter had telephoned to say that she was not coming home for dinner.

"Please tell Cook Mrs. Huang is staying for dinner," I said to Lao-zhao and took Winnie upstairs to my bathroom.

Lao-zhao laid the table for two with white embroidered linen table mats. A bowl of white carnations was in the center of the dining table.

"Cook said it's steamed mandarin fish with a green salad. Is it all right?" Lao-zhao asked me. I was usually served either

Chinese- or European-style cooking, depending on what my cook was able to obtain at the market.

I looked at Winnie inquiringly, and she said, "That's fine. I love mandarin fish."

After we had sat down, Winnie looked up at the large painting of a female figure in pale blue by the famous painter Lin Fengmian, who was once the head of the Hangzhou Academy of Art. This painting was the decorative centerpiece of my blue-and-white dining room. It went well in color and style with the blue-and-white Xuande plate and Kangxi vase displayed on the blackwood sideboard.

"Have you heard? Lin Fengmian is in serious trouble," Winnie told me.

I was surprised. I knew the painter was earning large sums of foreign exchange for the People's Government, which bought his paintings for a paltry sum but sold them in Hong Kong for twenty or thirty times the amount.

"He is accused of promoting the decadent art form of the West. But a more serious charge is that he has maintained contact with people outside China and has given information to captains of foreign ships calling at Shanghai. The foreigners were observed coming to his home by his neighborhood activists."

"Well, his wife and daughter are in Brazil. Actually I know for a fact that the ships' captains came to buy his pictures," I said.

"Many other painters are in trouble too. Your old teacher, Miss Pang, is also being criticized. It's said she once painted a branch of the *meihua* tree [a flowering tree that blooms in late winter or early spring] hanging down rather than upright to symbolize the downfall of the Communist Party."

I laid down my fork and said to Winnie, "They are mad. In the paintings by old masters the *meihua* tree is often depicted hanging over a cliff. It isn't anything she has invented."

"Well, you know how it is. The Party officials in her organization have probably never seen any paintings by the old masters. Party officials in charge of artists are not required to know the difference between watercolors and lithographs. And most of them don't know."

Our conversation was so disheartening that it depressed our

appetites. We couldn't do justice to the delicious meal my cook gave us.

When we were drinking tea in the drawing room, I told Winnie about the struggle meeting I had just attended. After thinking it over, she said, "It seems you are going to be treated just like us now that Shell has closed its Shanghai office. No one outside China will know what happens to you."

"What do you think is the purpose of their getting me to attend the meeting?" I asked her.

"To frighten you, of course."

"I'm not easily frightened."

"That, I think, they don't know. All they know is that you are a rich woman who has led an easy life and who has never been involved in any political campaign before. They probably think you are easily frightened. As a rule they underestimate our courage."

"Why do you think they want to frighten me? What for?"

"That's very hard to say at this juncture. Whatever it is, be prepared for unpleasantness. Be alert and keep your mouth shut. Don't say anything inadvertent, whatever the provocation."

"What about yourself? How are you getting on?" I asked her.

"I'm worn out. We spend all our time at meetings or writing Big Character Posters. Classes have been suspended. Several professors and medical experts have already been denounced. The situation seems even more serious than in 1957 at the beginning of the Anti-Rightist Campaign."

"Are you likely to become an object of criticism?"

"Of course one can't be sure. But I don't think I'm important enough. I've been a junior lecturer for sixteen years, without promotion or a raise. I always humbly ask my Party secretary for instructions and never indulge in the luxury of taking the initiative. I carry out his instructions even when I know he is wrong. At indoctrination meetings I never speak unless told to do so. Then I simply repeat whatever was said by our group leader or the Party secretary. I think my behavior can be considered impeccable. Anyway, in the last analysis, the more senior you are the more likely you are to get into trouble. 'A big tree catches the wind' is a true saying."

"What about Henry?"

