

already been eaten and is now nothing more than a pile of manure.”

My answer was: “Well, maybe she has, and

maybe she’s a mother by now, eating manure to stay alive and having one litter of puppies after another . . .”



Chapter Five: *Adventure: While All Ends Well*

NO ONE assigned to the cadre school in Xi County will ever forget the rain there. It was a gray pall of rain that enveloped the world of man; the ground turned into a muddy quagmire, and even the floors of our rooms were so damp they seemed about to turn to mud. Even though the muddy roads had ruts that were as hard as iron after baking in the hot sun and raised blisters on our feet, the next rainfall turned them into rivers of mud, so slippery and hazardous that even a walking stick was little protection against losing our footing. We were lodged with local families in various villages, and when we walked over to the kitchen to eat our meals, some of us would be all muddy from having slipped and fallen on the road. Our kitchen dining room was nothing more than a mat-shed; alongside it was another shed in which the carts and tools were stored. We would push our way as far inside the sheds as possible, rice-bowls in hand, since the floor in the middle was comparatively dry. The farther from the center we stood, the muddier the flooring and the greater the risk of getting soaked by the rain that blew inside. But whether we were in the middle of the sheds or near the edges, there was no place to hide

from the water that dripped from the roofs. When the meal was over, we had to slip and slide through the mud over to the well where we washed our ricebowls. Then on the road back to the villages we had to be especially careful not to drop and break our thermos bottles; that would have been an irreversible disaster, since thermos bottles were not available locally, nor could we have had them sent from Peking. Ai! The rain in Xi County was totally debilitating.

One afternoon, during a rainstorm that had lasted several days, we held a study-session meeting in the village; after lunch, only the core or key members of the leadership met, leaving the rest of us free to do whatever we pleased. Many of us returned to the homes of our villagers to write letters, mend clothing, or make winter clothes. I was living in the home of the vice-commander of a unit at the time, and although his home was constructed of mud-packed walls, ceiling, and floor, it was better maintained than most; the wall facing south even had a window, a hole a foot wide and a half foot in height. We covered the window with a layer of paper, which kept out the wind but let in some light. My bed was in a corner

of the room that was protected from the wind, but it was so dark there that I couldn't see my fingers when I held them in front of my face. So other than as a place to sleep at night, it didn't hold the slightest attraction for me. The only light in the entire room was provided by the weak rays that filtered in through the window, and I had no desire to make any use of it. Besides, it was too much work to have to keep changing out of the battle gear that protected me from the rain—raincoat, rainpants, rainboots—which was forever coated with mud. I kept my dripping umbrella nearby, and all I had to do was pick it up with one hand and my walking stick with the other and head out into the rain.

One of the things I loved most about my hometown of Suzhou (Soochow) was the rain. The leaves on the trees in our rear garden turned the color of jade when they were bathed by the rain, and the stone paths were washed clean of all their dust. I felt that my body was refreshed, my heart cleansed. But the rain in Xi County made a person feel as though she were made of clay, that even her bones had congealed into a mass of gooey mud. I walked out of the village atop a sea of mud. I looked at my watch—it was only a little past two o'clock—and I felt a sudden desire to go see Mo-cun. I knew that it was against regulations to go see him without first getting permission, but at that time they wouldn't blow the bugle, line us up in formation, or take roll. I decided to sneak around the kitchen and take the western road.

The fields around me were all laid out with irrigation ditches; normally dry, they turned into rivers of water following the rains. As I crossed a small bridge I was faced with a pathway that was completely flooded, the water mixing with that in the irrigation ditches to form a small river. But it was only a matter of a few steps before I could be on the road itself, and since I wasn't about to turn back then, I very gingerly stepped into the shallow water on the bank. There were a few spots on the uneven ground where the water was relatively deep, but I somehow managed to cross to the crest of the bank without incident. Taking a look behind me, I was relieved to find that I was not being pursued, so I stepped onto the road and headed west, making a mental note to take a different route on my return trip.

The mud on the road forced me to go slowly,

one cautious step at a time. My rainboots grew heavier with each step, so that every so often I had to stop and scrape off the mud with my walking stick. I was wearing high-topped rainboots, but the sticky mud along the way soon clung to them and weighted them down so heavily that it was as though eunuchs were vying to relieve me of my boots.¹⁶ More than once I nearly walked right out of my boots when they stuck in the mud. Not only that, several mud clods somehow worked their way into the boots themselves. Although I started out walking on the southern edge of the road, there seemed to be more twigs and grass on the northern edge, which would have made for surer footing, so I moved over there. But then it seemed to me that there was more grass on the southern edge. It was a wide road, level and straight for all but the last twenty or thirty feet before the brick kiln, where it was all caved in. Back when we had begun digging the well for our vegetable plot, and A-xiang and I had been responsible for bringing the workers their meals, it was she who had taken control of the cart at this spot, pushing it up and over the bumps. Since it had rained for several days, this spot had now turned into a swamp, looking for all the world like a shallow pond, with two embankments running right down the middle. I stepped up onto one of the embankments and promptly sank into the water; it had only been a ridge formed by passing carts, and once it was saturated with water it crumbled as soon as it was touched. I'd trudged this far, which hadn't been easy even if it was a broad, flat road, and I wasn't about to turn back then, even though the water only lacked a couple of inches of completely covering my rainboots. Some of the ground beneath the water was sandy, while in other spots it was grassy; both the sandy and grassy spots were sometimes spongy, sometimes firm. I pressed on, one tentative step after another, using my walking stick for added support, until, to my own amazement, I forded the pond without incident.

