



**Liao Yiwu**

**Love in the Times of Mao Zedong**

**464 pages**

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### **IN BRIEF**

Love in the Time of Mao is the newest novel by exiled Chinese dissident and writer Liao Yiwu, currently being translated into English by Chenxin Jiang. It's a modern-day picaresque following the adventures of teenage Zigui as he survives the dangerous twists and turns of the Cultural Revolution.

### **SYNOPSIS**

In 1966, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Zhuang Zigui is seventeen years old. To secure his place on a delegation of Red Guards that will be reviewed in Beijing by Chairman Mao, he slaps his father on the face during a struggle session. He sends his mother, who comes from a warlord family, to a lunatic asylum. Then he makes the pilgrimage to Beijing together with the other Red Guards, hoping to be reviewed by Chairman Mao. On the train, he meets Nie Honghong and falls in love with her. Over the next few months, Honghong and Zigui get caught up in the Great Linking Up, the frenzy of Red Guards making revolution and travelling the country for free. The excerpt included here, comprising the first three chapters of the novel, is from this section.

Honghong faints during a hunger strike and is taken to hospital, where she is treated well because her father is an influential pro-establishment figure. Her father has Zigui arrested, but he is released when the political climate turns against the pro-establishment faction. Eventually, during an attack on a factory, Honghong is dashed to death by a worker when she attempts to storm the building by ladder. The Red Guards execute her father shortly thereafter.

Like many other educated young people, Zhuang Zigui is eventually “sent down” to the countryside to be reeducated. His days are mind-numbingly long, and relations with the peasants worsen when the educated youth are caught picking pockets at the market. Zigui falls in love with one of the other educated youths, a girl called Er Ya. He stays up all night reading a handwritten copy of the erotic novel *Heart of a Young Girl*, but it makes him horny, and he ends up raping Er Ya and destroying their relationship. Er Ya returns to the city where she gets married, but Zhuang Zigui remains in the countryside as a village teacher.

He finally returns to Chengdu in 1976, the year in which both Mao Zedong and the powerful premier Zhou Enlai die. Zigui encounters a young woman called Yang Dong who was involved in the non-violent April 5th protests mourning Zhou Enlai’s death, and manages to rescue her from arrest. Having drawn attention to himself, Zigui is forced to flee to Tibet, where he develops a more mature relationship with the Tibetan woman Zhuo Ma. But before long, a commemoration of the 1959 Tibetan uprising ends in bloodshed and Zigui has to flee again. He makes his way across the Gobi Desert and ends up heading home. On the train he and Yang Dong meet again by chance. As they are making love in a train compartment, funereal music is broadcast— Chairman Mao has died. The two have no choice but to interrupt their love-making and take part in the communal outpouring of grief. They eventually part ways.

Covering ten years of the Cultural Revolution, this novel was first drafted in secret in a Sichuan prison in 1993. Liao Yiwu rewrote the novel multiple times and finally finished it in early 2016, on the 50th anniversary of the Cultural Revolution.

### **Liao Yiwu**

Liao Yiwu was born in 1958 in Sichuan, China. In 1990, he was arrested by the Chinese government for a poem condemning the massacre at Tiananmen Square and imprisoned for four years. After his release, he supported himself by working as a folk musician and eventually began to write acclaimed oral histories of people on the margins of Chinese society. In English he has published *The Corpse Walker. Real Life Stories: China From the Bottom Up* (2008), *God Is Red: The Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished*

*in Communist China* (2011), and *For a Song and a Hundred Songs: A Poet's Journey through a Chinese Prison* (2013).

In 2011, he was finally able to leave China and immediately sought asylum in Germany, where he now lives in Berlin. Awards he has received include a Freedom to Write Award from the Independent Chinese PEN Center, the German Geschwister-Scholl-Preis, and the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (2012).

**Translation: Chenxin Jiang**

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## CHAPTER 1: THE PILGRIMAGE TO BEIJING

The train huffed and puffed and was finally off. Zigui bent down to look at the sea of heads beneath him like so many cabbages in a pot of soup. He spotted a single face that looked up pleadingly at him. It belonged to the girl – she was wedged in so tightly she was going to turn into a flatfish. “Serves you right!” Zigui said under his breath. But something made him stick his hand out: “Come up here, miss!”

As the compartment whistled and hooted, he hauled the girl onto the luggage rack, even though there was actually no space for her. “Is this girl your wife?” said one irritated boy. He looked startled when the girl burst into tears.

Zigui cleared his throat and began to recite Chairman Mao’s words in perfect Mandarin. “As our Great Leader said: ‘We come from the four corners of the earth and have gathered together for a single revolutionary goal...’” The rendition earned him applause and cheers from both the stalls and the balcony. A moist little face unexpectedly thrust itself up to his: “Big brother Zhuang, I can give her my spot.” He recognized the speaker as the little chap who had yanked at his ears earlier. Zigui took off his own cap and planted it on the boy’s forehead as a reward. “I’ll call you Little Lei Feng from now on,” he said.

Their heads pressed together, they spent three days on the luggage racks, only climbing down to eat or shit if they really had to. The megaphone kept playing sayings from the Little Red Book set to music, which put Zigui to sleep. The girl, whose name was something like Hong, hummed along with her thin little voice but could never quite keep up. Her voice had a wistful quality to it. It was the most plaintive rendition of a revolutionary anthem that Zigui had ever heard. Even though it didn’t fit in with their surroundings, he liked it.

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For Zhuang Zigui, it all began with that rally. After a long tussle with his conscience, he bit his finger and signed a denunciation of his reactionary bourgeois family in blood, in hopes of

securing his place on a delegation of Red Guards that would be reviewed in Beijing by Chairman Mao. He wasn't the only child of class enemies who made that choice.

Zigui had his mother, who wore a big straw hat all year round, put into a mental asylum. At a rally to "Destroy the Three-Family Village," he was the first to clamber on stage and box his own father's ears as he stood bent over at the side of the stage. His father slowly turned his head to look at him. "Xiaogui!" he said affectionately.

Zigui's face was distorted by rage and his eyes were bloodshot. As the crowd applauded vigorously, he stood rooted to the spot by the sound of his childhood nickname in his father's voice. It took him to a faraway world in which even the echoing applause began to sound like the words "Xiaogui, Xiaogui, Xiaogui..." His eyes filled with tears and the chairperson had to jerk him aside. But his application to join the Red Guards was approved right away. As a model "revolutionary son of a counterrevolutionary father," he was even given a minor post in the publicity division.