"I'm worried about Henry. I think he will be denounced as a 'cow's demon and snake spirit' like all the other professors and will be struggled against," Winnie said helplessly. Then she closed her eyes and sighed.

"I thought he never did anything apart from teaching or spoke a word outside the classroom anymore," I said.

"It's true. He has learned a lesson from all his friends who were labeled Rightists. But he's a full professor, for one thing. Moreover, his family used to be very rich. And his sister is in Taiwan."

"But you have no contact with his sister. You don't write to her."

"That doesn't matter. She is there and she is Henry's sister. If the Party wants to make an issue of it, we can't stop them."

Lao-zhao came in to fill our teacups.

"Cook would like to have a word with you before he goes home," Lao-zhao said.

"All right. Ask him to come in," I told him.

Both Cook and Lao-zhao came in.

"The vice-chairman of the Shell Labor Union, Qi, came again tonight just before you returned. He asked us to give you a message," the cook said.

"What did he say?"

"He told us to tell you to be careful when you talk to the Party officials. He said that after you left the meeting, they complained that you were rude to them. Qi wants you to know that the Party officials were annoyed," the cook said.

"Qi is a good man," Lao-zhao chipped in.

"A good man? You should have seen him denouncing Tao Feng at the struggle meeting!" His ugly performance was still in my mind.

"He can't help it. He had to do what he was told. If he weren't a good man, he wouldn't have bothered to come to give you this warning," Lao-zhao countered, defending Qi.

"You are right, Lao-zhao. I'll remember to be careful. It's good of Qi to have bothered to come. Thank you both for telling me this," I said to Lao-zhao and the cook.

After the servants had withdrawn, Winnie said, "They are right. You must be careful. It doesn't pay to offend the men directly in charge of you during a political campaign. They have

absolute power to decide your fate. If they send you to a labor camp, you will have to go."

"How can they send me to a labor camp? Winnie," I said, "I don't even work for the government. Besides, I haven't broken the law!"

"Don't be naive! They can if they want to. You live here. You can't get out of the country. The only good thing about not working for the government is that they can't cut your pay."

Winnie got up to leave. I accompanied her to the front gate.

"Why didn't you go to Hong Kong when Shell applied to close the office last year?" Winnie asked me.

"How could I request such a thing? The general manager needed me during the negotiations. He didn't know the language. The whole thing was conducted in Chinese. I couldn't leave him holding the fort alone. Shell has treated me well. I couldn't let them down when they needed me," I said.

"I hope they appreciate your sense of duty. They can't help you now. You should have gone."

"I hope you and Henry will both come through this as well as you did the Anti-Rightist Campaign."

"I sometimes feel a real premonition of disaster," Winnie said sadly. "Think of all the years we spent just trying to survive!"

We stood outside my front gate to bid each other goodbye. After taking a few steps, Winnie turned and said to me, "I may not be able to come again until things clarify. Phone me if you need me."

"I understand. Take care of yourself!" I said.

"You too!" she said and waved.

After closing the front gate, I walked towards the house under a cloudless sky. A thousand stars were sparkling in space. It was a beautiful summer night.

Feeling tired and depressed, I went to my room to get ready for bed. My daughter came home while I was lying on my bed unable to sleep, with scenes of the day's events passing in front of my eyes.

"Mommy, Mommy!" she called as she mounted the stairs two steps at a time, just as she had as a teenager. I called out to say that I was in my bedroom. Chen-ma followed her into my room with a glass of milk and a plate of sandwiches on a tray.

"Goodness! I'm famished! I've had nothing to eat since break-

fast." She picked up the glass and drank the milk. I saw that her fingers were stained with ink.

"Look at those fingers! Are you going to eat your sandwiches with inky fingers? You are already a twenty-three-year-old young lady, but you behave like a ten-year-old. In the old days, girls of your age were married and had two or three children already," scolded Chen-ma. As Chen-ma had been with us since my daughter was a small girl, she could chide her as an old servant would.