Once I had reached the brick kiln at the top of the little hill, I had to turn and head north. A small river running from north to south flowed to

¹⁶The author has made a pun here; the eunuch allusion refers to the Tang dynasty eunuch Gao Lishi, the favorite of the emperor Ming Huang (712-755).

the foot of the hill on which the brick kiln stood; the slightest rise in the water level carried the river into the lower marshes of the wasteland to the west. Normally the river meandered past that spot at the foot of the hill, but after a heavy rainfall, the water rose until the spot became an island in the midst of rapidly flowing water. I walked along the northern bank, watching the expanse of water grow broader and broader. Mo-cun's dormitory was located on the other side, where he lived in the last of several rows of gray, tiled buildings. By the time his dormitory was in sight, the river was at least three meters across. A small bridge that was no more than four or five feet in length had been washed away and was now floating in a heap downstream. In the torrential downpour, the sky and the ground seemed to have fused together. But the three-meter-wide river in front of me had cut the road off completely. From where I stood on the eastern bank, I gazed across to the western bank at Mo-cun's dormitory, which was the westernmost of the more than ten buildings in this particular row. I looked and looked, without spotting a single person, and just then I realized what a laughingstock I'd be if anyone saw me standing there. So all I could do was turn and make my way back down the muddy road. I planned my course back as I walked along: the further south I went, the narrower the river became and the faster the water flowed. Now if I went all the way to the foot of the hill beneath the brick kiln and hopped over onto the little island, then jumped across to the other side, wouldn't that put me where I wanted to be? As I looked over at the other side I saw nothing but rock-strewn ground, with no road in sight; but at least over there I could count on an open stretch of ground, unbroken by any river. However, the footing was very slippery on the riverbank, and I couldn't be as sure of my footing in rainboots as I would in cloth shoes. Another question mark had to do with the firmness of the mud on the little island. I tested the ground with my walking stick, and it seemed firm enough, so I stuck the end of the walking stick deeply in the ground and vaulted over onto the island, then repeated the procedure to jump over to the opposite bank. The road back was full of bumps and hollows, and if I wasn't stepping into mud I was sloshing through water; but after more hardships and obstacles than

I could count, I somehow managed to make it to the front door of Mo-cun's dormitory.

I opened the door and walked in, much to his surprise.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to see you," I said with a smile.

He really gave me a piece of his mind and insisted that I return home. I was well aware that I couldn't stay there long, for a glance at my watch showed that it had taken me more than double the time it normally took to make the trip. I also had a nagging fear that the little island would continue to shrink in size, until I could no longer cross the river. And if the already leaden sky turned any darker, I'd be sure to trip and fall in the mud as I made my way across the pond.

As luck would have it, one of the men had some business to take care of at the Central Compound and would be passing right by the brick kiln as he headed west. I told him that the bridge was washed out, but he said that didn't matter, since there was another route to the south. So I decided to go along with him. Mo-cun put on his rainboots, took up his umbrella, and walked part of the way with us, before heading back. When we reached the kiln, my companion headed west, while I turned and headed east. Fortunately, this was the same road I had taken just a while earlier, so all I had to do was exercise some patience and caution and I could be a bit bolder. Night had fallen by the time I arrived at our kitchen. It was past dinner time, but a light was still burning inside the shed, and I could hear voices. Just like a thief in the night, I slipped past the kitchen and made my way back to my room as fast as the muddy footing would allow.

I've long since forgotten what I had for dinner that night, whether I had saved half a steamed bun or Mo-cun had given me something to eat; for all I know, I might have gone hungry. I thought only of my good fortune in not having fallen into the river or mud, in having kept my footing, and in having avoided being caught by the leadership; not even my roommates were aware that I had just done a very unusual thing.

As winter arrived, the entire company moved into the buildings we had constructed. The Propaganda Teams wanted us to enjoy a memorable New Year's, so we were treated to a New Year's Eve banquet to keep us from feeling homesick.

