

CHINESE LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

Editors

Irving Yucheng Lo

Joseph S. M. Lau

Leo Ou-fan Lee

**The Execution of
MAYOR YIN
and Other Stories
from the
Great Proletarian Cultural
Revolution**

CHEN JO-HSI

TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE BY
NANCY ING AND HOWARD GOLDBLATT

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“Chairman Mao Is a Rotten Egg”

IN THE BEGINNING OF SEPTEMBER 1971 MY HUSBAND WROTE to me from the May Seventh Cadre School* in northern Kiangsu that his period of labor reform would soon be over. He was planning to be in Nanking before the middle of the month, in time for Ching-ching's fourth birthday on the thirteenth. He would take him out to the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, for as he said in his letter, "It's been three years since we came to Nanking, and we've never gone to pay our respects to such historical monuments as the Ming Tombs and the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum."

If he hadn't reminded me I would have forgotten all about Ching-ching's birthday. Since our return to China we had even forgotten our own birthdays. For me birthdays

*The May Seventh Cadre Schools (*wu-ch'i kan-hsiao*) were established throughout the country to carry out the principles of manual work and the study of Mao's thoughts that were embodied in the May Seventh Directive (*wu-ch'i chih-shih*), issued by Chairman Mao on May 7, 1966.

had become a thing of the past except when my colleagues reminded me at the end of each year to take my ration card and buy a catty* of Strength and Prosperity Noodles—Chairman Mao's birthday noodles.

I picked up Ching-ching at kindergarten, and on the way home I told him all about his father's plans. He was delighted to hear that he was going on an outing with his father, whom he hadn't seen for a long time. His little round face broke into a smile as he skipped along beside me.

Suddenly he looked up and asked, "Mommy, what's a birthday?"

"Your birthday is the day on which you were born," I answered, without giving it a thought. It was only when I saw the puzzled expression on his face that I realized the abstractness of the word "birthday." Since I was eight months pregnant at the time, I placed his hand on my swollen abdomen and said, "In another month the baby will be born, and the day it arrives will be its birthday."

I couldn't tell if he actually understood what I was saying, but he skipped ahead, shouting, "Birthday! Birthday!" I was hardly able to keep up with him, and by the time I reached the steps leading up to our dormitory area I was out of breath. Tiger Pass Dormitory, situated on a hill, consists of several rows of one-story buildings. The families of over two hundred faculty members of the Institute of Hydraulic Engineering live there. Our building is halfway up the hill, and climbing up and down in hot weather made me perspire profusely.

* A catty equals 1½ pounds.

Ching-ching didn't stop to talk to any of his friends, but ran straight up to our quarters. "Nai-nai!"* he shouted happily to the old woman who had come out to meet him.

My neighbor, Auntie Wang, had asked the old woman to help take care of Ching-ching and look after me during my confinement. Her surname was An, and she was from northern Kiangsu. She was a very straightforward person, and although we had only been together for a short while, the three of us were already on the best of terms.

"Nai-nai, I'm going to have a birthday. Daddy's going to take me to San San Mausoleum!"

"San San what?" An Nai-nai was over sixty and hard of hearing.

"The Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum," I managed to gasp as I caught up with them. I was beginning to regret having mentioned the outing to Ching-ching. If he were to go around telling everyone about celebrating his birthday, people would think that his parents were still full of decadent capitalist ideas. So I quickly pulled him inside the house and told him not to mention his birthday again or one day he would become an old counterrevolutionary. He couldn't understand why he mustn't talk about his birthday, but he knew exactly what an "old counterrevolutionary" was. His face tightened immediately and he nodded gravely. I felt greatly relieved and let An Nai-nai take him away to wash his hands and eat his supper.

*Nai-nai actually means "grandmother," but it is also a term of respect for older women.

But Ching-ching couldn't keep the good news to himself after all. After supper he went to Auntie Wang's to play and told Tung-tung, her seven-year-old son, who was just entering the first grade. Since they lived so near us, and he and Ching-ching had been together in kindergarten, they had become fast friends, playing together most of the time. Later that evening, when Auntie Wang came over to visit, the first thing she said was, "I hear that it will soon be Ching-ching's birthday. Is that true?"