"Well, this isn't the old days anymore, dear Chen-ma, old-fashioned lady!" Meiping protested and went into my bathroom to wash her hands.

Chen-ma placed the sandwiches on the table and turned to leave the room. She said to me, "You don't have to worry about Lao-zhao, Cook, and me. We'll always stand by you."

"Thank you, Chen-ma, for your concern for me. Please tell Lao-zhao and Cook not to worry," I answered, deeply touched by her remark.

"We worry about you because you are alone. I wish the master were still with us," she murmured and shut the door behind her.

Chen-ma really was old-fashioned. In time of crisis she believed firmly in the superior ability of the male sex. In fact, I had been thinking of my husband as I lay on my bed in the darkened room before my daughter came back. For the first time since he died, I did not regret his death. I was thankful that he was to be spared the insults and persecution that would surely be directed against him if he were still alive.

With the bathroom door closed and the water running, my daughter did not hear our conversation. She was apparently having a shower.

My daughter Meiping was an attractive and intelligent young woman. In the course of growing up in Communist China, she had seen the disappearance of a society in which children of the educated and affluent had enjoyed many advantages. In its place was formed not an egalitarian society in which everyone enjoyed equal opportunity and status but a new system of discrimination against children like herself and their families. In each stage of her young life, she had been handicapped by her family background. For instance, to be admitted into a good middle school, she had to pass the entrance examination with marks of 80

percent, while children of workers and peasants got in with a pass mark of 60.

"This is unfair!" I had exclaimed at the time, indignant that my child was being discriminated against. "What is the reason for such an unfair regulation?"

"Don't worry, Mommy! I can do it! I can get eighty! It isn't hard," piped the twelve-year-old.

"It isn't fair!" I was still fuming.

"But, Mommy, the teacher told us the children of workers and peasants have to do housework or cook the evening meal after school. And their parents can't help them with homework. The treatment I get is fair if you consider all that." She had learned to be philosophical at a young age.

This kind of discrimination followed her in everything she tried to do. Whenever she encountered it, she was made to feel guilty and ashamed of her family background. She, and other children like her, just had to try harder than the children of workers and peasants. They learned from an early age that the "classless" society of Communism was more rigidly stratified than the despised capitalist system, where a man could move from the lower to the upper class by his own effort. Because my daughter had to try harder, she did well. In the prestigious No. 3 Municipal Girls' Middle School, she was a student leader and won honors and prizes. She seemed happily adjusted and had many friends, among them several children from working-class families. Although she was by nature loving and generous, I thought it was mainly the feeling of guilt instilled in her by Communist propaganda about the rich exploiting the poor that created in her the desire to help these children. She would bring them home to share her food, help them with their studies, and even go to their homes sometimes to assist them with their chores. While I thought her activities rather commendable, Chen-ma disapproved heartily, especially when she loaned her clothes to other girls and then brought home the dirty laundry for Chen-ma to wash.

From early childhood, she had shown an interest in music. We bought her a piano and arranged for her to have private lessons after school. When she was ten years old she became a member of the Children's Palace in Shanghai, a sort of club for specially selected schoolchildren who earned good marks in studies and

behavior. There she acted in plays and took part in musical activities. Being bilingual, she became one of the young interpreters whenever the Children's Palace had English-speaking visitors from abroad. Having learned to swim as a toddler in Australia, she was the unofficial swimming instructor of her class. When she was fifteen and in middle school, she was selected by the Shanghai Athletics Association for training with the Shanghai Rowing Club during the holidays and became cox for the first women's rowing team of Shanghai.

Although we lived in the midst of periodic political turmoil and were saddened by the personal tragedies of some of our friends and neighbors, I never had to worry about my daughter. I took it for granted that she would go to one of the better universities, be given a fairly good job upon graduation because of her good marks, and marry a nice young man. Her pay at work would be insignificant, but I could supplement her income with an allowance, as many other parents were doing in China.

