

for the cause of the proletarian

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The Red Guards

AS THE TEMPO OF the Proletarian Cultural Revolution gathered momentum, all-night sessions of political indoctrination were often held in different organizations. On the evening of August 30, when the Red Guards came to loot my house, my daughter was at her film studio attending one of these meetings. I was sitting alone in my study reading *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, which had come in the last batch of books from a bookshop in London with which I had an account. Throughout the years I worked for Shell, I managed to receive books from this shop by having the parcels sent to the office. Since the Shanghai censors always passed unopened all parcels addressed to organizations, and since Shell received an enormous amount of scientific literature for distribution to Chinese research organizations, my small parcel attracted no undue attention.

The house was very quiet. I knew Lao-zhao was sitting in the pantry as he had done day after day. Chen-ma was in her room, probably lying in bed wide awake. There was not the slightest sound or movement anywhere, almost as if everything in the house were holding its breath waiting helplessly for its own destruction.

The windows of my study were open. The bittersweet per-

fume of the magnolia in the garden and the damp smell of the cool evening air with a hint of autumn pervaded the atmosphere. From the direction of the street, faint at first but growing louder, came the sound of a heavy motor vehicle slowly approaching. I listened and waited for it to speed up and pass the house. But it slowed down, and the motor was cut off. I knew my neighbor on the left was also expecting the Red Guards. Dropping the book on my lap and sitting up tensely, I listened, wondering which house was to be the target.

Suddenly the doorbell began to ring incessantly. At the same time, there was furious pounding of many fists on my front gate, accompanied by the confused sound of hysterical voices shouting slogans. The cacophony told me that the time of waiting was over and that I must face the threat of the Red Guards and the destruction of my home. Lao-zhao came up the stairs breathlessly. Although he had known the Red Guards were sure to come eventually and had been waiting night after night just as I had, his face was ashen.

"They have come!" His unsteady voice was a mixture of awe and fright.

"Please keep calm, Lao-zhao! Open the gate but don't say anything. Take Chen-ma with you to your room and stay there," I told him.

Lao-zhao's room was over the garage. I wanted both of them out of the way so that they would not say anything to offend the Red Guards out of a sense of loyalty to me.

Outside, the sound of voices became louder. "Open the gate! Open the gate! Are you all dead? Why don't you open the gate?" Someone was swearing and kicking the wooden gate. The horn of the truck was blasting too.

Lao-zhao ran downstairs. I stood up to put the book on the shelf. A copy of the Constitution of the People's Republic caught my eye. Taking it in my hand and picking up the bunch of keys I had ready on my desk, I went downstairs.

Although in my imagination I had already lived through this moment many times, my heart was pounding. However, lifelong discipline enabled me to maintain a calm appearance. By the time I had reached the bottom of the staircase, I was the epitome of Chinese fatalism.

At the same moment, the Red Guards pushed open the front

door and entered the house. There were thirty or forty senior high school students, aged between fifteen and twenty, led by two men and one woman much older. Although they all wore the armband of the Red Guard, I thought the three older people were the teachers who generally accompanied the Red Guards when they looted private homes. As they crowded into the hall, one of them knocked over a pot of jasmine on a *fencai* porcelain stool. The tiny white blooms scattered on the floor, trampled by their impatient feet.

The leading Red Guard, a gangling youth with angry eyes, stepped forward and said to me, "We are the Red Guards. We have come to take revolutionary action against you!"

Though I knew it was futile, I held up the copy of the Constitution and said calmly, "It's against the Constitution of the People's Republic of China to enter a private house without a search warrant."

The young man snatched the document out of my hand and threw it on the floor. With his eyes blazing, he said, "The Constitution is abolished. It was a document written by the Revisionists within the Communist Party. We recognize only the teachings of our Great Leader Chairman Mao."

"Only the People's Congress has the power to change the Constitution," I said.

"We have abolished it. What can you do about it?" he said aggressively while assuming a militant stance with feet apart and shoulders braced.

A girl came within a few inches of where I stood and said, "What trick are you trying to play? Your only way out is to bow your head in submission. Otherwise you will suffer." She shook her fist in front of my nose and spat on the floor.

Another young man used a stick to smash the mirror hanging over the blackwood chest facing the front door. A shower of glass fell on the blue-and-white Kangxi vase on the chest, but the carved frame of the mirror remained on the hook. He tore the frame off and hurled it against the banister. Then he took from another Red Guard a small blackboard, which he hung up on the hook. On it was written a quotation from Mao Zedong. It said, "When the enemies with guns are annihilated, the enemies without guns still remain. We must not belittle these enemies."

The Red Guards read the quotation aloud as if taking a sol-

emn oath. Afterwards, they told me to read it. Then one of them shouted to me, "An enemy without gun! That's what you are. Hand over the keys!"

I placed my bunch of keys on the chest amidst the fragments of glass. One of them picked it up. All the Red Guards dispersed into various parts of the house. A girl pushed me into the dining room and locked the door.

I sat down by the dining table and looked around the room. It was strange to realize that after this night I would never see it again as it was. The room had never looked so beautiful as it did at that moment. The gleam of the polished blackwood table was richer than ever. The white lacquered screen with its inlaid ivory figures stood proudly in one corner, a symbol of fine craftsmanship. The antique porcelain plates and vases on their blackwood stands were placed at just the right angle to show off their beauty. Even the curtains hung completely evenly, not a fraction out of line. In the glass cabinet were white jade figures, a rose quartz incense burner, and ornaments of other semiprecious stones that I had lovingly collected over the years. They had been beautifully carved in intricate designs by the hands of skilled artists. Now my eyes caressed them to bid them farewell. Having heard from Winnie that the painter Lin Fengmian was in serious trouble, I knew that his painting of a lady in blue hanging over the sideboard would be ruthlessly destroyed. But what about the other ink-and-brush painting by Qi Baishi? He was a great artist of the traditional style. Because of his having been a carpenter in early life, he was honored by the Communist Party. Would the Red Guards know the facts of Qi Baishi's life and spare this painting? I looked at it carefully, my eyes lingering over each stroke of his masterful brush. It was a picture of the lotus, a favorite subject for Chinese artists because the lotus symbolized purity. The poet Tao Yuanming (A.D. 376-427) used the lotus to represent a man of honor in a famous poem, saying that the lotus rose out of mud but remained unstained.