"Yes," I admitted with some embarrassment.

Auntie Wang was in charge of the youngest group at the kindergarten—the three- to four-year-olds—so Ching-ching was in her group. Since she was very patient and sang well, the children were all very fond of her. Like so many Cantonese, she was lively and talkative. She had been designated as a poor citizen of the city (I never quite understood what this term stood for; people said that it meant an unemployed person, but I never had the nerve to question her about it), which made her one of the Five Red Elements* of society. Because of that she exuded self-confidence and spoke in a very loud voice. Evidently she regarded me favorably, as she often came over to visit in the evenings after finishing her household chores. Her husband and I belonged to the same teaching unit and at that time he was also working in the rice fields with the May Seventh Cadre School. Since we both had to look after a child in addition to going to work and

*Children of workers, poor and lower middle peasants, revolutionary cadres, Liberation Army men, and revolutionary martyrs.

doing our housework, we helped each other with shopping and other chores. And if she hadn't found An Nai-nai for me at a time when I was still new to the place, I would have been helpless.

"Tung-tung's birthday was a few days ago, on the twenty-ninth of August, but I didn't do anything to celebrate." There was an overtone of remorse in her voice. "When his daddy returns I'll ask him to take him to People's Park."

"That'll be nice," I said. "You should all go boating together in this crisp autumn weather. Just think how wonderful it would be to have a photo taken!"

"Too bad we don't have a camera."

I would have liked to lend her our Canon camera but I was afraid that she would embarrass me by refusing my offer. So although the words were on the tip of my tongue, I said nothing. About a year earlier I had impetuously offered the camera to our Party section leader, who took one look and flatly refused it. From then on I was reluctant even to take out the camera, which had been made in a "militaristic country."

Auntie Wang couldn't stop yawning. She looked very tired, so I asked, "Didn't you get any rest today after being on duty last night?"

She shook her head as she covered her mouth with her hand. There were dark circles under her eyes.

"I lay in bed all day, but I couldn't sleep!" she said as she looked around. An Nai-nai was taking a bath behind the closed kitchen door and Ching-ching was already in bed in the other room. She leaned over and whispered, "You know

Shih Lao-shih's* daughter, Hsiao Hung, don't you?"

"Of course," I said. "Isn't she in Ching-ching's class?"

Hsiao Hung's father and I were in the same department. He came from a choice background and had been a Party member for many years. Because of his role in the Cultural Revolution, he was now in charge of a study class to inspect the mid-level cadres in our provincial government. His wife was a teacher and was also performing labor in the May Seventh Cadre School. Since neither parent was in Nanking, Hsiao Hung was left in the care of the kindergarten day and night. She was a lovable little girl with pretty rosy cheeks. I had even brought her to our home to play one day during the summer.

"I'll tell you something, but you mustn't mention it to anyone!" Auntie Wang whispered in my ear.

"Of course!" I promised. I closed my door gently, then made her sit down by the desk while I sat on the edge of the bed.

"At ten o'clock last night," she continued in a whisper, leaning close to me so as not to be overheard, "after all the children were asleep, Lao Wang of the political section showed up, bringing with him Lao Shao of the broadcasting section and a tape recorder. The director of the kindergarten was with them. They told me to wake up Hsiao Hung. She was sleeping so soundly I couldn't wake her, so I had to carry her into the dining room and wipe her face with a cold washcloth. Even after she opened her eyes she was still only half awake. Lao Shao turned on the tape recorder. Section Chief

*Lao-shih means "teacher."

Wang closed the door, and then he and the director began to question Hsiao Hung. First they asked her, 'What is your father's name? What is your mother's name?' Then 'Did anyone teach you to shout reactionary slogans?' Hsiao Hung, whose eyes were still closed, kept shaking her head. After a while the director grew impatient and demanded, 'A little friend of yours said she heard you shouting a reactionary slogan . . .'" Now Auntie Wang's lips were almost touching my ear. "'Chairman Mao is a rotten egg.' Did you shout that?" Apparently the seriousness of the situation suddenly dawned on her, because she opened her eyes—you remember her eyes, as bright and shiny as lichee nut kernels—and she stared at Section Chief Wang, then at the director, shaking her head over and over.