The Institute of Foreign Literature had originally been an offshoot of the Institute of Literature. The "old men" of several of the female comrades in my unit (Mo-cun was my "old man"—a woman's husband was referred to as her "old man," regardless of his age) were in the same unit, so we agreed to invite them over to share our New Year's dinner. Each of the cooks in our kitchen prepared his specialty, so we had a great many dishes that night: smoked fish, pickled chicken, braised pork, beef curry, and just about everything else you might expect, including cold vegetables in special sauces; everything was just delicious. Mo-cun spiritedly joined our vegetable-plot detail as we sat around a rectangular table and had a sumptuous spread. Quickie stayed under the table, where she ate her fill, and I wouldn't be surprised if she wagged her tail so hard that night it drooped.

I thought back to when we had celebrated Mo-cun's sixtieth birthday (we had also celebrated my sixtieth birthday, by Chinese reckoning) by eating only some canned braised chicken. That had been a day off for me, but not for him—a day off meant two meals, a day on meant three. I had gone over to his place that day right after breakfast and had no appetite at noon; then when dinnertime rolled around, I was in such a hurry to get back to my own company that all I had time for was a few bites of a steamed bun. But for this New Year's Eve meal we had good food *and* good wine. Neither of us was a drinker, but we joined the others in enjoying ourselves and putting our cares aside. Then after dinner we headed back toward Mo-cun's place together, chatting about this and that as we walked. When we reached the bridge where the tractor had tumbled into the river, Mo-cun said to me: "You go on back now." Then he crossed the bridge and headed north; he was only halfway home.

That was a day that had followed a heavy snowfall, and the snow on the road had already melted, leaving behind a road caked with mud that was already beginning to harden, even though it was still soft enough to walk on without slipping. But there was still unmelted snow on the narrow road north of the bridge. Night had fallen by then, and I was concerned that Mo-cun, with his myopia, would find it hard to see where he was going—he'd never been much good at finding his way—

so I decided to walk him all the way back to his dormitory.

When snow covered the ground, the roads were nearly indistinguishable from the surrounding fields. So I made my way very carefully, fixing each landmark securely in my mind: for instance, how many tall trees there were at a particular bend in the road, how many short trees, the shapes of the branches; a spot where the road veered off to one direction or another; a place where the snow was thicker than at other places, which meant that there was an irrigation ditch beneath my feet, the base of which was partly melted mud, and that I should avoid that spot on my return trip home.

By the time we reached our destination, Mo-cun's room was already flooded with lamplight. I knew I couldn't stay, since it was getting late, so I turned to go. A young man standing nearby offered to walk me home, since it was so dark out, but I thought it would be too great an imposition to make him leave the cozy warmth of his room and the light-hearted conversation of this New Year's Eve just to walk me home on such a dark, cold night. So I politely refused his offer, saying that I knew the way back. But all of this talk had left Mo-cun feeling anxious, so I said boastfully: "I've traveled that road twice a day for as long as I can remember! Besides, I've got a strong flashlight with me, so there's nothing to be afraid of!" Actually, the only roads I used on my daily walks were the dike on the northern side and the wide east-west road paralleling the southern dike. Mo-cun was unaware that in the space of half an hour the sky outside had changed completely and the road was no longer the road we had taken together on our way over. On top of that, finding our way over had been made easier by the lamplight coming from the buildings in front of us; heading the other way into the darkness with the light behind me would be a different matter altogether. But I stood firm in not wanting the man to see me home, and he didn't force the issue. So he walked with me as far as the lamplight reached, where I stopped and sent him back.

I had walked down enough dark roads to feel pretty confident, so I just stood there orienting myself to my surroundings, something that some people said we female comrades were not very good at. I recall reading in a book somewhere

that women were like mother hens—they lost their bearings as soon as they left the nest. This may have been an intentional insult to women, but I am definitely one of those creatures who has no sense of direction, who invariably “strikes out for south city only to wind up in north city.”¹⁷ Even with Mo-cun’s inability to find his way from one place to another, I nonetheless relied upon his sense of direction. But this time I took pains to map out my course: first I’d head southwest and cut across the woods until I reached the wide road running alongside it; then I’d turn to the west until I reached the small cluster of trees; from there I’d turn south, cross the bridge, and walk down that familiar road all the way to my dormitory.

As soon as I was beyond the range of the light from the lamps, I was enshrouded by total darkness. It was a starless night and the ground was blanketed by snow. I could neither see any trees nor find the road. When I turned on my flashlight, all I could see were the tree trunks, some off in the distance, some nearby. I paused to let my eyes get used to the dark, then took a careful look around; but there was nothing to be seen in the pervading darkness except the white snow on the ground. I could no longer even catch a glimpse of the little path that wound through the trees, the one that had been vaguely distinguishable at dusk because of the lamplight from the dormitory. I felt the urge to turn back and ask the young man to see me home after all, but I quickly realized that even a second pair of eyes wouldn’t make it any easier to find the road with all this snow on the ground. Besides, if he did see me home, he’d have to make the return trip all by himself, so it was still up to me to forge ahead as best I could.