I had hoped that after graduation she would be assigned a job in Shanghai so that she could live at home. But I couldn't be sure of that. I knew that young people with family backgrounds like hers were often deliberately sent to distant regions of China where living conditions were backward and extremely poor. This had happened to some of my friends' children. As I watched my daughter grow from a lanky teenager into a beautiful young woman, I wondered what was in store for her. However, when I felt optimistic, I would dream of converting the third floor of the house into a self-contained apartment for her and her family. The prospect of nursing a grandchild was immensely comforting to me. I gazed happily into the rosy future of my dream and could almost feel the warmth of the little creature in my arms.

It had been somewhat of a surprise when my daughter told me that two well-known film actresses, concurrently teachers in the newly established Film School of Shanghai, had approached her to suggest that she try for the entrance examination as a specially selected "talent." I could see she was flattered that she had been chosen. But I had hoped for something different for her, some work in which her intellectual power rather than her physical attributes would be an asset.

"The film school is on Hongqiao Road near the old golf club.

I can come home easily for weekends. And the two teachers told me all graduates will be given jobs in the Shanghai Film Studio. Actually the school is a subsidiary of the film studio. It has sent talent scouts all over the country to select students for the entrance examination. There is bound to be a big response because everyone wants to live in Shanghai," Meiping said.

"But do you really want to be a film actress?" I asked her.

"I don't mind. I can do it. It isn't hard." This was her standard response to any problem.

"I'm sure you can do it. But do you want to?" I believed this to be an important point. To be happy one should do the job one wants to do.

"Well, I never think of what I really want to do. It's no use thinking that way when I know the government is going to assign me a job. Thinking about what I really want to do only leads to disappointment. None of my friends think that way either," she said. "I'll just enjoy doing whatever the government wants me to do. If I try hard enough to do a job well, I generally end up liking it."

I suppose my daughter's attitude was sound under the circumstances. But could a man assigned to carry night soil as his lifelong occupation make himself like the job by working hard at it?

"So you have decided to try for the entrance examination?" I asked her.

"Yes, if you agree. The teachers spoke to me officially. It would be hard to say no without appearing unappreciative. Besides, I like the idea of working in Shanghai. I'd hate leaving you alone here and coming home only once a year for a few days at Chinese New Year," my daughter said.

"Yes, yes, darling, that's certainly an important point to consider. I would hate you to go into the interior to work." I agreed with her wholeheartedly.

So she went to the film school. Three years later she graduated and was given a job with the Shanghai Film Studio, which was run by the Bureau of Films of the Ministry of Culture.

The acting profession was somewhat glamorous even in Communist China, but those who worked in it did not receive higher pay or enjoy better working conditions than factory workers or teachers of the same age group. The function of an actress was

primarily to bring entertainment to the masses, so besides appearing in films, she often gave performances in factories, rural communes, coal mines, and oilfields, traveling far and wide with her unit all over China. It was an arduous life. But she thought her experience enriched her understanding and knowledge of her own country and its people, and believed she was rendering service to them by giving them entertainment. For her, that was a meaningful way of life.

As she munched her sandwiches, she told me about the day's events at her film studio.

"I spent the whole day writing Big Character Posters for the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. We were told that the more Big Character Posters one writes, the more revolutionary enthusiasm one demonstrates, so everybody wrote and wrote until the notice board and all the wall space in our section were completely covered."

"Was that why you didn't come home for dinner?"

"We gave up having lunch and dinner to show our revolutionary zeal. Actually everyone was hungry, but nobody wanted to be the first to leave."

"What did you write about?"

"Oh, slogans and denunciations against those who had been labeled 'cow's demon and snake spirit,' and all China's enemies such as Taiwan, Japan, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union."

"How do you know what to write? Do you make things up?"