I recited the poem to myself and wondered whether it was really possible for anyone to remain unstained by his environment. It was an idea contrary to Marxism, which held that the environment molded the man. Perhaps the poet was too idealistic, I thought as I listened to the laughter of the Red Guards overhead. They seemed to be blissfully happy in their work of

destruction because they were sure they were doing something to satisfy their God, Mao Zedong. Their behavior was the result of their upbringing in Communist China. The propaganda they had absorbed precluded their having a free will of their own.

A heavy thud overhead stopped my speculations. I could hear the sound of many people walking up and down the stairs, glasses breaking, and heavy knocking on the wall. The noise intensified. It sounded almost as if the Red Guards were tearing the house down rather than merely looting its contents. I became alarmed and decided to try to secure my release by deception.

I knocked on the door. There was such a din in the house that no one heard me. I knocked harder and harder. When I heard a movement outside the door, I called out, "Open up!"

The handle was turned slowly, and the door opened a narrow gap. A girl Red Guard in pigtails asked what I wanted. I told her I had to go to the bathroom. She let me out after cautioning me not to interfere with their revolutionary activities.

The Red Guards had taken from the storeroom the crates containing my father's books and papers and were trying to open them with pliers. Through the open drawing room door, I saw a girl on a ladder removing the curtains. Two bridge tables were in the middle of the room. On them was a collection of cameras, watches, clocks, binoculars, and silverware that the Red Guards had gathered from all over the house. These were the "valuables" they intended to present to the state.

Mounting the stairs, I was astonished to see several Red Guards taking pieces of my porcelain collection out of their padded boxes. One young man had arranged a set of four Kangxi winecups in a row on the floor and was stepping on them. I was just in time to hear the crunch of delicate porcelain under the sole of his shoe. The sound pierced my heart. Impulsively I leapt forward and caught his leg just as he raised his foot to crush the next cup. He toppled. We fell in a heap together. My eyes searched for the other winecups to make sure we had not broken them in our fall, and, momentarily distracted, I was not able to move aside when the boy regained his feet and kicked me right in my chest. I cried out in pain. The other Red Guards dropped what they were doing and gathered around us, shouting at me angrily for interfering in their revolutionary activities.

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One of the teachers pulled me up from the floor. His face flushed in anger, the young man waved his fist, threatening me with a severe beating. The teacher raised her voice to restore order. She said to me, "What do you think you are doing? Are you trying to protect your possessions?"

"No, no, you can do whatever you like with my things. But you mustn't break these porcelain treasures. They are old and valuable and cannot be replaced," I said rather breathlessly. My chest throbbed with pain.

"Shut up! Shut up!" A chorus of voices drowned my words. "Our Great Leader said, 'Lay out the facts; state the reasons.'" I summoned all my strength and yelled at the top of my voice to be heard.

The teacher raised her hand to silence the Red Guards and said, "We will allow you to lay out the facts and state the reasons." The Red Guards glared at me.

I picked up one of the remaining winecups and cradled it in my palm. Holding my hand out, I said, "This winecup is nearly three hundred years old. You seem to value the cameras, watches, and binoculars, but better cameras, better watches, and more powerful binoculars are being made every year. No one in this world can make another winecup like this one again. This is a part of our cultural heritage. Every Chinese should be proud of it."

The young man whose revolutionary work of destruction I had interrupted said angrily, "You shut up! These things belong to the old culture. They are the useless toys of the feudal emperors and the modern capitalist class and have no significance to us, the proletarian class. They cannot be compared to cameras and binoculars, which are useful for our struggle in time of war. Our Great Leader Chairman Mao taught us, 'If we do not destroy, we cannot establish.' The old culture must be destroyed to make way for the new socialist culture."

Another Red Guard said, "The purpose of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is to destroy the old culture. You cannot stop us!"

I was trembling with anxiety and frantically searching my mind for some convincing argument to stop this senseless destruction. But before I could utter another futile word, I saw another young man coming down the stairs from the third floor

with my blanc de chine Goddess of Mercy, Guanyin, in his hand. I turned to him and asked easily, "What are you going to do with that figure?"

He swung the arm holding the Guanyin carelessly in the air and declared, "This is a figure of Buddhist superstition. I'm going to throw it in the trash."

The Guanyin was a perfect specimen and a genuine product of the Dehua kiln in Fujian province. It was the work of the famous seventeenth-century Ming sculptor Chen Wei and bore his seal on the back. The beauty of the creamy-white figure was beyond description. The serene expression of the face was so skillfully captured that it seemed to be alive. The folds of the robe flowed so naturally that one forgot it was carved out of hard biscuit. The glaze was so rich and creamy that the whole figure looked as if it were soft to the touch. This figure of Guanyin I always kept in its padded box, deeming it too valuable to be displayed. I took it out only when knowledgeable friends interested in porcelain asked to look at it.

"No, no, please! You mustn't do that! I beg you." I was so agitated that my voice was shrill. The Red Guard just fixed me with a stony stare and continued to swing his arm casually, holding the Guanyin now with only two fingers.

Pleading was not going to move the Red Guards. If I wanted to communicate, I must speak their language. The time had come to employ diplomacy, it seemed to me. If the Red Guards thought I opposed them, I would never succeed in saving the treasures. By this time, I no longer thought of them as my own possessions. I did not care to whom they belonged after tonight as long as they were saved from destruction.

"Please, Red Guards! Believe me, I'm not opposed to you. You have come here as representatives of our Great Leader. How could I oppose the representatives of Chairman Mao? I understand the purpose of the Cultural Revolution. Did I not surrender the keys willingly when you asked for them?" I said.

"Yes, you did," conceded the teacher with a nod. The Red Guards gathered around us seemed to relax a little.