Zigui led the Red Guards in a raid on his own home. They burned the shelves of Chinese and foreign books his father had collected over the course of years. Then he moved into the broadcast station at the Red Guards' headquarters, where he would live and breathe revolution. One night two months later, when he was feeling a little tired and lonely, he slipped back home, planning to just take a quick look around and leave. He found a seal across the door. Zigui peeked in, listening to the rats squeal. Overwhelmed, he leaned against the door and wept. Suddenly, he was disturbed by a sound of frail breathing behind him. He wiped his tears on his sleeve and turned around. There was the familiar straw hat, with his mother's eyes glinting beneath it. Zigui breathed a sigh of relief. Dressed all in black, she appeared so elegant and insubstantial she might as well have floated in from the dark night. He looked around warily and yanked his mother from the garish glare of the streetlight into the shadows. She stroked his face. For a moment Zigui couldn't speak. He took his mother's hands and pressed them to his lips, letting the sharp night-sky cold of her fingertips diffuse downward into his diaphragm and bathe him in the maternal love that seemed a kind of wistful religion.

Without quite thinking about what he was doing, he roamed through the streets with his mother, keeping her company until dawn woke him from his fantasy of childhood. The world of big-character posters and revolutionary flags grew crisp in the daylight, rousing the red devil in

him. He glared at his mother. She looked away quickly and her hat fell to the ground. Now he could make out her pale cheeks ruddy with blush, her gaudy lipstick and frail frame. Zigui remembered the winter night during his childhood when his mother had wept in front of her husband and son for a lover who had died in prison. Yes, that was his unlovable mother. His mother, who couldn't get rid of her bourgeois weakness for make-up. She was a spiritually polluted lunatic. How could he possibly be her son? He gripped her with both hands and took her back to the mental asylum.

They were making a revolution at the asylum too. The doctors all wore military fatigues over their white coats. Zigui bellowed at the gatekeeper: "Chairman Mao says: 'Help the sick and practice revolutionary humanitarianism!' I am a Red Guard of the Jinggangshan Troop bringing a fugitive patient back." The gatekeeper saluted and hollered back even more loudly: "Our Great Leader taught us: 'Serve the people!' I'll take charge of the fugitive." He laid his hands on Zigui's mother and marched her to the end of the corridor, his footsteps thudding in Zigui's brain.

Zigui was distracted by strange cries coming from an examination room to his left. He pushed the door open and saw a Red Guard standing on his right leg and kicking an old man so hard that the man's nose bled and a tooth rolled to the floor. Zigui couldn't help exclaiming: "Chairman Mao says: 'Fight with the pen and not with the sword!'" The kung fu master responded, his foot suspended mid-air: "Our Great Leader taught us: 'Everything counterrevolutionary must be beaten, or it won't be beaten down!' This old geezer is the superintendent here, a counterrevolutionary academic authority. He won't admit his guilt, but we'll show him who's boss!"

Zigui couldn't stop staring at the raised leg of the kung fu master, who swung it over the head of the old man and brought it to rest it on the desk: "You might not know me: I'm the leader of the January Storm Militia at this hospital. I've been practicing these techniques on the crazies for years: they're so filthy I can't stand to touch them, so I don't do injections or electrotherapy or anything like that: I just kick them into submission. Now I've finally found a real use for my talents!"

Zigui's knees went weak. He felt terrible about having delivered his mother into the charge of this tyrant. He was already fed up with the interminable Cultural Revolution, but as soon as he

recognized his own thought error, he felt guilty about it. He gritted his teeth and resolved to improve his attitude.

Zigui was eventually permitted to make a pilgrimage to Beijing as an official representative of the Jinggangshan Red Guards.

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When he got to the train station, it was bursting at the seams. There were no ticket inspectors and the crowd surged past the ticket barriers towards the overloaded train, which wheezed like an asthma patient and seemed to be sinking very slightly into the ground. The megaphones screeched: “Comrades! Let us win the revolution with discipline!” “Beware class enemies and saboteurs!” There was no boarding the train through the doors, since the doorways were all occupied by large men, so people were climbing into the windows. A few of the taller Red Guards picked Zigui up and tried to shove him in. Those of them who had already made it hauled him in through the window, while a snot-nosed boy tried to help by yanking on Zigui’s ears. Zigui yelped with pain: “Fuck you, can’t you tell I’m human?” The car roared with laughter: “Actually, we thought you were a piece of luggage!”

Zigui’s pants had ripped, but he couldn’t care less. He immediately clambered onto one of the little tables to help yank another girl in. She grinned at him when she made it, showing two pretty front teeth. The car was hot and dank. Everyone was sweaty. Zigui himself was drenched, but he took out his crumpled handkerchief and handed it to the girl. She shook her head, a single curl sticking out from beneath her military cap, and produced her own neatly folded handkerchief to fan herself. Zigui was baffled, but the idea amused him. He made a show of taking his own cap off and fanning her with it far more effectively. “Thank you!” the girl said. She stopped fanning and just smiled at him while he fanned her as if she was a princess. Zigui was irritated. “Bourgeois miss!” he said. He climbed onto the luggage rack, which he shared with a few other skinny boys.

Little Lei Feng lay snoring between Zigui’s knees. Zigui had the urge to whisper something to this girl. He’d never felt this way before. He’d never known any woman apart from his mother up close. Her face and big straw hat seemed so grotesquely out of place in the new revolutionary world. He squinted up at the ceiling of the compartment, as if that would let him float above the sea of heads into a quiet shrine all his own. The Mother of God accepted his contrition and understood

him completely. He began to tell her everything, softly, quickly, in no particular order. How he'd let his father down, how he loved Chairman Mao and also loved his father. When had the two loves become mutually exclusive? He told her that he'd secretly spent all night wandering around with his mother, who was from a warlord's family. His unfortunate parents still lived in the past and had old ways of thinking. He pitied them, too, which only showed how unregenerate he himself was. To pity his parents was to betray the revolution, pity was bourgeois. But he could swear that his worship of Chairman Mao was sincere. Do I deserve to be reviewed by the Great Leader? he asked the silent Mother of God. My feeble bourgeois affections might betray the revolution at some crucial point. He kept murmuring aloud about whatever came to mind. He'd completely forgotten where he was, who he was and where he was going. No, this was his only chance to commune with her. He craned his neck, drenched with sweat. Zigui's family background was the greatest burden he had. Why hadn't he simply been born in an ordinary worker's family? He'd have to get rid of all these doubts and questions before he'd be worthy to stand on Tiananmen Square. Are human beings red or black at heart? he asked her. Is there any such thing as good and evil, pure red and pure black?