I knew that the ground beneath my feet wasn’t going to move on its own, while I stood there trying to make up my mind, so I braced myself and headed into the darkness in a roughly south-eastern direction. If I were to go a little too far to the west, I’d never find my way out of the woods, so I chose to take a more southerly route. I could see the layer of snow beneath my feet, but each footstep left a muddy imprint. Luckily for me, there were enough sorghum stalks, dried grasses, and fallen leaves to keep the footing from getting

too slippery. I carefully made my way south, turning to the west whenever my passage was blocked by a tree.

I looked back to see if the lights from Mo-cun’s dormitory were still visible—they weren’t—and I wasn’t sure just where I was at the moment. I continued walking ahead, when suddenly my foot stepped into space and I tumbled into a ditch, scaring myself half to death. But then I recalled that there was a wide, very deep ditch that ran alongside the road next to the woods, and I actually rejoiced over my good fortune in having fallen into it. I quickly turned on my flashlight, found a way out, and climbed up onto the road beside the woods.

Since there was no snow on this road, walking along it was no problem, so I started taking longer strides. But I had to be prepared to turn south at the right place, for if I kept walking straight ahead, I’d wind up at a neighboring village west of the Central Compound. Trees had been planted alongside the road, one every dozen steps or so, but I could only see the trunks, not the branches, the leaves, or the unique shapes of the trees themselves. None of the landmarks I had noted on my way over came into view. I was anxious that I might miss the turnoff and be unable to find the bridge from which the tractor had fallen. If I had to miss it, I’d be better off turning too soon than turning too late, for if I passed the point, I’d drift off into the fields, where I could easily spend the entire night walking around in circles. So the moment I spotted a cluster of trees nearby, I turned abruptly to the south.

As soon as I left the road my sense of direction deserted me; after a few steps I discovered that I was standing in a clump of sorghum stalks. But I kept walking straight ahead, for as long as I was headed south, sooner or later I’d reach the river, and once I’d done that, I’d be able to find the bridge.

I had once heard someone say that there were bad people who hid themselves in the sorghum fields on dark nights; I was also afraid that wild dogs could hear me coming, so I kept my ears pricked, listening very carefully to the sounds around me as I walked along gingerly, trying to avoid stepping on the dried leaves from the sorghum stalks on the ground around me. The soil was very muddy, but not all that slippery. I relied

¹⁷The final line of Du Fu’s “Lament By the River’s Edge.”

upon all my senses, preferring not to use my flashlight. I don't know how long I had been walking when I suddenly spotted a road in front of me running from left to right, beyond which rose a tall dike. I'd made it to the river! The only problem was that, with the snow-covered ground and the darkness of the night, that familiar old road had become a stranger, and I didn't know if I was east of the bridge or west of it—for there was a tall dike on the western bank as well. Now if I had already made it to the west bank, the river should widen the farther west it flowed, and I would have to walk all the way to another brick kiln west of the Central Compound before I could cross to the other bank, then turn and head south until I made my way back to my dormitory. I had heard that one of the cadre-school "students" had hanged himself in that kiln recently. Fortunately, I was no longer the "scardy cat" of former days, for if I had been, just thinking about one man drowning under this very bridge and another hanging himself in the kiln would have been enough to paralyze me with fear right there at the riverside. I suspected that in my impatience I had turned too early and was still on the eastern side of the bridge; so I headed west, and after walking for a while my suspicions were confirmed, for I finally reached the bridge.

Even after crossing the bridge, I still had half the distance to go, so I walked as fast as I could, and before long, I was home.

"Back already?" one of my roommates greeted me with a smile on her face, as though I had just gone out for a little stroll. There in my brightly lit room I could scarcely believe that there was an entirely different world out in the pitch-black wilds.

In the early spring of 1971, the Study Division cadre school moved en masse from Xi County to a barracks at the Minggang Division Headquarters. The mission for our cadre school was changed from performing labor to "study sessions"—the study of class struggle, we supposed. For those people who hadn't quite comprehended the significance of the abbreviation "Study Division," it now suddenly dawned on them. Of course, "Study Division" was meant to be short for "Study Session Division."¹⁸

¹⁸See the opening line on page 9.

Watching movies must have been considered a study session of sorts, and it sure beat classwork. No one was excused from these sessions (Mo-cun's vision was so poor that he couldn't see what was on the screen, so he was given special dispensation). On nights when movies were shown, right after dinner we all took folding stools and lined up in the public square. Every unit had its own designated area, where each of us sat in close file on our stools. The ground in our particular designated space turned into a quagmire after a rainfall, and we had to set up our stools right there in the mud—sometimes it started raining while we were out there, so we had to take raingear along with us. And during hot nights we were exposed to hordes of mosquitoes. But this sort of class required no examinations. As long as I could keep my eyes open I watched the screen, and when I couldn't I rested. There weren't more than a few movies altogether, so whatever I missed when I rested my eyes I'd have plenty of chances to see later on. After we returned to our dormitory, the thirty women who shared one room would discuss the movie we had just seen, while I would just sit quietly by so as not to show my ignorance on the subject.