Somewhat encouraged, I went on. "All these old things belong to the past era. The past is old. It must go to make way for the new culture of socialism. But they could be taken away without immediate destruction. Remember, they were not made

by members of the capitalist class. They were made by the hands of the workers of a bygone age. Should you not respect the labor of those workers?"

A Red Guard at the back of the group shouted impatiently, "Don't listen to her flowery words. She is trying to confuse us. She is trying to protect her possessions."

I quickly turned to him and said, "No, no! Your being in my house has already improved my socialist awareness. It was wrong of me to have kept all these beautiful and valuable things to myself. They rightly belong to the people. I beg you to take them to the Shanghai Museum. You can consult their experts. If the experts advise you to destroy them, there will still be time to do so."

A girl said, "The Shanghai Museum is closed. The experts there are being investigated. Some of them are also class enemies. In any case, they are intellectuals. Our Great Leader has said, 'The capitalist class is the skin; the intellectuals are the hairs that grow on the skin. When the skin dies, there will be no hair.' The capitalist class nourishes the intellectuals, so they belong to the same side. Now we are going to destroy the capitalist class. Naturally the intellectuals are to be destroyed too."

The quotation of Mao she mentioned was new to me, but this was no time to think of that. I pursued my purpose by saying, "In that case, consult someone you can trust, someone in a position of authority. Perhaps one of the vice-mayors of Shanghai. Surely there are many private collections in the city. There must be some sort of policy for dealing with them."

"No, no! You are a stupid class enemy! You simply do not understand. You are arguing and advising us to consult either other class enemies or the revisionist officials of the government. You talk about official policy. The only valid official policy is in this book." The young man took his book of Mao's quotations from his pocket and held it up as he continued, "The teachings of our Great Leader Chairman Mao are the only valid official policy."

Changing the direction of my argument, I said, "I saw a placard saying, 'Long Live World Revolution.' You are going to carry the red flag of our Great Leader Chairman Mao all over the world, aren't you?"

"Of course we are! What has that got to do with you? You are

only a class enemy," a girl sneered. She turned to the others and warned, "She is a tricky woman. Don't listen to her nonsense!"

Getting really desperate, I said, "Don't you realize all these things are extremely valuable? They can be sold in Hong Kong for a large sum of money. You will be able to finance your world revolution with that money."

At last, what I said made an impression. The Red Guards were listening. The wonderful prospect of playing a heroic role on the broad world stage was flattering to their egos, especially now that they were getting intoxicated with a sense of power.

I seized the psychological moment and went on. "Please put all these porcelain pieces back in their boxes and take them to a safe place. You can sell them or give them to the museum, whatever you consider right, according to the teachings of our Great Leader."

Perhaps, being an older person, the teacher felt some sense of responsibility. She asked me, "Are you sure your collection is valuable? How much would you say it is worth?"

"You will find a notebook with the date of purchase and the sum of money I spent on each item. Their price increases every month, especially on the world market. As a rough estimate, I think they are worth at least a million yuan," I told her.

Although members of the proletarian class did not appreciate value, they understood price. The Red Guards were impressed by the figure "one million." The teacher was by now just as anxious as I was to save the treasures, but she was afraid to put herself in the wrong with the Red Guards. However, she found a way for the Red Guards to back down without loss of face.

"Little revolutionary generals! Let's have a meeting and talk over this matter." She was flattering the Red Guards by calling them "little revolutionary generals," a title coined by the Maoists to encourage the Red Guards to do their bidding. The Red Guards were obviously pleased and readily agreed to her suggestion. She led them down the stairs to the dining room.

I knelt down to pick up the remaining winecups and put them in the box. The Guanyin had been left on the table. I took it and went upstairs to the large cupboard on the landing of the third floor, where I normally kept my collection. I saw that all the boxes had been taken out. On the floor there were fragments of porcelain in colors of oxblood, imperial yellow, celadon green,

and blue-and-white. My heart sank at the realization that whatever my desperate effort might now achieve, it was already too late. Many of the boxes were empty.

The third-floor rooms resembled a scene after an earthquake except for the absence of corpses. But the red wine spilled out of broken bottles on white sheets and blankets was the same color as blood.

Because we lived in a permanent state of shortage, every household with enough living space had a store cupboard in which we hoarded reserves of such daily necessities as flour, sugar, and canned meat. Each time I went to Hong Kong I also brought back cases of food and soap to supplement our meager ration, even though the import duty was astronomical. The Red Guards had emptied my store cupboard. Flour, sugar, and food from cans they had opened lay on top of heaps of clothing they had taken out of cupboards, trunks, and drawers. Some suitcases remained undisturbed, but I could see that they had already dealt with my fur coats and evening dresses with a pair of scissors. The ceiling fan was whirling. Bits of fur, silk, and torn sheets of tissue paper were flying around.

Every piece of furniture was pulled out of its place. Tables and chairs were overturned, some placed on top of others to form a ladder. As it was summer, my carpets had been cleaned, sprinkled with camphor powder, rolled up, and stored in an empty bedroom on the third floor. Behind the largest roll of carpet, I found a shopping bag stuffed with two of my cashmere cardigans and several sets of new underwear. It seemed a thoughtful Red Guard had quietly put them away for personal use.

In the largest guest room, where the Red Guards had carried out most of their destructive labor of cutting and smashing, a radio set was tuned to a local station broadcasting revolutionary songs based on Mao's quotations. A female voice was singing, "Marxism can be summed up in one sentence: revolution is justifiable." There was a note of urgency in her voice that compelled the listener's attention. This song was to become the clarion call not only for the Red Guards but also for the Proletarian Revolutionaries when they were organized later on. I thought of switching off the radio, but it was out of my reach unless I climbed over the mountain of debris in the middle of the room.

I looked at what had happened to my things hopelessly but indifferently. They belonged to a period of my life that had abruptly ended when the Red Guards entered my house. Though I could not see into the future, I refused to look back. I supposed the Red Guards had enjoyed themselves. Is it not true that we all possess some destructive tendencies in our nature? The veneer of civilization is very thin. Underneath lurks the animal in each of us. If I were young and had had a working-class background, if I had been brought up to worship Mao and taught to believe him infallible, would I not have behaved exactly as the Red Guards had done?