A little hand touched his face. He couldn't bear to open his eyes in case his lashes scared it away. The train entered a long tunnel, as if it were hurtling through the center of the earth to the other side. Its passengers lay piled together like so many dirty green caterpillars. The megaphones had fallen silent: perhaps even the robotic announcers needed a nap. To Zigui it felt as if the moment of peacefulness was a miracle brought about by the girl's hand. He'd never noticed that girls' hands were so small. He'd never touched such a soft little hand. He bit his lip to stop himself from crying but choked on his tears and started coughing instead. People were staring. He was proud and embarrassed at once. Even tears were a luxury: in seventeen years of growing up in a rather unusual household, Zigui had almost never wept, unless you counted the few occasions on which he'd just opened his mouth stolidly like a frog.

He wept enough tears to drown the train and the whole revolutionary world with it. Zigui imagined he could see many other people crying. He saw the swollen eyes behind those fanatical faces. If the revolutionaries' currency was blood, their fuel was tears, and in the sea of tears there was a hand waving like seaweed, swimming towards him in the dim light. His cracked lips sucked on the



hand, that five-tailed sprite resting on the reef of his cheek and slowly curling over his nose. He was afraid it would escape, so he bit down on it gently. “Guigui!” The thin little voice trailed off like a falling leaf. The compartment disappeared and there were leaves everywhere... He bit down slightly harder. This time his tongue touched her fingertip briefly. He shivered and was filled with warmth down to his toes.

“Poor Guigui!” the girl said. She didn’t withdraw her hand. She let him keep biting her with the greed of a small animal, which found its way to her heart through his teeth. They didn’t realize this was called being in love. The Mao era knew only comradeship and revolution. But Zigui would have sacrificed himself for this little hand, this five-tailed nymph. He’d finally found something other than Mao worth dying for.

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By the time the train reached Beijing it was past two on a frigid morning, but the station itself was warm, packed with Red Guards from all over the country, all waving flags and searching for their friends with megaphones. A banner welcoming the new arrivals fluttered by the trucks and buses. “Dear comrades, the capital Beijing is where all the peoples of the earth want to be. It is where the Red Sun of our heart rises...” blared the megaphones. Beijing at night reminded Zigui of Moscow in the Soviet film *Lenin in 1918*. Of course, he had no idea of the extent to which the Communist Liberation merely replicated earlier Western political movements.

His companion, Nie Honghong, was an eleventh-grade student at a nearby girls’ school. She came from a worker’s family, and she’d inherited her frailty as well as her musical talent from her parents, who repaired pianos in an instrument factory. Her Red Guard unit was a sister organization to Zhuang Zigui’s unit, so when she told them he was her cousin, she was permitted to stay with him. Eventually, Little Lei Feng’s brother came to pick him up, and Zigui and Honghong were left alone, so afraid of betraying their secret passion that they didn’t even dare let their eyes meet. To atone for being infatuated with Honghong, Zigui threw himself into revolutionary activity. The Red Guards had heard that that morning Chairman Mao would be reviewing the Red Guards for the eighth and final time. Exuberant to the point of hysteria, the crowd surged towards

Tiananmen Square. Most of the available vehicles had already been commandeered by other Red Guard units, so Zigui pulled out the megaphone he kept with him at all times, exhorting his unit to march towards the square in the glorious tradition of the Red March. He chanted slogans and his group jogged towards the square while others marveled at their discipline. Soon, other groups joined them, falling into line behind them. When they grew tired, they marched in unison, singing “The Red Guards think of Chairman Mao.” Zigui stole a glance at Nie Honghong. She trembled in the wind, smiling in the dim street light even though she was out of breath. He was content. Surely a natural union of love and making revolution was the best thing that could happen to any Red Guard.

At four in the morning, Tiananmen Square was quivering with lights. Red Guards swarmed towards the Golden Water Bridge from all directions, singing and chanting slogans. Like a god’s single eye, a new moon looked on wearily. The greasy human cauldron of the square grew warmer and warmer towards dawn. The Monument to the People’s Heroes, a great totem pole pointing upwards like an erect penis, recalled the feverish prayers of cavepeople to the fertility gods. That same fervor gripped the Red Guards— the echoes of the past in the present, you could see it in their bloodshot eyes. This was the twentieth century’s most impressive act of hero worship. It replaced private intoxication with collective frenzy.

Zigui’s group was held up at the Front Gate. To reach the massive Tiananmen Gate on the other side, they’d have to make their way across the whole square. Red Guards were squabbling and quoting the Little Red Book at each other, fighting for a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see that familiar round face. How would Zigui’s unit make it past the crowds? Honghong clutched Zigui’s military belt, terrified that they’d lose each other. Either there was no crowd control, or the announcers had lost their voices long ago. Thousands of security guards found themselves involuntarily pushed back, drowned in the oncoming crowd of Red Guards who were pressing relentlessly towards Tiananmen Gate. With the tremendous force of the crowd at his back, Zigui inched forward towards the monument, Honghong’s head on his breast. They had made their own little world in a tiny eddy of the crowd.

At 5 a.m., a soldier's voice began to bark directions to the assembled masses from a megaphone installed at one corner of the monument. Following his orders, the security guards separated the Red Guards into several massive groups. In the southwestern sector of the Square, everyone congregated beneath the monument. Zigui relaxed. Looking around, he found that only four or five of the dozen in their troupe were left. They were so greasy and exhausted from days of travelling and hours of marching that one of them fell asleep instantly, collapsing onto the ground like a noodle.

For a few short moments, relative peace came over the Square. Zigui realized he really needed to pee. Naturally, there was no bathroom for miles, and Honghong had fallen asleep clutching his belt. Zigui pried her hands off his belt and propped her up with his bag so she could sleep leaning against the stone railing. He pulled her cap down over her eyes. Then he followed his nose to the corner from which a certain sour smell emanated. Dozens of people were peeing there, and as soon as one person stepped away, Zigui hurriedly took his place. He'd never waited so long for a good pee.

When he got back to his original spot, Nie Honghong was crouched over, holding her stomach as if she was in pain. Hey, what's the matter, he said, bending towards her. She blushed, shook her head, and nodded furiously. Zigui was perplexed. "What is it?" he said. It took her a while to get the words out: "It's a girl thing!"

There weren't any other girls around. Zigui hesitated, and nodded and shook his head like her. "Right, what kind of girl thing?"

Honghong was forced to wave a sanitary pad at him.

"Taking a dump?"