One night as we were returning to the dormitory after watching a movie, I continued my woolgathering, fixing my gaze on the feet of the person ahead of me as I walked along. I suddenly realized that the ranks ahead were starting to thin, and I soon found myself in the dormitory passageway—but it wasn't *my* dormitory. I quickly disengaged myself from the ranks, of which only the tail-end now remained. Then they too entered the dormitory one by one. I had no idea where my own dormitory was, nor did any of the people I asked. They were too busy returning to their own rooms to pay any attention to me. I suddenly felt like someone who had drifted into a strange town, where she didn't know a soul.

I looked up at the star-filled sky. I knew some of the constellations, but now they all seemed to be out of place. I never did know how to tell directions by the stars, but at least I could see by their placement that I was a long way from my dormitory. The camp occupied a huge area and was comprised of a great many barracks buildings scattered all over the place, all of which were now brightly lit up. I don't know how many roads

crisscrossed the camp, but there were plenty. And since every building looked exactly like all the others, if I just started running up one path and down another, once people started turning out their lamps, I wouldn't have a prayer of finding my dormitory. My only chance was to locate the stone-paved road on the southern boundary of the camp, since I could find my way home from there. I knew that the public square where the movies were shown wasn't far from the road, and I suspected that the unfamiliar dormitory I had stumbled upon couldn't be far from the square. Most of the barracks buildings faced south, which meant that the Big Dipper was behind them—I knew that much, at least. So all I had to do was turn my back to this dormitory and I'd be facing south; that should take me up to the road, and even if that turned out to be the long way around, at least the road made for easy walking.

Not wanting to waste any more time, I concentrated on walking due south, instead of following the winding paths, taking whatever shortcuts were necessary, even when it meant cutting across the camp's vegetable plot. This plot was vastly different from ours in Xi County: the soil here was so fertile that the neatly laid out beds were teeming with all kinds of vegetables. I knew that there was one deep manure pit for every one or two vegetable beds, for not long before this, a tall young man in our unit had fallen into one of these pits on the way back from watching a movie. After climbing out, he had gone immediately to the "water house"—which is what we called our shower area—without a thought for how cold it was, and scrubbed himself for the longest time before returning quietly to his room. In this way he managed to avoid making a public spectacle of himself. If I were to fall into one of the pits now, I'd sink straight to the bottom, and none of my shouts would bring anyone to my rescue. As for the terror of taking a shower in ice-cold water, that was an eventuality that didn't even have to be considered.

Since I was always walking in rank, there had been no need to carry a flashlight, so I hadn't paid any attention to the condition of the batteries. Now the flashlight was nearly dead, and all I could see was the leaf-covered ground, although I couldn't tell what kind of vegetables I was walking through. My only protection against falling into

one of the pits was something I had learned from Zhu Bajie and his experience with walking across a frozen lake.¹⁹ Now although I didn't have a carrying pole to lay across my shoulder, as he had, I at least had my stool, which I could carry in front of me as an extension of my body. But if I were to fall in up to my waist and my shouts brought no one to my aid, I'd still wind up at the bottom of the manure pit. I forced myself to stop thinking these wild thoughts and concentrated on moving ahead, the stool in one hand, the flashlight in the other. I walked very gingerly, brushing aside vegetable leaves with each step, and although I was feeling pretty anxious, I proceeded with great caution, as though I were on the edge of a deep abyss. I didn't dare make a single false step. I finally crossed the vegetable plot, with considerable difficulty, but as soon as I stepped over an irrigation ditch, I found myself in yet another vegetable plot. It was like a nightmare—I kept walking and walking, but I didn't think I'd ever find my way out of the vegetable plots.

Fortunately I had been heading in the right direction, and at last I emerged from the vegetable plot. I crossed a little asphalt road, a vacant grassy area, and a stone pile, finally setting foot on the paved road I had been looking for. I really started to move then, alternately running and walking fast; before long I was headed west, and from there it was a straight shot back to the dormitory. The lights were still on in the room, and the last group of women was just then returning from the toilet. Obviously, I hadn't been out in the fields for even twenty minutes. Luckily I hadn't taken a wrong turn somewhere; it was almost as though I had just returned to the room from a visit to the toilet, and no one would have dreamed that I had followed the wrong group of people with my eyes wide open. I began to wonder when I might have been discovered if I had fallen into one of the manure pits.

I lay down on my hard, sturdy little bed and slept more peacefully that night than any other in memory.