"They took turns urging her to confess, to tell the truth and be Chairman Mao's good little girl. They said that if she would confess that would be the end of it. Finally the director told her the name of the friend who had reported her. That seemed to jog her memory, and she burst out crying. We had to comfort her for a long time before she quieted down. I thought that would be the end of the matter, but they began to question her again, 'Why did you shout that reactionary slogan? Where did you hear the slogan? Did your daddy say it? Did your mommy say it? Did your teacher say it?' Hsiao Hung just kept shaking her head at every question. Aiya, Wen Lao-shih, you don't know how frightened I was! I was in a cold sweat!"

At this point Auntie Wang straightened up; her eyes rolled back as though she were going to faint, and she was patting her chest with one hand.

"When I stole a glance at my watch I was shocked to find that it was already midnight. The poor child couldn't take any more and couldn't keep her eyes open. When they asked her again, 'Did you hear your mommy say it?' she just closed her eyes and nodded her head. They asked her, 'When did she say it? Where did you hear it?' but she couldn't answer anymore. Finally, after much fruitless questioning, they let me carry her back to bed. The moment she was in my arms she fell fast asleep. But I haven't been able to sleep a wink. It's been on my mind all day long."

No wonder she couldn't sleep; I was dumbstruck just hearing her talk about it.

"Did you say they taped everything?"

"Of course," Auntie Wang replied. "And it will be part of her record forever."

"Her record!" I hugged myself as I felt a sudden chill in my heart. "Heavens, she's just a child!"

"Yes, not yet four; a little younger than your Ching-ching." Auntie Wang sighed.

I shook my head in disbelief. I felt, as Hsiao Hung most probably had felt, that I must be dreaming. Shih Lao-shih came from an approved background, I recalled, but his wife was from a landlord family and for that reason she tried harder in everything she did. Now their daughter had gotten into this terrible mess, and they were totally unaware of it. Poor Hsiao Hung, only four years old, and already she had all of this recorded against her. The tape would be filed away, and if in the future she did anything out of line it would be brought out to prove that she had been a "reactionary since childhood."

No wonder Auntie Wang couldn't sleep. I was so upset myself that I tossed and turned all night. Hsiao Hung's bright eyes and rosy cheeks kept appearing before me.

From then on, I asked Auntie Wang daily how things were going. First she had to make a written report, then the director of the kindergarten consulted with the school. Finally someone was sent to Hsiao Hung's mother's home in Tiench'ang County to investigate her. Now I began to worry about the mother. And poor Shih Lao-shih! All year long he traveled throughout the country investigating other people, never dreaming that his own wife would some day be the object of an investigation.

On Sunday evening, as An Nai-nai was washing the dishes in the kitchen and I was reading Ching-ching a story from the children's book *Nabbing the Secret Agent by Strategy*, Auntie Wang came over. She looked around nervously, her small eyes bright with excitement and filled with mystery. Something unfortunate must have happened to Hsiao Hung's mother. I gave Ching-ching two pieces of candy and coaxed him into An Nai-nai's room to read a book, then gently closed the door behind him.

"How are things with Hsiao Hung's mother?" I asked anxiously. I didn't even offer Auntie Wang a seat, but simply pointed to the chair at the desk. I propped up my stomach and plopped down on the bed to await the news.

"Hsiao Hung's mother?" Auntie Wang stared at me, shaking her head and waving her hands. "It's not Hsiao Hung's mother. It's Ching-ching!"

"Ching-ching?" I repeated, completely at a loss.

"Aiya, what can I say? . . ." She plumped herself down

on a chair, then, drawing it towards me, she leaned over so close that her chin almost touched my belly as she whispered, "Tung-tung told me that when he was playing with Ching-ching this afternoon he heard Ching-ching shout . . . he shouted a reactionary slogan!"