"Some people do. But I think that's too dangerous. Most of us get materials from our section leader. I concentrate on enemy countries. The section leader allows me to because she thinks I know more about other countries since I was born abroad. I don't want to write about individuals. I don't know much about the life of any of the denounced people, and I don't want to lie and insinuate. The older actresses, actors, directors, and scriptwriters have to write their own self-criticism. A lot of them are being denounced. From time to time, they are led out by the activists to be struggled against at struggle meetings or just to stand or kneel in the sun with their heads bowed."

"How terrible!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, it's terrible. I'm sorry for them. I heard that most of them are Jiang Qing's enemies from the old days. I heard that

Chairman Mao has given his wife Jiang Qing full power to deal with everybody in the field of art," my daughter said.

"Hasn't she been putting on modern Beijing operas?"

"Yes, it seems she has been in disagreement with the leaders in the Cultural Department for some time. In any case, I heard that the actresses who got better parts than she did in the old days when she was an actress in Shanghai have all packed their bags in preparation for going to labor camps. It's said she is very cruel and jealous. But it's best not to talk about her at all."

"Surely that's farfetched. She is the number one lady of China now. Why should she care about a few old actresses?"

"Perhaps they know too much about her past life. They say that before she went to Yanan and married Chairman Mao, she had a lot of lovers and even several husbands."

"Chairman Mao had several wives too. Why shouldn't she have had several husbands? She sounds like a proper Hollywood film star," I laughed. "You have been brought up in China, so you have a puritanical outlook on such matters. Tell me, how about yourself? Are you likely to get criticized?"

"Mommy, don't be silly. I'm not important enough. I'm just one of the masses. Of course, my family background and my birth abroad might get criticized. Wasn't it lucky I was born in Australia rather than in the United States or Britain?"

"Certainly no one can say Australia is an imperialist country."

"No, most people at the film studio think it's still a British colony where the people are oppressed. They don't know the Australians are really British and only the kangaroos are the natives." My daughter laughed heartily.

She finished her sandwiches and got up to go to her own room. Casually she asked, "What did you do all day, Mommy?"

"I was called to attend a struggle meeting against the former chief accountant of our office. It seems I also must take part in the Cultural Revolution. I might even become a target of attack," I told her.

"Oh, my goodness! This is extremely serious. Why didn't you tell me before?" Meiping was shocked by my news. She sat down again and urged me to tell her everything. After I had described my experiences of the day, she became very worried. She asked, "Was your office all right? Has it ever done anything wrong?"

"No, of course not," I told her.

"Why did they single out the chief accountant? Perhaps he infringed the foreign exchange regulations on behalf of the firm? Or perhaps you didn't pay your taxes?"

"We paid our taxes, all right. Certainly we were most meticulous in observing the foreign exchange regulations."

We were both puzzled but agreed it was useless to speculate. I urged her to go to bed. After remaining silent for a while longer, she said good night and left the room. She seemed a changed girl, much older than when she came in.

I switched off the light but remained wide awake. I was thinking that the Proletarian Cultural Revolution was also my daughter's first experience of a political movement. I wondered how it was going to affect her future. After some time, my bedroom door was gently pushed open. I switched on the light.

"Mommy, I can't go to sleep. Do you mind if I go down and play the piano for a while?" Meiping asked, standing in her pajamas in the open doorway.

"I'll come with you," I said, getting out of bed and following her downstairs.

Fluffy, Meiping's large Persian cat, was on the terrace outside. When he saw us, he mewed to get in. I opened the screen door. Meiping stepped out and picked him up to carry him into her study. She put Fluffy down, opened the lid of the piano, and proceeded to strike a few chords. Turning to me, she asked, "What shall I play?"

"Anything at all, but not revolutionary songs."

She started to play one of Chopin's nocturnes and murmured to me, "All right?"

I made an affirmative sound. Fluffy was stretched out at Meiping's feet under the piano. It was a scene of domestic peace and tranquility but for an invisible threat hanging in the air.