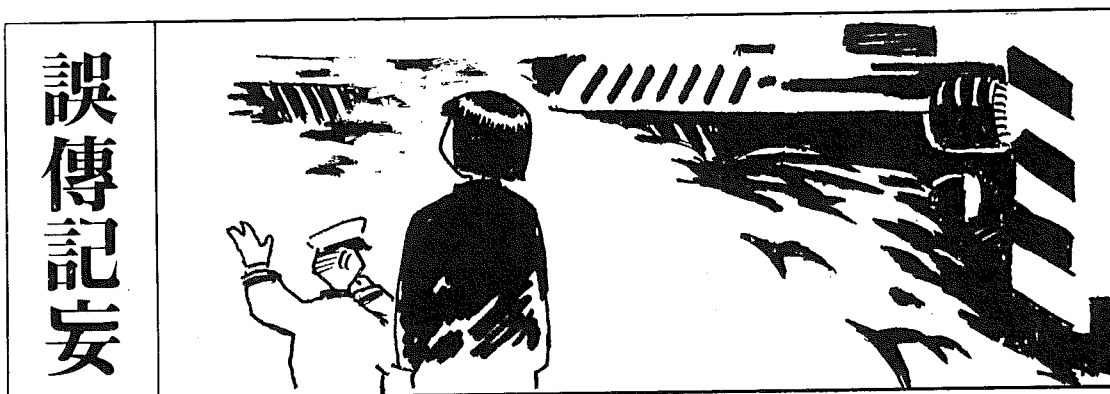
One of my colleagues, who was two years

¹⁹Zhu Bajie (Chu Pa-chieh) is one of the main characters in the classical novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*), translated by Anthony C. Yu (known as Pigsy in Arthur Waley's *Monkey*).

younger than I, was sitting quietly on her stool watching the movie after dinner one night, and suffered a stroke; she was immediately paralyzed and beyond help before we knew it. From then on, the older folks were excused from the movie sessions. I often wondered whether, if I had been forced to shout for help in front of that unfamiliar dormitory, the old folks might have been excused from these sessions even earlier. But then my

shouts of distress might not have been tragic enough, and could have been used as a lesson by negative example.

These three incidents were, for me, somewhat dangerous adventures, although, in truth, there wasn't all that much danger involved; they would have been truly dangerous only if they had ended in tragedy.



誤傳記妄

Chapter Six: *Wronged: But Home—At Last*

WHEN I WAS being put up in Yang Village, the cat belonging to my landlord once played a prank on me. We lit a kerosene lamp in the room each night, which we hung on the wall alongside the door, and since my bed was the farthest from the door, I was always in the shadows. One evening, after my roommate and I had finished washing up at the well, we returned to our room, where I could discern two strange objects on my bed. Fortunately for me, I refrained from reaching out and touching whatever they were; instead I shone my flashlight on the objects, which turned out to be a gutted and bloody dead rat, with its pink innards lying in a heap alongside it. Neither of us had the nerve to pick the things up in our fingers, so I very gingerly removed my comforter and pillow, then my roommate and I lifted up the bedsheet by its corners and carried the dead rat outside, where we dumped it into the compost pit

behind the house. I rose early the next morning and washed my bedsheet, using one bucketful of water after another. After washing it several times, I hung it out to dry, then washed it again, and still I thought the bloodstains would never come out.

The next time I saw Mo-cun, I related this ill-omened incident to him, telling him that the cat had "dined" me with a decayed rat. "That's a good omen," he said to console me. "It could mean that you'll be taking leave of this place soon. Having the rat and its innards separated into two piles means 'taking leave of,' while the word 'rat' (*shu*) is roughly homophonous with 'place' (*chu*). I had quite a laugh over the way he so cleverly used dream analysis or word dissection to explain what had happened, even though he must have known that I wasn't about to believe this story he had concocted to make me feel better. I could have responded to him in the manner of the *dazi*-

bao [big-character posters] by shouting: "Your ideological foundation is crystal clear! So you're thinking about leaving this place, huh? Well, you can forget about that!" The truth of the matter was, we both knew that "freedom is being familiar with discipline": if you know that a door is securely locked, pushing on it or trying to break it down is an exercise in futility.

On one of the last days of the year, during one of our meetings at the vegetable plot, Mo-cun let me in on a very unexpected piece of news.

On his trips to the post office he often helped one of the workers there decipher some of the hard-to-read Chinese characters. He provided a valuable service by locating some of the obscure place names, and the man came to regard him highly, rewarding him for his efforts with glasses of tea. The locals called boiled water "tea," but it was the real stuff that Mo-cun was treated to. It was this comrade who told Mo-cun that a telegram had been received from Peking, which ordered the Study Division cadre school to send a group of its "old, weak, sick, and disabled" members back to the capital, and Mo-cun's name was supposed to be on the list.

I couldn't have been happier, since if Mo-cun could return to Peking, he and A-yuan could rely upon one another to get by. That way I could stay behind alone at the cadre school without any worries; besides, I could make an annual trip back to Peking to visit my family. At the time, no working couples at the Xi County cadre school enjoyed that privilege, even if they weren't actually living together.

A few days later, on one of his return trips from the post office with his sack of mail, he broke precedent by crossing the river to come over and see me; he was making a special trip to pass on the news that the list of approved names of the "old, weak, sick, and disabled" who were to be sent back to Peking had arrived, and his name was on it.