"A reactionary slogan? What slogan?" I still didn't understand.

"Aiya!" Unable to sit still any longer, she jumped up. Pressing close to my ear, she spat out the words, one by one, "He said: 'Chairman Mao is a rotten egg!'"

"What?!" I cried, springing to my feet.

"Shh! Not so loud!"

Auntie Wang caught hold of me and pressed me back onto the edge of the bed. I was completely numb, my mind a blank, as I muttered over and over, "Reactionary slogan . . . reactionary slogan . . ."

"The child's still young and can be straightened out. Speak to him. There's no need to spank him." Auntie Wang sat down beside me, trying to comfort me.

It was quite a while before I could pull myself together enough to ask, "Aside from Tung-tung, who else heard him say it?"

"I don't know," she frowned, her head tilted in thought. "I think just the two of them were playing together."

I made up my mind to talk to Tung-tung in order to get to the bottom of this. An Nai-nai was just then coming out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron, as I started out of the room, dragging Auntie Wang after me. I was waddling with the weight of the child in me. "What's the matter?" An Nai-nai asked.

"We'll be right back!" I answered as we left for Auntie Wang's apartment. When Tung-tung saw the look on my face he was badly frightened. His small eyes opened wide, he waved his hands, and he shook his head vigorously. "I didn't say anything! I didn't say anything! Ching-ching said it!"

It was only after some questioning that I finally learned what had happened: That afternoon, as the two of them were playing in the garden, they had begun by calling anyone they could think of a "rotten egg." After shouting "Daddy's a rotten egg!" "Mommy's a rotten egg!" Ching-ching had let slip the name of the one person he should never ever mention.

"I'm going to give him a good spanking!" Once my fear had subsided, anger surged through me. Holding my belly I stamped angrily on the cement walk.

"Spanking alone won't solve the problem, Wen Lao-shih," Auntie Wang remonstrated. "You have to start from the beginning and teach him to love Chairman Mao. You must guide him into loving our leader."

"As if I haven't . . ." I choked up at the injustice of the insinuation, and tears began to flow.

Not love Chairman Mao? How could I begin to tell her! To start with, my husband had not wanted our child to be born in a foreign country, so we had rushed back to China so he could be born here. And even before he was born his school name had already been chosen: Wei-tung—Defend Mao Tse-tung. When he was but a few months old we were lifting him up to look at Chairman Mao's portrait so that he'd recognize it as he grew up. He would laugh at the sight of his picture, and kick his legs and wave his arms. Before

he could even say "Mama" he was crying out "Mao! Mao!" How could anyone say that he didn't love Chairman Mao? And we, his parents, did not lag behind. In 1969, when the entire country was fanatically promoting the Loyalty Campaign,* I went out for four hours every night after a full day's work to take my turn at embroidering the huge portrait of Chairman Mao. In response to the call from the rebel faction, every wall in our home, except in the kitchen and the toilet, was plastered with Chairman Mao's portraits, poetry, calligraphy, and the like. It was not until his wife, Chiang Ch'ing, began to feel that all of this was too vulgar and gave the order to stop, that we took them all down.

How could anyone say that we did not love Chairman Mao? Why, in order to follow him we had abandoned our families and had come to China, where we had neither friends nor relatives. Time and again my husband told Ching-ching that Chairman Mao was the only family we had.

"Don't cry any more, Wen Lao-shih." Auntie Wang tried to console me. "You're so big with child now that you mustn't get upset. As I said, Ching-ching is still young and can be straightened out."

She talked as though Ching-ching were already a hopeless case. All I wanted to do was cry my heart out. But I was

*The Loyalty Campaign (*Chung-tzu hua yün-tung*) was supposedly initiated by the masses, but was highly endorsed by Lin Piao and his followers. Its objective was to worship and glorify Mao and promote his thought through daily life. At the beginning and end of each work day, everyone shouted "Long live Chairman Mao," recited his teachings, sang songs of praise, and danced before his picture. Every school and factory had a Loyalty Room in which were displayed many types of handicrafts, all with one subject—Mao; and in every household the walls were to be covered with objects related to him.

afraid that the neighbors would hear me and that the news of the incident would spread. So I took some deep breaths and silently wiped away the tears that kept rolling down my face. Suddenly the baby in my womb moved, and what should have filled me with mystery and great happiness was only a throbbing pain. Forgetting my tears, I pressed both hands against my belly.