The struggle over the porcelain had exhausted me. My chest still throbbed with pain. I wondered whether a rib had been broken. Examining my chest in the bathroom mirror, I saw a large bruise on the right side. I went down to the second floor looking for somewhere to lie down and rest. I opened the door of my own bedroom. It was in the same state of disorder as the third floor. Through the open door of my study, I saw my jewelry laid out on the desk. Since the Red Guards were still in the dining room discussing what they were going to do with the porcelain, I quickly withdrew to avoid the suspicion that I was attempting to recover anything. I turned the handle of my daughter's bedroom door to find the room as yet undisturbed. The strong breeze from the open window was tossing the gauze curtain. Crossing the room to secure it to the loop, I chanced to look down and was attracted by the sight of bright, leaping flames in the garden. I saw that a bonfire had been lit in the middle of the lawn. The Red Guards were standing around the fire carelessly tossing my books onto the flames. My heart tightened with pain. I turned my back to the window and closed my eyes, leaning against the windowsill for support. Hoping to shut out what I had seen and heard during the last few hours, I tried to escape to my inner self for a moment of peace and prayer.

Suddenly, a girl Red Guard appeared in the doorway and switched on the light. "What are you doing here? Who told you to come here? Are you up to any tricks?" She bombarded me with questions but did not wait for me to answer before she said, "Come along! We need you."

I followed her to my study. Several Red Guards were gathered around my desk. Seated on the chair was a thin girl with bobbed

hair in a faded blue cotton blouse that she had outgrown. In a society where food was at a premium, those who had to depend entirely on official rations, without recourse to perks or the black market, generally acquired a pinched look. She was just such a girl. I supposed she came from a working-class family living on a tight budget, without either of her parents being smart enough to become a Party member. She sat there tensely with head bowed, and I guessed that the others, who fell silent when I entered the room, had been questioning her. One of the male teachers was standing next to the girl. He said to me, "Pull up a chair and be seated."

Several Red Guards brought chairs from my bedroom next door, and both the teacher and I sat down. I was directly opposite the girl on the other side of my desk. As I took my seat, she looked up and hastily threw me a nervous glance that was half-frightened and half-appealing. On the desk in front of me was my jewelry case, and some of the jewelry was on the blotting pad.

"Is this all the jewelry you have? Look it over and tell us if everything is here," the teacher said. Opening the case, I saw that several rings and bracelets and a diamond watch were missing. The teacher asked again, "Is it all here, your jewelry? Speak the truth. We are going to check with your servants too. Have you hidden some? Some of the capitalist families have tried to hide their jewelry among flowers in the garden."

It was a tense moment. The boys at the other end of the room removing records from the record cabinet stopped to wait for my answer too. I understood the situation fully. They all suspected the girl, who had probably been left alone for a short moment, of having secreted some pieces of jewelry. In fact, that was probably exactly what she had done. If I lied to protect the girl and if my servants, who knew what jewelry I had, did not, I would be laying myself open to charges that I had hidden my jewelry. There was no choice for me but to tell the truth. Yet the girl looked so pitiful that I hated having to incriminate her.

"The main pieces are here. The most valuable ones, such as this jade necklace and this diamond brooch, are here. A few pieces are missing, but they are not the most valuable." I tried to minimize the girl's predicament.

"What is missing?" the teacher asked impatiently. "A watch, several rings and gold bracelets."

"What is the watch like? What make is it? Is it like this one?" The teacher stretched out his wrist, and I saw that he had on an imported Swiss watch, a status symbol in Communist China. He thought I had a man's watch like most other Chinese women, who tried to achieve equality by being the same as men. But I had never followed the new fashion.

"No, the missing watch is a small one with diamonds and a platinum strap. It's French. The name of the maker is Ebel."

"I hope you are not lying. How come you had such an unusual watch? Swiss watches are the best, aren't they?" While the teacher was speaking to me, he gestured to a Red Guard to go to the drawing room downstairs to see if such a watch was among the cameras and binoculars. The Red Guard soon came back and shook his head.

"The Ebel watch was bought in Hong Kong when my late husband and I were there in 1957. It was his last gift to me. Please ask Chen-ma. She knows all about it and is familiar with all my things, including my jewelry."

No one said anything more. The poor girl was almost in tears; her pale face looked so sad and frightened. The teacher asked me about the rings and bracelets. As I described them, an idea occurred to me. The floor of my study, especially around my desk, was knee-deep in paper-wrappings, tissue paper wrinkled into balls, old magazines torn to pieces, many old copies of the airmail edition of the *London Times* in shreds, exercise books, note pads, and unused stationery from my desk drawers. Mixed with all these were also stacks of books waiting to be carried to the garden fire. When I finished describing the missing jewelry, I said, looking at the girl in front of me, "All of you have made such a mess with all these papers and books on the floor. Perhaps the missing watch, rings, and bracelets have dropped among the debris."

The girl's pale face reddened. In an instant, she disappeared under the desk. The other Red Guards followed suit. The teacher remained in his seat, contemplating me with a puzzled frown. It seemed to me he saw through my game but did not understand my motive for covering up for the thief. Confucius said, "A compassionate heart is possessed by every human

being." This was no longer true in China, where in a society pledged to materialism, men's behavior was increasingly motivated by self-interest. The teacher probably thought I hoped to gain favor from the Red Guards.

After searching among the papers, the Red Guards recovered the rings and bracelets. The girl was smiling. But there was no watch. Probably someone else had taken it.

In my bedroom next door, the Red Guards were hammering on the furniture. Right in front of me, they were breaking my records. I stood up and said to the teacher, "These records are classical music by the great masters of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They are not the forbidden music of the dancehalls and nightclubs. Western music of this kind is taught in our music academies. Why not preserve the records and donate them to the Music Society?"

"You live in the past," he said. "Don't you know that our Great Leader has said that Western music of any kind is decadent? Only certain passages of certain compositions are all right, not the whole of any composition."