I had already begun thinking about packing for him, and now I could only wait on pins and needles until the date was announced. A few days later, when he came by to see me, his face was as calm as ever.

"Hasn't it been officially announced yet?"

It had, and his name wasn't on it.

While he told me the names of those who were

returning to Peking, my heart sank. Had there not been the erroneous information in the first place, there would have been nothing to give rise to hope. Nor would there have been the bitter disappointment that came with frustrated hope.

I accompanied him as far as the riverbank, then walked back to the shed and watched his back as it receded into the distance, a hundred thoughts running through my mind.

Did Mo-cun have more "youthful vigor" than the others? I recited Han Yu's poem "Written For Zhang Gongcao on the Night of August Fifteenth,"²⁰ and was almost carried away by my emotions.

As I began to recite the poem, I thought of the damning material in Mo-cun's dossier. If it hadn't been for the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" we would never have known about this material.

During the early stages of the "Cultural Revolution," several people had joined forces to put up a *dazibao* denouncing Mo-cun for being contemptuous of the published works of the leader [Mao Zedong]. People who knew Mo-cun, however slightly, reacted to seeing this by saying that if that fellow Qian had said something to that effect, he would certainly have done so in a more witty fashion, and that even the tone wasn't quite right. Someone tipped me off about the *dazibao*, which I went to see. I was furious. I said that in order to "chase the wind and clutch at shadows" —to make groundless accusations—one at least needed some wind and some shadows; people shouldn't be allowed to frame someone without any cause at all. After the two of us had been released from our respective "cowsheds," I told Mo-cun all about the incident. Together we drafted a small-character poster [*xiaozibao*], spelling out every aspect of the case and demanding a fair investigation. After eating our dinner as fast as we could, we went over to the Study Division with a jar of paste and a flashlight, where we pasted up our *xiaozibao* directly beneath the *dazibao*. The next day I was subjected to a no-nonsense struggle session. Some time after this incident I discovered that the accusations in the *dazibao* hadn't been

²⁰The author implies here that her husband's release from the cadre school was thwarted by someone above him for reasons not made clear here.

bao [big-character posters] by shouting: "Your ideological foundation is crystal clear! So you're thinking about leaving this place, huh? Well, you can forget about that!" The truth of the matter was, we both knew that "freedom is being familiar with discipline": if you know that a door is securely locked, pushing on it or trying to break it down is an exercise in futility.

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²⁰The author implies here that her husband's release from the cadre school was thwarted by someone above him for reasons not made clear here.

completely without basis. Someone had in fact accused "this fellow Qian" of saying something along the lines described. Obviously, the accusation had been placed in his dossier without anyone checking to see if it was accurate, and when they did get around to investigating, the "accuser" denied making the accusation. I'm sure that the Red Guards' investigation was a thorough one, but they were unable to produce any proof. Before Mo-cun was sent down to the cadre school, the Propaganda Team considered this "accusation" to be a very serious matter, for even though no proof had surfaced, they were convinced that where there's smoke there's fire, and they ordered him to write a self-examination. He had to handle this tactfully, so he wrote a self-examination that skirted the issues. I still feel a sense of injustice every time I recall this incident.

This time, when Mo-cun came to see me in the vegetable plot, I said to him: "That damning material has come back to haunt you for sure." But he thought I was being silly; since everything had been decided, why worry about what was coming back to haunt him. I admitted that I was being silly, and that it was foolish to engage in wishful thinking; still, what had happened so long ago remained in my heart and wouldn't go away.

On the day the people departed for Peking, we got up early and hurried over to the public square by the highway to give them a sendoff. The feelings that a visitor away from home has when he sees someone off to where he himself came from are quite unique. I felt terribly disappointed as I watched one truck after another pull out with the people and their belongings; just then, one of my female companions took me by the arm and said: "Come on! Let's go back!" So I went with her back to the dormitory, where she sighed long and hard, as though she wanted to say something. But the words wouldn't come, so we retired to our rooms.

Only the "old, weak, sick, and disabled" had returned to Peking, and after we saw them off, we were left with the feeling that we might spend the rest of our lives here at the cadre school. I walked alone over to the vegetable plot, when a new thought suddenly hit me: If I had seen Mo-cun off, could I still experience the sense of "we?" Even though I would still be physically at the cadre school, my mood would be quite different,

for I would no longer be able to consider myself a part of "we." I thought back to the days just before Liberation, when so many people had been fleeing the country in alarm; with so many roads open to the two of us, why hadn't we chosen to leave? Had we been progressive thinkers then? Had we had high political consciousness? Mo-cun had often quoted the lines of the poet Liu Yong:

*Although my girdle grows loose, I care not;
For her I pine with no regrets.*²¹

We had simply been unwilling to abandon the motherland, to cast off the "you;" in other words, it was all tied up with the concept of "we" or "us." And even though we had never met the billion other people who made up this "we," this "us," we were still part of the same body—we all shared a common lot and were closely bound up with one another. We were all indispensable parts of a whole. I was ashamed of myself for having listened to rumors and let myself get carried away with wild thoughts; I had hoped only that Mo-cun could return to Peking and be together with A-yuan again—I couldn't see beyond the well-being of my own family. Since Liberation, after having been through the fire and crucible of reform, I'm afraid that I was worse off than at the very beginning.