She was so frustrated she poked his forehead: "You, you're stupider than a pig!" When Zigui figured out what she was getting at, it was his turn to blush hotly. He took her to a nook of the monument and woke the comrades sleeping there. They got up sleepily, and Zigui had them make a half circle around Honghong, facing outwards, while she ducked into the nook. The sky grew brighter, and he impatiently asked if she was done. When she finally emerged, Zigui glanced reflexively at the ground, where a bloodstained wad lay in a pool of pee. He could feel himself getting aroused at this first glimpse of a female secret. Feigning indifference, he gazed into the

distance. The first rays of sunlight glinted off the red walls, and the glow of streetlights began to fade in the morning mist. In the fat shadow of the Forbidden City, other human semicircles were forming. Zigui smiled to think they'd all inadvertently lit upon the same solution to this pressing problem. But he immediately recognized his thought error and checked himself. "The East is Red" began to play.

When the red sun finally emerged, the pilgrims were unmoved— they were waiting for a different Sun. To their minds, Chairman Mao commanded the air, sunlight and water. Without him they'd all be destitute like the unlucky people of Taiwan they read about in the papers. At 8 a.m., bugles whistled. The Red Guards shook stale crumbs and bits of pickle off themselves, got up and waited for the real Sun to rise and awaken the masses. That all too human "sun" was, at that very moment, getting dressed in the closely guarded labyrinth of Zhongnanhai. He stood with one hand on his hip and a luxury cigarette in the other while a busy nurse put on his pants. Then he got ready to step out of that nondescript building and shine on a fourth of the world's population.

Like many other girls, Honghong had had an irregular period because of overexertion— her lips were pale and her eyes were sunken. But she was still dressed neatly, her cap facing forwards and her short hair stuffed into it to make her look like a boy. Her ashen face made her resemble a revolutionary martyr rather than a girl, much less the girl who had been peeing on the ground only a few moments ago. The Red Guards took out their copies of Mao's Quotations. Flags fluttered, megaphones went silent, and the whole crowd leaned forward on tiptoes like dancers as they waited. People murmured "Chairman Mao, Chairman Mao!" to themselves in anticipation. Zigui could hear himself swallow in this extraordinary silence. His throat itched. He clutched his throat, trying to hold back what he was sure was a bourgeois itch. He clamped his lips together with his fingers. But the cough escaped anyway through his nose, and he sneezed right onto the neck of the Red Guard in front of him. Luckily the other didn't turn around. No one was looking. Zigui hastily wiped his Little Red Book clean.

Chairman Mao finally appeared!

He was followed by a flurry of great men: Lin Biao, Zhou Enlai, Jiang Qing, Kang Sheng, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyan, Chen Boda and others, all dressed in military fatigues like the Red Guards. A million voices cried: "Long live Chairman Mao, our reddest red sun!" Startled, the actual

sun hid behind some clouds. The cauldron grew hotter. Zigui was yelling at the top of his voice, already in tears. Honghong had climbed onto his back. She craned forward to see better, croaking like a mechanical frog.

In the crowd's imagination, Tiananmen Gate seemed to be rising, ascending past the stratosphere and into space, where it reached the sun and ate it. On the great red gate overgrown with moss, Chairman Mao himself appeared tiny, beyond reach, like a lone fish that had swum away from its companions, with all humanity as its roe.

He stood by the gleaming white jade railings on top of the gate while the pilgrims cheered. Mao took his hat off and waved it to the crowds at his feet. By a strange ancient folk magic, he dispersed an invisible red roe into their hearts. In his slurred Hubei accent, he manipulatively returned their cheer: "Long live the Red Guards!"

Half the crowd peed its pants. "Long Live Chairman Mao!" they cried with a happy sensation of release, waving Little Red Books. Zigui felt himself dissolving into a timeless fantasy in which all flesh disintegrated, as if the wind was blowing and there was pollen in his eyes, so that people became grasshoppers and grasshoppers became roe and roe became countless sperm. He was in a sea of sperm, but who was he and where were they swimming to? Who was President Liu Shaoqi and why was he a traitor? Grass, Tiannamen was covered in flourishing grass. A few thousand years ago, this had actually been a field of grass, until someone dug a trench, built a house, a city, an empire, and made himself emperor. The emperor himself was nothing more than a big grasshopper: what had the Chinese people accomplished in all these years?

Guan-guan go the ospreys,

On the islet in the river.

The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady:

For our prince a good mate she.

On the desolate square, a man and a woman were making love. The man bit the woman's face while the woman counted the stars: as many sperm swam in her vagina as there were stars in the sky. How had the universe itself been birthed, in that long love-making beyond our imagination? The earth, sun, and moon were all sperm in the universe's vagina, and people were the sperm of one particular sperm. If Mao was the Sun of the Chinese people, who was his sun?

“Long live the Red Guards!” Mao murmured, flapping his cap feebly. “I am a monk wandering alone with a black umbrella in the rain,” he said to himself.

Trapped within the borders of their vast country, Zigui and his friends had no way of knowing that the Red Guards were only the very latest in a series of twentieth-century political catastrophes brought about by thugs wearing red armbands. Mao, Lenin, Stalin, Kim Il-sung, Mussolini, Hitler, Castro, and Hoxha were all maniacs of the same ilk, and the Cultural Revolution was only the latest manifestation of that old mad specter, Communism. The chief thing that differentiated the Red Guards from Nazis was the removal of the swastika and the addition of the words RED GUARD to their armbands.

When it was finally all over, Zigui and Honghong couldn't bring themselves to leave. They wanted to live on Tiananmen Square forever. They imagined turning into statues frozen in their happiness. “Without Chairman Mao, we wouldn't even exist!” sobbed Honghong, as if Mao were her father.

The setting sun soaked the square, turning it blood red. Zigui was hungry, exhausted, there was a roaring in his ears. He gazed at the slowly dispersing Red Guards. “How odd,” he said aloud.

“What did you say?”

“What, what did I say?”

Honghong was exasperated. “Hey, you're zoning out.”

“Yeah, I'm zoning out.”

She shook him: “Snap out of it. They've all gone, it's just us.”

“Just us? Only a while ago this place was full...” He wandered about aimlessly. “They came out of nowhere and disappeared into nowhere, all gone...” He poked at his ear to make the roaring stop but only made it bleed. In the crimson sunset, Zigui wondered: is God ever lonely?

“There has never been a savior,/ There are no gods or emperors./To make our own happiness/ we have only ourselves to rely on.” The Internationale struck up somewhere. Zigui was too young to really understand what the lyrics meant. He could only feel a vast emptiness coming towards him, a gigantic Mao face. Clouds drifted across the sky and wiped the blood from it... He

was daydreaming again, he'd inherited this from his mother. He looked down and realized that he'd stepped into a pile of shit. "Guigui!" Honghong yelled.

The illusion vanished. He stamped hard to scrape the shit off. They'd walked into a dump of toilet paper, wrappings, other garbage, and piles of shit. "There's probably some of yours here too," he joked.