"Isn't every section of any composition an integral part of the whole?" I murmured.

"Shut up! In any case, do the peasants and workers want Chopin, Mozart, Beethoven, or Tchaikovsky? Of course not! We are going to compose our own proletarian music. As for the Music Society, it's disbanded."

The night seemed interminable. I was so tired that I could hardly stand. I asked the teacher for permission to rest for a while.

"You may go to your daughter's room. She is an independent film worker earning a salary of her own. Her room is not included in our revolutionary action."

I returned to my daughter's room and lay down on her bed. It was still dark, but through the window I could see the faint light of dawn on the eastern horizon. I closed my eyes and slowly drifted off to sleep.

When I woke, the sun was streaming into the room. The house was a great deal quieter. There was the sound of a news broadcast from a radio, but there was no longer the noise of furniture being dragged about overhead. I had a shower in my daughter's bathroom and dressed in her slacks and shirt. Out-

side the room, I found the Red Guards sitting on chairs and on the stairs eating hot buns sent to them from their school. There seemed fewer of them, and none of the teachers was in sight. I went down the stairs to the kitchen to look for breakfast.

The cook was there removing food from the refrigerator, which, he told me, the Red Guards wanted to take away. I asked him to make some coffee and toast.

I sat down by the kitchen table, and the cook placed the coffee percolator, toast, butter, and a jar of Cooper's marmalade in front of me.

A pretty girl with a lithe figure and two long plaits over her shoulders came into the kitchen and sat down on the other side of the table, watching me. After I had drunk the coffee and put the cup down, she picked it up. There was still some coffee in it. She put the cup to her nose and sniffed.

Making a face of distaste, she asked me, "What is this?"

"It's coffee," I said.

"What is coffee?"

I told her that coffee was a beverage rather like tea, only stronger.

"Is it foreign food?" She put the cup down with a clatter.

"I suppose you could call it foreign food." I picked up another slice of toast and started to butter it.

She looked at the butter and picked up the jar of marmalade with its label in English. Then she leaned forward in her seat and stared at me with her large black eyes blazing. "Why do you have to drink a foreign beverage? Why do you have to eat foreign food? Why do you have so many foreign books? Why are you so foreign altogether? In every room in this house there are imported things, but there is not a single portrait of our beloved Great Leader. We have been to many homes of the capitalist class. Your house is the worst of all, the most reactionary of all. Are you a Chinese, or are you a foreigner?"

I smiled at her outburst. My house must have seemed rather different from the others they had looted. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Lao-zhao did suggest that I hang up a portrait of Mao Zedong. But so many people had the same idea that we couldn't find a single one in any shop and had to give up. However, I thought I might try to help this pretty girl see things in their proper perspective.

"Do you eat tomatoes?" I asked her.

"Of course I do!" she said. Tomatoes were common in Shanghai. When the harvest was in, the price dropped to a few cents a catty (a catty being a little over a pound in weight). Every adult and every child in Shanghai ate tomatoes either as fruit or vegetable.

"Well, the tomato is a foreign food. It was introduced into China by foreigners. So was the watermelon, brought from Persia over the silk route. As for foreign books, Karl Marx himself was a German. If people didn't read books by foreigners, there would not have been an international Communist movement. It has never been possible to keep things and ideas locked up within the national boundary of any one country, even in the old days when communication was difficult. Nowadays, it's even more impossible. I'm pretty sure that by now people all over the world have heard that Chinese high school students are organized as Red Guards."

"Really?" she said and became thoughtful. It was apparent that I had opened a new horizon for her. After a while, she said, "You are good at making things clear. Have you been to a university?"

I had a mouthful of toast, so I just nodded. She looked wistful. "I had hoped to go to a university when I finish high school. But now there won't be any university to go to. All of us young people will have to become soldiers."

"You are a girl. You won't have to be a soldier."

"It's much worse for girls!" She sounded depressed.

"In any case, there won't be a war, so you don't have to worry." I tried to console her.

She turned quickly to look at the door and shot a glance of apprehension at the cook, who was bending over the sink washing vegetables. Putting a hand on my arm, she warned in a whisper, "Don't say that! It's dangerous to say that! Our Great Leader has already told us to prepare for a People's War against the American imperialists, the Soviet revisionists, and the reactionary Kuomintang in Taiwan. You must not speak such peace propaganda and oppose what was said by our Great Leader!" I smiled at her and nodded in agreement.

The kitchen door opened. A boy poked his head into the room to ask the cook whether the refrigerator was ready. The girl

quickly removed her hand from my arm and stood up. Although the boy had already withdrawn, she said in a firm, loud voice, "You are a class enemy. I'm not going to listen to your nonsense."

She turned to leave. But at the door she looked back and gave me a sweet smile.

At the sink, the cook said, "Not all of them are young fools!" Remembering that his youngest son was a high school student, I asked him whether the boy also belonged to the Red Guard organization.

"Oh, yes! How could he not join? He would have been looked upon as a renegade and punished. Besides, young people always want to do exactly what other young people are doing. But when he comes home my wife searches him to make sure he hasn't taken anything that doesn't belong to him."

"Is there a lot of that kind of thing going on?"

"Yes. The temptation is there. Some parents even encourage the youngsters to take things. But I'm not going to let my son be turned into a habitual thief," the cook said.

"What about the children from capitalist families?"

"They are having a hard time. They are made to feel like outcasts and required to draw a line between themselves and their parents. Young people can be very cruel to each other, you know. There has been an increasing number of suicides."

Outside the kitchen, I saw a man who had not been present with the Red Guards the night before. I could tell by his air of self-assurance that he was a Party official, perhaps a veteran of the Civil War, as he was obviously over forty.

"I'm a liaison officer of the municipal government," he introduced himself to me. "It's my job to inspect the revolutionary action of the Red Guards. Have you been beaten or ill treated?"

It was a pleasant surprise to learn that the Shanghai municipal government was endeavoring to check the excessive behavior of the Red Guards. This attempt at moderation was to be very quickly curtailed by the Maoists in the Party leadership in Beijing. The work of the liaison officer was short-lived. But when he spoke to me he was unaware of his own impending downfall, and his manner was authoritative.