* Mo-cun walked across the vegetable plot toward me; I pointed to the shed and said: "If they'd give us a shed like that, we could live there together. What do you think?"

He thought it over for a moment, then said: "There aren't any books."

He was right—we could get by without all the other material comforts, but the days would be far too long without any books. All he had in his trunk were things like dictionaries, notebooks, and calligraphy models.

"Are you sorry we stayed on back then instead of leaving?" I asked him.

"If I could turn back the clock, I'd probably do the same thing all over again."

Mo-cun had always been one to make up his mind quickly, seemingly without thinking things

²¹The final two lines of Liu's *ci* (詞) to the tune of *Feng Qi Wu*. Here the "her" clearly refers to the motherland.

out first. But once his decision had been made, he stuck by it. I'm the type who tries to think things out from every angle, but we invariably arrive at the same conclusions. Since we had made our decision, and had done so with our eyes open, we stuck to our guns and avoided letting our thoughts get out of hand.

After the cadre school had moved to Minggang, Mo-cun's and my dormitories were separated only by a single row of buildings, so it took no more than five or six minutes to get from one to the other. We lived in large tile-roofed buildings with glass windows and cement floors. The food there was better than it had been at the Study Division dining hall, and we no longer had to put up with toilets with rush walls and shallow pits, nor did we have to stand in line to use them. Our living quarters were spacious enough that we could take our reference books and notebooks out of our trunk and put them to use. Then in addition to a continuous stream of foodstuffs, A-yuan also sent us foreign magazines and newspapers of every type from Peking. And the various books that were circulated secretly among our companions were always worth another reading. Our surroundings were peaceful and beautiful, and there was plenty of room to walk around. The two of us went for a stroll every day at dusk, which was a great improvement over having to meet in the vegetable plot. But since we weren't engaged in either physical or mental labor, we felt ashamed that we weren't earning our keep, and the sight of all those promising young people doing nothing but holding daily meetings and making speeches filled us with secret anxieties.

Absolutely nothing was done at the cadre school, but still we couldn't leave. Even though no more than an hour's walk separated us from the train station, without written authorization from the Propaganda Team, no one could buy a ticket. Once when Mo-cun had a toothache and I had an eye infection, we chose a date to request permission to see a doctor at Xinyang. The hospital there had developed a new technique called massage extraction—they'd massage the gums, then extract the teeth. But there were no volunteer patients, for everyone ran away from the treatment. Mo-cun and I went out and took a stroll through one of the area's scenic spots, the name of which escapes me now. The "mountain" was an

earthen mound, the "lake" a nearly dried-up pond; there was a dilapidated bridge and several patches of medicinal plants growing in the "valleys." Even though there wasn't much to do there, our spirits were extremely high, because we had been given a day off from our studies. After that I went by myself to Xinyang to have my eye checked, and discovered that my tear duct was torn. I was advised to go to Peking to have it taken care of, but the Propaganda Team would not permit it under any circumstances. So I requested a leave of absence to return to Peking, for which I had to get authorization from the Study Division before I would be allowed to register at the hospital. This rule was probably instituted to keep the people at the cadre school from going to Peking on the pretext of seeking a doctor, then not returning.

Anyone who came down with a major illness at the cadre school was completely at the mercy of Lady Luck. On my return from Peking, after having had my eye taken care of, I brought A-yuan back with me on a family visit. We presumed that Mo-cun would be there to meet us when we arrived in Minggang, but when we got off the train, we didn't spot him anywhere on the platform. We continued looking for him outside the station and on the road all the way back to the cadre school, afraid that we had missed him at the train station and that he was still there looking for us. Who could have guessed that after I had left for Peking, he would have taken seriously ill with asthma and a high fever! A-yuan and I weren't informed of this until we were almost at his dormitory. The medical worker assigned to his company wouldn't even qualify as a "barefoot doctor." She herself told me that this was the first time in her life she had ever given an intravenous injection, and she had been so nervous that she had broken out in a sweat; then after injecting the needle she had even forgotten to remove the rubber tourniquet she had wound around Mo-cun's upper arm. But after two injections, his condition improved, and by the time A-yuan and I arrived at the cadre school, his temperature had already subsided. The medical worker kept pointing to herself, throwing her head back, and saying: "Mr. Qian, you know I saved your life!" Indeed it was fortunate she had been around. If she had been afraid or unwilling to give those two injections and Mo-cun had been sent somewhere far away for treatment, things could