Honghong was too shy to come up with a response, so for the very first time since they'd gotten to know each other, they began to argue. She called him batty, full of nutty capitalist ideas. "Who are you to talk, miss!" he teased. "Who was it who leaned over to touch my face on the train?"

She blushed. "That's got nothing to do with Chairman Mao!"

"Why not? You and your capitalist petty-bourgeois feelings."

"I shouldn't ever have... You classist little..." She stopped abruptly and ran off, skipping between the piles of garbage. Streetlights bathed the Square in a soft glow. A fleet of street cleaning cars descended on the Square, with sanitary workers close behind. Honghong tripped and fell. Zigui came after her, heedless of the filth beneath his feet. He caught up easily and picked her up while she was still sobbing.

She slapped him and pinched him and spat on him, but he didn't respond. They both stank. Growing desperate, she finally bit him. Zigui let out a cry and began to laugh. "Hey, what are you laughing at?" She was taken aback.

"This is great, you're the first girl who's ever bitten me."

"You're so mean to me!"

"Stop this, Honghong, let's find a place to change. We've become the sick soldiers who dropped out of the Red March," Zigui said seriously.

"Hey! What are you doing hugging me?"

"Ew, who do you think's hugging you?" Zigui recoiled as if electrocuted. "A Red Guard would never do that. Plus you stink. Yuck."

The two children left the filthy Square at dusk. Zigui no longer felt guilty. He was daydreaming about how, when the revolution succeeded in a few years' time and all the capitalist roaders had been defeated, he'd have his parents sign a statement denouncing the counter

revolutionary classes. Then he'd marry Honghong and his mother wouldn't have to live in an asylum ever again. Just thinking about it made him want to stare at her. "If your dad is a radical, you can be one too. If your dad is a scumbag, disown him, start a coup!" he sang.

But instead of singing along with him, Honghong took his hand. "Your dad's always your dad, Guigui, you've really gone mad," she said softly.

Years later, those words still choked Zhuang Zigui up: in those days, they truly were a miracle.

## CHAPTER 2: THE GREAT LINKING UP

Zhuang Zigui and Nie Honghong boarded a southbound train from Beijing. They'd lost touch with their group, so they joined up with another group of Red Guards from Sichuan so that they wouldn't be caught travelling as a couple and accused of "making revolution in order to make love." The train compartment was just as packed as it had been on the way up to Beijing, and Zigui and Honghong stood cramped together. But by the time they passed Shijiazhuang, Zigui had started making conversation with the Red Guards seated near them. He spoke stirringly about the experience of being received by Mao in Beijing. As soon as Zigui brought up the one thing they all had in common, their devotion to Chairman Mao, the fellow travellers began to feel friendlier towards each other. One of them offered his seat to Honghong in a spirit of camaraderie. Leaning against her, Zigui dozed off.

In the meantime, several Red Guards began to abuse a middle-aged man who was sitting by the window. Throughout the Cultural Revolution, people were as volatile as gunpowder – the tiniest thing could set them off. The man pushed his glasses back and unhurriedly recited a saying by Chairman Mao: "‘Fight with the pen and not with the sword.’ Stop pointing fingers at me! All I'm saying is that revolution should not lead to a state of complete anarchy. Not all Party leaders are capitalist-roader authorities. If those criminals really were in charge everywhere, from the Politburo down to the local government, would we even be able to call ourselves a Communist country?"

"In other words, you're a reactionary!"



“Oh no I’m not,” the middle-aged man retorted hastily. “Of course I believe we should make revolution against real capitalist-roaders. I just happen not to believe in attacking the Party administration at all levels. If the Party stops functioning China will be plunged into chaos, and things are already chaotic enough as it is.”

Someone hit the man hard across the face. It was a Red Guard who leapt onto the table and declared: “Comrades, you’ve heard what he said. This man is a reactionary through and through! Chairman Mao’s Red Guards take orders from no one but the Great Leader himself. He lit the fires of the Cultural Revolution that are going to burn Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and all their followers to death. Now this lackey of Liu Shaoqi is yammering on about how ‘if the Party stops functioning China will be plunged into chaos’ and claiming that China is not a Communist country. We’re telling him: Chairman Mao himself is our leader, and as long he lives, so does the Communist Party and Communist China! Things couldn’t be going any better! ‘The people themselves have been fully mobilized.’”

The middle-aged man’s spectacles had flown off when the other man slapped his left cheek. He got up somewhat unsteadily, squinting at the crowd. “Comrades, listen to me!” he cried. “I’ve been received by Chairman Mao too! Not only recently in Beijing, but in 1942 in Yan’an, I was received no fewer than three times by the Great Leader himself! I’ve been a Party member for twenty years now, and I know how important it is to ‘win the revolution with discipline.’ Even making revolution has to be done in an orderly way! Chairman Mao didn’t order you lot to destroy everything, ruin everything, and beat people up or struggle against them for no good reason.”

It’s hardly the best time to be making this speech, Zhuang Zigu thought to himself. All over China people are writing big-character posters and holding public debates. When they get worked up, it’s hard to stop them from using fists instead of Mao. The Red Guards would be willing to die to defend Chairman Mao, never mind beat up a few rightist scabs.

Sure enough, the reactionary Party member of two decades was pushed onto a seat with his hands tied behind his back and made to face the crowd bent over at the waist. The travellers clapped and cheered. As they chanted “Down with!” slogans, the man’s Chairman Mao badge and red armband were torn off. The struggle session grew heated, and the man’s tormentors knocked out a couple of his front teeth. Each Red Guard produced a copy of the Little Red Book and read aloud

from it before launching into a denunciation of the man. One of them pointed out that Liu Shaoqi had betrayed the worker inspectors in Wuhan in 1927 by writing a “letter of contrition” so that the Kuomintang would release him from prison. Yes, Liu Shaoqi was a time bomb that Chiang Kai-shek himself had planted next to the Great Leader before making off to Taiwan. Since this man shared Liu Shaoqi’s class nature, he must have a counter-revolutionary past too.

While the crowd talked and argued ceaselessly, several travellers took the advantage of the commotion to steal some other people’s seats. Nie Honghong bent over searching for the reactionary’s glasses for a long time. When the man thanked her, she retorted sternly: “None of your bourgeois politeness!” The person chairing the struggle session was taken aback, but then he smiled at her. More and more passengers from other compartments were squeezing into their compartment to see what the fuss was all about. And even though the compartment was full to bursting, the announcer kept encouraging passengers to make their way to Car 8 to receive real life class-struggle education. Zhuang Zigui yanked Nie Honghong up and held her in his arms. She was frightened and breathing hard. He pressed his crotch against her. His whole body began to tremble from the point where his erect member touched her body. He pulled his cap down to conceal the veins bulging on his forehead. They both hoped the struggle session would go on forever. They knew they were safest in public, standing there in full view of the others, their hearts beating in an eternal language that the Great Leader himself couldn’t control. Honghong deliberately slipped her hand into his. They grasped each other’s sweaty hands, their fingertips electrified by the sensation. They blushed with what must have seemed to everyone else like a revolutionary fever. The others were all fanatics, drunk with revolutionary zeal, so Honghong and Zigui blended right in. Zigui’s crotch grew wet. Suddenly, the train lurched forward, and a young Red Guard tumbled off the luggage rack.