"No, not at all," I said to him. "These Red Guards carried out their revolutionary action strictly according to the teachings of

our Great Leader Chairman Mao. I have been allowed to eat and sleep." The Red Guards standing around us beamed.

He declared, "That's good. It's not the purpose of the proletarian class to destroy your body. We want to save your soul by reforming your way of thinking." Although Mao Zedong and his followers were atheists, they were very fond of talking about the "soul." In his writing, Mao often referred to the saving of a man's soul. During the Cultural Revolution, "soul" was mentioned frequently. Several times, Defense Minister Lin Biao stood on the balcony of Tiananmen to speak on behalf of Mao Zedong to the Red Guards gathered below about allowing the revolutionary spirit to touch their "souls" in order to improve themselves. While no one could ask Mao Zedong or Lin Biao what exactly they meant when they talked about a man's "soul," it greatly taxed the ingenuity of the Marxist writers of newspaper articles who had to explain their leaders' words to the people.

Then the liaison officer raised his arm and swung it in a circle to embrace the whole house. "Is it right for you and your daughter to live in a house of nine rooms with four bathrooms when there is such a severe housing shortage in Shanghai? Is it right for you to use woolen carpets and have each room filled with rosewood and blackwood furniture when there is a shortage of wood and basic furniture for others? Is it right for you to wear silk and fur and sleep under quilts filled with down? Is it right for you to have three servants to wait on you?"

He looked at me for a moment. When he saw I was not going to argue with him, he went on. "As I said a moment ago, it is not our objective to destroy your body. You will be allowed enough clothing and basic furniture to carry on a normal life, but you won't be allowed to maintain a standard of living above that of the average worker."

He looked at me again for my reaction. Seeing none, he continued. "It's now quite warm, but winter will be here soon. The Red Guards will take you upstairs to pack a suitcase of clothing for yourself. Pick a warm padded jacket. You won't have central heating in this house again. Coal is needed for industry. It's not for the luxury of the capitalist class."

He went into the dining room and closed the door. I followed a Red Guard to the third floor to pick up warm clothes from the debris. A male Red Guard who had been there the night before

but had gone away in the morning returned to the house. He came up the stairs two steps at a time and said to the girl helping me, "Incredible! It's incredible! You know what I found when I went home? They are looting my house! How can they do this? My father and grandfather are both workers."

Indeed, this was extraordinary. We stopped sorting the clothes and asked him to explain.

"It's my aunt. During the Japanese invasion, she lost everything when the Japanese soldiers burned her area of Nantao City. She borrowed money to open a fruit stall after the war. She did quite well and made a living for herself and her children, but she gave it up two years ago when she got too old to manage it. Now they say she is a capitalist because she had a private business of her own. Our home is being looted because she is now living with us since her children are not in Shanghai."

The young man was full of indignation and almost in tears. The incident was a terrible blow to a self-righteous and proud Red Guard who was the third generation of a working-class family. It was also an eye-opener for me. Apparently, I decided, there were capitalists and capitalists, and none were more equal than others. If owners of fruit stalls were included in the category, the Red Guards in Shanghai had a big job to do.

More Red Guards joined us to hear the young man's story. I noticed that a couple of them slipped away quietly afterwards, no doubt going home to investigate.

Thinking of my daughter, I asked the Red Guards for her winter clothes.

"She is not included in our revolutionary action. We did not go to her room," they replied.

"But her winter clothes are not in her room. They were put away for the summer up here," I told them.

Evidently mellowed by his own family's experience, the boy whose home was looted volunteered, "We must pack a couple of suitcases for her too."

My daughter and I were each allowed a suitcase of clothes and a canvas bag with bedding.

The work of destruction accomplished, the Red Guards were getting things ready for removal. By the afternoon, there were no more than a dozen of them left in the house. One of them called me to the dining room.

The liaison officer and two of the teachers were seated by the dining table, which was strewn with old letters my grandfather had written to my father when the latter was a student in a naval college in Japan, before the 1911 revolution that made China a republic. They were included among the family papers brought to my house after my widowed mother passed away in Nanjing in 1962. I had never opened the boxes because they were to be sent to my brother in Beijing. Being the eldest son, he was the rightful heir. I could see that the paper and the envelopes were yellow with age, but the brush-and-ink handwriting of my grandfather had not faded.

After motioning me to sit down in a vacant chair, the liaison officer pointed to the letters and asked me, "Have you read these letters from your grandfather to your father?"

"My father showed them to me when I was in my teens, a long time ago," I told him.

"Your grandfather was a patriot even though he was a big landlord. He sent your father, his eldest son, to Japan to learn to become a naval officer because China suffered defeat in the naval battle against Japan in 1895. He also took part in the abortive Constitutional Reform Movement. When that failed, he returned to his native province and devoted himself to academic work. Do you respect your grandfather?"

I thought the liaison officer very brave to say my grandfather was a patriot even though he was a big landlord, because all big landlords were declared enemies of the state and shot during the Land Reform Movement in 1950. No attempt was made to verify whether any of them was a patriot. I remembered my father saying at the time that it was fortunate my second uncle, who managed the family estate, had died some years before the Communist takeover, so that my grandfather in heaven was spared the indignity of having one of his sons executed.

All Chinese revered their ancestors. Although I had never seen my grandfather, I loved him. So I said to the liaison officer, "Of course I respect and love my grandfather."

"Then why did you choose to work for a foreign firm? Don't you know the foreigners have never had any good intentions towards us? They exploited the Chinese people for economic gain or tried to enslave us politically. Only the scum of China work for foreigners. You should know that. You were offered a

job teaching English at the Institute of Foreign Languages. But you preferred to work for Shell. Why?"