The unfortunate boy landed right on the middle-aged man’s back. The latter keeled over in a dead faint. Onlookers dragged him off the ground and splashed water on his face. They pinched him and called for doctors. The chairperson got up on a table and cried: “Comrades, listen to me!” But no one paid him any attention. To make matters worse, the boy who’d caused the commotion began to holler that he needed to take a dump. His squeaky little threat caused more general mirth.

But there was no way of getting to the toilet through the crowds, so all they could do was open the train window and let him take his trousers down with his buttocks hanging out of the window. Several burly Red Guards held him tightly to make sure that he wouldn't be swept away by the wind. Nie Honghong turned around and pressed her face against Zigui's chest. "Yuck," she said, even though secretly she was pleased. The middle-aged man came to his senses. He was moaning, his face bloodied, but people ignored him. They were all gathered around the boy hanging precariously out of the window. "Let go of him!" someone said. Everyone laughed. The boy pulled his military cap down over his blushing face. The harder he tried, the less he was able to relieve himself. Tears came into his eyes as he defecated. The crowd was delighted. "What's the matter, wind blew off a piece of your butt?" the chairperson said.

The announcer was still saying: "A counterrevolutionary supporter of Liu Shaoqi has been found in Car 8 even as we travel onwards, a great victory for Chairman Mao thought..." In the jam-packed compartment, Zhuang Zigui finally found the nerve to embrace Honghong. His erect penis, pressed against her stomach, was beginning to hurt.

From the summer of 1966 to the beginning of the following year, the movement known as the Great Linking Up was all the rage. Hordes of teenagers wearing red armbands and military fatigues travelled all over the country with their Little Red Books, giving speeches, arguing with each other, and getting into fights. Under the leadership of President Liu Shaoqi, China enjoyed plentiful harvests from the autumn of 1962 to 1965, which helped to alleviate the suffering caused by three years of widespread famine in the countryside. Liu Shaoqi had inadvertently created the material abundance that made the Cultural Revolution possible, leading to his own downfall.

Mao himself had been a peasant. He had arranged for a vegetable garden to be put in at the Communist Party headquarters in Zhongnanhai, and even after he became Party Chairman, he puttered about in it every day. When Mao put down his home and took up traveling instead, it was an omen that China was about to give up farming as well. He went swimming in the Yangtze River, his round belly bobbing in the waves like the belly of a laughing frog. He returned to his hometown in Hunan and lived in seclusion for a while. Then he returned to Beijing unexpectedly and began to direct from afar the January Storm that seized power in Shanghai. Before his old enemies even

realized what was happening to them, they were unceremoniously kicked off the stage and became political untouchables. The Great Leader's travels influenced the whole country. People were wandering around like herds of sheep, using "revolution" as the pretext to take a long vacation for free.

All over the country, public cafeterias just like those created in 1958 during the Great Leap Forward were set up especially for the visiting Red Guards. With a letter of introduction, you could eat your way from one province to the next. On the doors of bigger cafeterias, Zhuang Zigui often read the tongue-in-cheek couplet: "The lazy miss eats what comes to her; the idle master eats and leaves." China had become an enormous hotel. Mountains of rice and noodles, vegetables and eggs were wasted. Even the rice bowls themselves became targets of the Red Guards' zeal. They would eat a few bites and toss their bowls on the ground, smashing them to pieces as if reenacting the scene of Mao mobilizing the peasants to rush into their landlords' houses with spears and take whatever they wanted. But now that the government itself had become the landlord, who were the Red Guards struggling against? The capitalist landowning class? Kuomintang counterrevolutionaries? Or Chairman Mao's own political enemies? Anyone who opposed the Emperor became a target. Mao claimed that class struggle would continue after ten thousand years, which was to say that he planned to continue the struggle as a ghost. If peace were to prevail such that he had no more enemies, he would have struggled against his own shadow, his own political traps, his own past and future. If necessary, he could have his left and right brain struggle against each other, his left eye staring at his right eye in hatred, his own left hand slapping his right cheek.

Like everyone around them, Zhuang Zigui and Nie Honghong were filled with revolutionary fervor. They ate to their hearts' content at national expense, burped happily, and ran out to the streets to quarrel with people whose political views differed from their own. They toured all the cities along the railroad lines, admiring the parks whose walls had been destroyed. They stood under the streetlights exchanging Chairman Mao badges with people with funny accents. You could get a big badge for five little pins, and then turn around and trade the big badge for eight little ones. After a series of transactions, they each had a whole parcel of Chairman Mao badges stowed away, not to mention the commemorative plates engraved with quotations from the Little Red Book, as well as assorted badges commemorating sacred places of the revolution, Mao's birthday, or other

important revolutionary dates, and badges made for no reason. They collected square, round, triangular, flat, cylindrical, sailboat-shaped, leaf-shaped, pagoda-shaped, hoe-shaped, and seedling-shaped badges. Not content with their collections, the two kept trading up. They even altered their own “letters of introduction” multiple times to get new Mao badges for free. It was impossible to tell how much this colossal waste of metals was burdening China, a country with a weak industrial sector.

Mao’s importance extended far beyond the realm of palace intrigue. He had become the god of family, of marriage, of entertainment, the god of fertility and the god of death. You couldn’t step out of your own door in China without having a few dozen sayings by Chairman Mao up your sleeve. There were gangs of Little Red Guards around every corner, elementary school students who stopped passersby and forced them to recite Mao sayings. If you fumbled a word, you risked being struggled against as a criminal rightist who’d betrayed Mao. Families were torn apart by their involvement in rival revolutionary organizations. Children were given names like Weidong and Weiqi: Defend the East, Defend the Flag. Lovers brought Little Red Books to their clandestine meetings.

In a shop, you’d say: “Our Great Leader taught us: ‘Serve the people!’ – I’d like five feet of cloth, please.”

To which the shopkeeper might reply: “Chairman Mao says: ‘Thrift is making revolution.’ – What kind of cloth?”

“The red flags flutter and the peasants carry spears.”

“They don’t love to wear red, they love to wear uniforms.’ – I’m afraid we’ve just sold out of red and only have green or yellow.”

By the time the two returned home with their spoils, it was already well into winter. But they were keen to keep traveling, so after reporting to their respective Red Guard units, they arranged a trip to Guan County, fifty kilometers outside the city limits. By then, the Cultural Revolution Group had already attempted to divert the Red Guards from the cities by urging them to go on long hikes in the tradition of the Long March. They encouraged Red Guards to learn about revolution in Mao’s birthplace in Shaoshan, or in farflung Red Army pilgrimage sites like Zunyi, Jinggangshan, and Yan’an. But Chairman Mao himself had traveled all over the place: if

traveling to Jinggangshan was allowed, then why not big cities like Shanghai, Wuhan, or Hangzhou? Since you obviously couldn't get there on foot, travel by ship and bus was a revolutionary necessity too. So it was in the name of revolutionary necessity that Zigui and Honghong got on a bus to Two Kings Temple, to inspect the local campaign to Destroy the Four Olds.

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Book proposal, Liao

### CHAPTER 3: DESTROYING THE FOUR OLDS

The impressive Two Kings Temple, which stood at the foot of Mount Yulei, was built to honor the administrator Li Bing of the state of Qin and his son. Legend had it that during the Warring States period some 2500 years ago, the plains in western Sichuan were plagued alternately by drought and flooding. Li Bing and his son assembled a team of capable engineers to fix the problem. They managed to crack the hard rock of the mountains, building a channel that became the extensive Dujiangyan irrigation system, which made agriculture possible on the fertile plains. Zhuang Zigui and Nie Honghong got in touch with the revolutionaries there in Guan County, and began to travel towards the temple, setting off from the mouth of the channel. In the distance, they could see Flying Sand Weir, which connects the inner and outer streams of the channel, emblazoned with a gigantic red banner that read: "All the intricacies of Marxism can be boiled down to a single sentence: 'It is reasonable to revolt.'"

"The revolutionary fire has penetrated to the center of the river," Zigui said to one of the Red Guard leaders accompanying them.

"We've only just gotten started," the other replied. "We're just doing what Chairman Mao himself ordered: 'Begin by being destructive and the constructive will arise from it.' Within the space of a night, we destroyed dozens of Two King statues on both banks of the Min River. We hurled them into the river if we could. If they were too heavy, we took gunpowder and exploded the hell out of them. The class struggle around here is an uphill battle— too many bad eggs. The Peasant Volunteer Militia caught a seventy-year-old landowner burning incense by the river at midnight. They took turns peeing into a chamber pot and half killed her forcing her to drink it."

Nie Honghong pursed her lips and pointed Zigui to the empty niches. All the memorial tablets honoring Li Bing and his son had gory dog heads painted on them. To Zigui's bafflement, even the monks and Taoist priests were making revolution. The younger monks had apparently been secretly reading the Little Red Book at night. They now realized that the Diamond Sutra, the Bodhisattva Sutra, the Tao Te Ching and the Book of Changes had all been invented by capitalists, feudalists, and revisionists, as the opiate of the masses. So they secretly liaised with the Red Guards to arrest the elder who had sequestered them in the caves. When Zigui and his companions reached the Two Kings Temple, its hallowed grounds had already been turned into a prison for all the monks, nuns, and priests in the county, who were being forced to take political classes and reflect on their errors. There was a column of smoke in front of the temple, where entire Buddhist and Taoist libraries were being burnt in a gigantic bonfire. Several thousand revolutionaries were gathered around a couple of dozen priests wearing wooden placards and tall hats. "Down with Siddhartha!" they chanted. "Down with Lao Tse! Down with the Guanyin Bodhisattva! Fry Zhang Celestial Master in oil! Burn the garbage of history! We're making a red future!"

A young monk in military fatigues made his way out of the crowds. He went up to an older monk who was standing bent over on stage, and pushed down hard on his neck. "Fucking sutras! Worth fuck all! Down with Liu Shaoqi's son-of-a-turtle lackey Monk Zhang!" The crowd hollered back: "Fucking sutras..." Nie Honghong burst into giggles and had to stifle a cough. The young monk with the shaved head caught sight of her and smiled shyly. Honghong nodded encouragingly at him, so he went on: "Down with Deng Xiaoping's whore Nun He! Revolution is not! Revolution is not..." He'd forgotten the rest of the line he was quoting from the Little Red Book, so he could only keep repeating: "Revolution is not!" And the crowd bellowed back: "Revolution is not!" A forest of fists punched the air while the hapless monk racked his brains to recall Mao's famous dictum. After ten painful seconds, he had a flash of inspiration: "Revolution is not like gift-giving!" The crowd was divided: most of the peasants shouted "Revolution is not like gift-giving!" while the few revolutionaries who knew the Little Red Book quoted it correctly:

"Revolution is not like a dinner party!" Chaos broke out, and the chairperson glared at the unfortunate monk: "Bring the son of a turtle who dared to alter Chairman Mao's words up here!"

The crowds closed in. The bald monk was stripped naked, tied up, and hauled onto the stage, forced to bend over like the older monks and submit to being struggled against. At the repeated requests of the chairperson, Zhuang Zigui made a speech on behalf of the Chengdu Red Guards in support of the Guan County revolutionaries. He drew cheers from the crowds as he described the impressive sight of Mao reviewing a million Red Guards. “The revolutionary masses must keep our eyes open,” he went on. “We don’t want opportunists like that man just now infiltrating the masses and causing havoc in the name of revolution. We must continue to maintain the highest standards of revolutionary activity, take careful aim at our authoritarian targets, and accurately and ruthlessly destroy the Four Olds.” He stopped abruptly. Someone was shoving a glass of water in his face— it was Nie Honghong, who was giving him a meaningful look. “Right, close call,” he thought. Taking the glass, he took a moment to collect himself. “Some degree of deviation is inevitable in a struggle,” he said. “The Great Leader himself exhorts us to learn to swim in choppy waves. As long as we’re headed in the right direction, everything we do can only be right. A salute to the revolutionaries of Guan County!”

While the crowd applauded at length, Zigui broke out in a cold sweat. Next on the agenda was for monks and younger Taoist priests to accuse their elders. “Monk Zhang is the biggest bully at Two Kings Temple,” one fat monk said. “Not only does he himself refuse to make revolution, he prevents other monks from making revolution. He keeps saying that Buddhists should be tranquil and engage in non-doing. This is simply Liu Shaoqi’s defeatist argument against class struggle. And has the class struggle been defeated? Not at all! Even now, in the middle of the revolution, the despicable Monk Zhang is still up at five every morning reciting the Diamond Sutra: namo amitabha, or ‘the pure land is in the west.’ Only after reading Chairman Mao’s works did I come to understand that the west is a breeding ground for capitalism, not some sort of pure land. Clearly Monk Zhang can’t wait for the Americans to invade so that we peasant-born poorer monks will be made to suffer twice as much. Once, he even claimed to have caught me drinking and eating meat, and had me soundly beaten and thrown out of the temple. This landowner-born baldheaded rascal isn’t cut from the same cloth as us peasant monks!”