I couldn't tell him that I had made the decision to work for Shell because I was afraid to get involved in the new political movement initiated by Mao Zedong. In 1957 when I was called upon to make the choice of either going to the Foreign Language Institute to teach or accepting the job with Shell, the Anti-Rightist Campaign was in full swing. It was a campaign primarily aimed at the intellectuals, especially those trained in foreign universities and suspected of harboring ideas hostile to Communism. Many of my friends and acquaintances had been denounced and persecuted. Some were sent to labor camps; a few went to prison. All the universities and research organizations, including the Foreign Language Institute, were in a state of turmoil. Under such circumstances, it would have been asking for trouble to join the teaching staff of the Foreign Language Institute. I did not regret accepting the job with Shell even though I was aware that working for a foreign firm carried with it neither honor nor position in Chinese society.

"You were probably attracted by the pay you got from the foreigners?" he asked. I realized at once that I was on dangerous ground. It was the common belief in China, the result of persistent propaganda, that members of the capitalist class would do anything for money, criminal or otherwise.

"No," I said. "I already had a great deal of money. It was mainly the working conditions at Shell, such as shorter hours, the use of a car, etc. I suppose I am lazy," I added, feeling a gesture of self-criticism was called for. Laziness was another characteristic attributed to the capitalist class.

He stood up and looked at his watch. "There are several more places I have to go," he said. "You had better think over the things you did for the foreigners and be ready to change your standpoint to that of the people. It's not our policy to destroy the physical person of the members of the capitalist class. We want you to reform. Don't you want to join the ranks of the glorious proletariat? You can do so only after being stripped of your surplus belongings and changing your way of life. It's the objective of the proletarian revolution to form a classless society in which each individual labors for the common good and enjoys the fruit of that labor, and where no one is above anyone else."

It was an attractive and idealistic picture. I used to believe in it too when I was a student. But after living in Communist China for the past seventeen years, I knew that such a society was only a dream because those who seized power would invariably become the new ruling class. They would have the power to control the people's lives and bend the people's will. Because they controlled the production and distribution of goods and services in the name of the state, they would also enjoy material luxuries beyond the reach of the common people. In Communist China, details of the private lives of the leaders were guarded as state secrets. But every Chinese knew that the Party leaders lived in spacious mansions with many servants, obtained their provisions from special shops where luxury goods were made available to their households at nominal prices, and sent their children in chauffeur-driven cars to exclusive schools to be taught by specially selected teachers. Even though every Chinese knew how the leaders lived, no one dared to talk about it. If we had to pass by a special shop for the military or high officials, we carefully looked the other way to avoid giving the impression we knew it was there.

It was common knowledge that Mao Zedong himself lived in the former winter palace of the Qing dynasty emperors and had an entourage of specially selected attractive young women as his personal attendants. He could order the Red Guards to tear up the Constitution, beat people up, and loot their homes, and no one, not even other Party leaders, dared to oppose him. Even this liaison officer, a very junior official in the Party hierarchy, could decide how many jackets I was to be allowed from my own stock of clothes and how I was to live in future. He could make all these arbitrary decisions about my life and lecture me or even accuse me of imaginary crimes simply because he was an official and I was just an ordinary citizen. He had power, but I had none. We were not equals by any stretch of the imagination.

After the liaison officer had left my house, the Red Guards learned that no trucks were available that day for them to take away the loot, so they put my jewelry and other valuables in Meiping's study and sealed the door. They also charged my servants to watch me so that I could not take back any of my things.

It was late afternoon when the last Red Guard passed through

the front gate and banged it shut. Lao-zhao and the cook tried to clear the debris that covered the floor of every room—pieces of broken glass, china, picture frames, and a huge amount of torn paper. I told them not to remove or discard anything in case something the Red Guards wanted was lost and we were accused of deliberately taking it away. They just cleared a path in the middle of each room and swept the debris into the corners.

When I went up to my bedroom to inspect the damage, I found Chen-ma already there, sitting at my dressing table staring at the mess around her. I told her to help me pick up the torn clothes and put them in one corner so that we might have some space to move about in. My bedspread was soiled with the footprints of the Red Guards. When Chen-ma and I took it off, we saw that they had slashed the mattress. On the wall over my bed, where a painting of flowers had hung, someone had written in lipstick, "Down with the Running Dog of Imperialism!" The Red Guards had punched holes in the panels of the lacquered screen. Hanging on the frame of the screen were strips of colored paper with slogans such as "Long Live the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" and "Down with the Capitalist Class." I folded the broken screen and put it in the passage outside, slogans and all. Then I picked up the crushed white silk lampshades while Chen-ma swept up the broken pieces of the porcelain lamps.

In the bathroom, soiled towels lay in a heap. The bathtub was half full of colored water because the Red Guards had emptied all the medicines from the medicine cabinet into it. I reached in to pull the plug and let the water out.

Suddenly the front doorbell rang again. Lao-zhao rushed up the stairs shouting, "Another group of Red Guards has come!"

Hastily I wiped my stained hands on a towel and came out to the landing. I said to him, "Keep calm and open the gate."

"Cook is there," he said breathlessly.

I walked downstairs. Eight men dressed in the coarse blue of peasants or outdoor workers stood in the hall. Though they were middle-aged, they all wore the armband of the Red Guard. Their leader, a man with a leather whip in his hand, stood in front of me and said, "We are the Red Guards! We have come to take revolutionary action against you!"

The situation was so absurd that I couldn't help being amused. "Indeed, are you the Red Guards? You look to me

more like their fathers," I said, standing on the last step of the staircase.

The leather whip struck me on my bare arm just above my elbow. The sharp pain made me bite my lip. The men seemed nervous; they kept looking over their shoulders at the front door.

"Hand over the keys! We haven't time to stand here and carry on a conversation with you," their leader shouted.

"The keys were taken by the Red Guards who came here last night."

"You are lying!" The man raised his whip as if to strike me again, but he only let the tip of the whip touch my shoulder.

Another man asked anxiously, "Have they taken everything?"

"No, not everything," I answered.

One of the men pushed me and my servants into the kitchen and locked us inside. He remained outside guarding the door while the others collected a few suitcases of things from the house. They departed so hurriedly that they forgot to let us out. The cook had to climb out of the kitchen window into the garden in order to get into the house to unlock the kitchen door.