A skinny Taoist priest took the podium: “Today I want to unmask Priest Li. Months after the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution had started, Priest Li insisted on keeping the news from



us and wouldn't let us leave the mountain. After I secretly made a trip to town, he ordered his underlings not to let me back into the temple. What's worse, he wouldn't let me put up a portrait of the Great Leader in the temple. I told him that Chairman Mao is the greatest, far greater than Lao Tse or Celestial Master Zhang. He actually had the nerve to say, 'Chairman Mao is the god of ordinary people outside the temple. There's no place for him inside this temple.' He kept spouting counterrevolutionary nonsense: 'If you think he's so much greater than they are, why don't you make a pilgrimage to Beijing!' The arrogance..."

More monks took turns to address the frenzied crowd. Zigui would never have thought that such intense class struggle existed even in these otherworldly Buddhist and Taoist temples. After all, the Great Leader himself hadn't said anything about how monks and Taoist priests should make revolution. What would monks chant if they didn't chant sutras— were they supposed to kneel on their rush mats striking wooden fish and chanting the Little Red Book? As for putting up a portrait of Chairman Mao in the temple, that made no sense either. The temple was full of niches, sacred objects, and mud sculptures: where would the portrait go? Hanging it too low would be an unacceptable sign of disrespect. Would it have to be hung higher than the portraits of the Three Pure Ones themselves? That would just make it look like one of the black magic charms they denounce. Despite being an experienced revolutionary, Zigui was stumped.

After the struggle session, the cow devils were paraded through the town. Zigui had grown tired of these crowd-pleasing spectacles, so he and Honghong invented an excuse to stay behind in the temple. The setting sun glinted off the eaves of the old temple and cirrus clouds glistened like skin lesions on the horizon. The sculptures, prayer flags, wooden fish, mats, tables, and chamber pots had all been destroyed. The glazed tiles on the eaves were smashed to pieces. The revolutionaries had also ruined a piece of calligraphy by the warlord Feng Yuxiang and Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek, which said "When drinking water, consider its source." Zigui and Honghong climbed to the top of the temple, where they saw that the sculpture of Li Bing and his son had been beheaded. It lay in pieces everywhere, punctured countless times with steel rods. A few teenagers showed up. "Take a photo of me!" one of them said to a girl in the group. He straightened his fatigues and climbed onto Li Bing's shoulders, straddling the sculpture's broken neck. The others rushed to imitate him in humiliating the ancient hero.

Zigui and Honghong hiked up to a vantage point on the Sichuan-Tibet Highway from which they could see the entirety of the western Sichuan plains. They felt as if they had just climbed out of hell's cauldron into the pure land of the mountains. The wind whistled and the fearless birds perched on the rocks, observing them. Zigui shivered. He could hear his mother's song in the wind, the delirious, drifting melodies that had never left him. Even now that he'd become a hair on the Great Leader's neck, in lonely moments his illiterate mother would still come to mind, often making him relent towards political enemies. Zigui's eyes filled with tears. Two drops congealed like amber on his lashes. The stars that surrounded the misty mountains in the distance were like the creator's own tears. Everything has a source, Zigui thought, whether you call it God or Mother. Zigui's mother was a passionate lunatic who wore a black straw hat year round. He'd taken her to the lunatic asylum countless times. The doctors there were such kung fu masters that they could kick high enough never to have to slap someone in the face.

The foothills were already dark, but there was still a glimmer of light on the mountaintops. The wind sang, a gust of wind like a gentle sigh. An invisible ribbon connected Zigui to the sky, the river, the mountains. Chairman Mao said that even ten thousand years from now there would still be class struggle. But the mountains sat there, the river flowed and the clouds drifted, and they'd been there for years. Zigui's heart leapt. He'd unwittingly found something that would outlast Chairman Mao, a glimpse of something eternal that had nothing to do with his day to day life.

He opened his mouth to say "Mother" but the word had rusted away. The temple bustled with activity beneath them—the parade had returned. As they made their way back down, they noticed that even the "Danger" signs on the highway had "Long live Chairman Mao" painted on them. They couldn't help smiling at each other.

The revolutionaries gathered for a couple of hours after dinner to study the Little Red Book. Zigui was exhausted, so after making his excuses he slipped into a guest room and fell asleep. That night, he dreamed he heard strange noises and got up to look outside. The Two Kings Temple gleamed with a cold light, and at the steps to the main hall he saw two motionless figures in the moonlight. Zigui almost mistook them for pillars. But then he recognized them as the Buddhist monk Zhang and the Taoist priest Li, the targets of that day's struggle session. How had the two old men managed to escape their heavily guarded rooms? Zigui wondered. He watched as the monk

and priest laughed heartily and cried aloud. They began to dance silently, as if possessed. The monk's bald head emerged gradually and the priest's long hair almost touched the ground. The monk spun round in circles as the priest circled him closely, his arms outstretched while his partner followed his movements closely. As Zigui watched, their dance grew rapider, insubstantial, until they lifted from the face of the ground and turned into a bald bird with black wings that flew into the moon.

Zigui stared into the empty sky. When he turned to look at the two motionless figures, he realized they were pillars after all. The following morning, Zigui woke uncharacteristically early. He lay in bed, the image of the two figures still fresh in his mind, turning over in his mind the conversation they had held during their silent dance.

Monk: Buddhists and Taoists have never been friends. It's strange that we two should meet here. Perhaps this is a last blessing from the Buddha at the end of the world. Priest: Monk, tonight the moon is bright and the wind is clear. The gates of the heavenly palace are open. You achieve your nirvana and I'll ascend to my heavens. Monk: It's only thanks to Chairman Mao, who stirred things up here in the earthly Sea of Bitterness, that a monk is here to observe your ascent.

Priest: Isn't it thanks to Chairman Mao, who's turned heaven and earth upside down, that a priest is here to witness your achieving nirvana?

The two laughed and then cried, cried and then danced. "The Buddha is no Buddha, the Tao is no Tao," sang the priest. The monk closed his eyes and nodded: "Seven is seven, six is six. Harass my master and I'll destroy you." They clasped each other's hands, cried, and laughed again.

Shortly after eight in the morning, a breathless Honghong knocked on Zigui's window to tell him that Monk Zhang and Priest Li had taken their own lives in front of the main hall that night.