Chen-ma went back to my bedroom to try to make me a bed for the night. I sat down by the kitchen table to drink a cup of tea the cook had made for me. He sat down on the other side of the table and started to shell peas.

"What's going to happen next?" he asked. "There is surely going to be lawlessness and disorder. Anybody wearing a red armband and calling himself a Red Guard can enter anybody's home and help himself."

"The Red Guards have put up a Big Character Poster on the front gate. Shall I go out and see what it says?" Lao-zhao asked me.

"Yes, please go and see."

Lao-zhao came back and told me that I was accused of "conspiring with foreign nations," which during the Cultural Revolution meant that I was a "foreign spy." Strictly translated, the four Chinese characters, *li tong wai guo*, meant "inside communicate foreign countries." It's probably considered normal and innocuous anywhere else. But in Maoist China communicating with foreign countries other than through official channels was a crime.

I was thinking how the Chinese language lent itself to euphemism when I heard my daughter opening and closing the front gate and pushing her bicycle into the garage.

"Mei-mei has come home! She will be upset!" both Lao-zhao and the cook exclaimed. (Old servants in Chinese households often gave pet names to the children. Mei-mei was what my servants had called my daughter since she was a little girl.)

I composed myself to appear nonchalant and got up to meet her.

She opened the front door and stood there, stunned by the sight of chaos. When she saw me, she rushed forward and threw her arms around my shoulders and murmured, "Mommy, oh, Mommy, are you all right?"

"Don't be upset," I said in as cheerful a voice as I could manage. "When the Cultural Revolution is over, we will make a new home. It will be just as beautiful, no, more beautiful than it was."

"No, Mommy, no one will be allowed to have a home like we had again," she said in a subdued voice.

We mounted the stairs in silence with our arms around each other's waist. I accompanied her to her bedroom. At least there everything was still just as it had been. I sat down in the armchair while she went into her bathroom. When we came out, Lao-zhao had already cleared a space in my study and laid out a folding bridge table in preparation for dinner. The cook had managed to produce a noodle dish with a delicious meat sauce served with green peas. I did not know how exhausted and hungry I was until I started to eat.

While we were eating, I told my daughter that the liaison officer had said that I would be left basic furniture and utensils necessary for a simple life, the same as that of an ordinary worker. I would ask for the second floor of the house and give the rest to the government for other families. We would have my bedroom and bathroom, Meiping's bedroom and bathroom, and the study. It would be enough for us. To be able to plan and look ahead was good. I was already resigned to a lower standard of living. It would be a novelty and probably quite pleasant not to have too many things to look after. The human spirit is resilient, and I was by nature optimistic.

I noticed that as I talked about my plan for the future, Meiping

"Oh, Mommy, how could you have forgotten something terrible like that? You lost everything!"

"Yes, I did forget. But it was wartime. People were being bombed out all over the place. Bad experience is more bearable when you are not the only sufferer."

"I'll never forget how our house looks today, not in a million years," my daughter said.

"It's always best to look ahead and not backwards. Possessions are not important. Think of those beautiful porcelain pieces I had. Before they came to me, they had all passed through the hands of many people, surviving wars and natural disasters. I got them only because someone else lost them. While I had them, I enjoyed them; now some other people will enjoy them. Life itself is transitory. Possessions are not important."

"I'm glad you are so philosophical," she said, smiling for the first time since she had come home. "Of course, we must not let our happiness be dependent on possessions. We still have each other. We can be happy together even if we are poor."

"We won't be poor. I have already told you about the assets abroad. We will always be better off than most others in China. You are worn out. I can see dark shadows under your eyes. You had better try to get some rest."

Meiping sat on in silence for a while longer, lost in thought. When she stood up, she declared, "Mommy, we will weather the storm together. I still believe in the future of our country. Things will change. They can't always be unfair like this. There are good leaders in the Party, such as Premier Zhou and many others."

"Well, I wonder what they are doing now, allowing so many innocent people to suffer."

"Don't lose heart! Surely they will do something when the time comes. I love China! I love my country even though it is not always good or right," my daughter proclaimed in a firm voice.

Her words brought tears to my eyes. I also had a deep and abiding love for the land of my ancestors even though, because of my class status, I had become an outcast.

became visibly more relaxed. She told me that in addition to appointing liaison officers to supervise the Red Guards, the Shanghai Party Secretariat and the municipal government had passed a Ten-Point Resolution stressing the importance of protecting cultural relics and pointing out that it was against the Constitution to ransack private homes. Lao-zhao stopped what he was doing to listen, and Chen-ma came out of my bedroom and clapped. They were comforted by this piece of good news. But what I had seen of the behavior of the Red Guards and what they said about revisionist officials in the government made me skeptical of the extent to which the Ten-Point Resolution was enforceable.

I knew my daughter was worried about me, as she kept looking at me anxiously. To put her mind at ease, I told her how I had lost all my possessions in Chongqing during the Sino-Japanese War.

"It happened in Chongqing in the summer of 1941. Daddy and I were about to leave for Canberra with the first group of Chinese diplomats and their families to open the new Chinese legation there. Two days before we were scheduled to leave, we had a prolonged and severe air raid. A bomb landed on the tennis court right in front of our house. The blast tore off the roof, and part of the house collapsed," I said.

"Goodness! Where were you?" my daughter asked.

"I was in the shelter under the house. Daddy was in the shelter at his office. The shelters in Chongqing were deep caves dug into mountainsides, very deep and quite safe."

"Did you lose everything in the house?"

"Fortunately we had put the packed suitcases under the stairs when the alarm sounded. The stairs collapsed and buried the suitcases underneath. We managed to dig three of them out. Of course they were in a terrible state. When we got to Hong Kong we had to buy everything all over again. We didn't have time to get the furniture out of the rubble. To this day, I have no idea what happened to it," I told her. "So you see, we did in fact lose almost everything we had."

"You never told me any of this."

"It happened such a long time ago, before you were born, when I was not much older than you are now. I had actually forgotten all about it. It was the looting by the Red Guards that made me remember it again."