"Tung-tung," Auntie Wang admonished her son, "you're not to tell anyone about Ching-ching! If you do I'll give you a spanking, and Ching-ching won't play with you anymore!"

Tung-tung stared at his mother with tiny eyes that resembled hers. He nodded his little head repeatedly like a grave old man.

I went home filled with anger. An Nai-nai had just finished bathing Ching-ching and was dressing him as I rushed into the room.

"What's the matter, Wen Lao-shih?"

I began questioning Ching-ching without even answering her. He raised his plump little face, mouth open, eyes blinking as he pulled at his wet hair; the incident was obviously not preying on his mind.

"Tung-tung said you shouted 'Chairman Mao . . .'" At this point I hesitated and from force of habit looked around before continuing in a lowered voice, "'is a rotten egg!' Did you say that?"

"May I hope to die!" An Nai-nai gasped as she stamped her foot out of fright.

At this he seemed to remember. His whole face tightened and he stared at me with fearful eyes.

"Did you or did you not say that?" I demanded again.

"Yes, I did." His voice was as soft as a mosquito's.

"Why?" I screamed angrily.

His face was now without expression. His mouth hung open foolishly and his eyes were as dull as a dead fish's. Even in my anger I felt sorry for him, but my heart was filled with foreboding. So many parents had said to me, "A child may steal or rob, but he must never ever commit a political error." Armed with this thought, I leaned over and slapped him hard on each cheek. This took him completely by surprise; he covered his face and burst into tears.

"Oh, don't be so hard on the child!" the frightened old woman said as she pulled him away from me. Ching-ching cried louder than ever, holding his tear-streaked cheeks with his hands. "Don't you ever say that again!" An Nai-nai scolded, with a set face. "Only counterrevolutionaries say such things. If you say it again I'll smack your mouth! See what you've done to your mother! Now, promise you'll never say it again."

"Won't . . . say it . . .," he managed to gasp between sobs.

"Come, let's wash your face again." An Nai-nai dragged him off to the kitchen before I could say another word.

What shall I do? I kept asking myself. Completely exhausted, I walked slowly to my room. I closed the door, leaned against the wall, and closed my eyes tightly, wishing I could shut out everything and not have to worry about a thing. The turmoil in my mind was like the rising and falling waves of a raging sea futilely searching for the land. I wasn't even sure whether I was anxious for Ching-ching or for myself. I had the sudden urge to write my husband, but I was afraid that if the letter were censored it could be used as

damaging evidence. I decided it was better to wait until he came home; that would also save him a few days of anxiety. Such anxiety would, of course, pass in time, but what concerned me most was that he might be disappointed in his son. That would be a tremendous emotional blow for him. After traveling thousands of miles to come back to China, he had met with so much personal frustration. His only hope was that his son, born and raised under the red flag, would grow up as an accepted member of the eight hundred million people, living a peaceful life without the burden of any previous ideology. And now Ching-ching was but four years old, and this humble hope was already in danger of being dashed. How could my husband bear such a blow?

After much thought, I decided not to tell him about the incident—not even after he came home. But how was I to stop others from bringing it up? I was sure I could ask An Nai-nai not to say anything, and I could hint at it to Auntie Wang. Since she and my husband were from the same province, and since the Cantonese are well known for their loyalty, I was confident that she would not report the matter to the school authorities. But I wasn't so sure of her husband. He was a colleague of mine, a man with a reputation for being very progressive. Besides, he had close ties with Party members and higher officials. He had always kept me at a polite distance, even though his wife and I were close friends, most probably because I had been poisoned by an "American imperialist" education. I decided that from then on I must be extra careful not to offend him. Neither could I afford to offend Auntie Wang or, for that matter, even Tung-tung.

At the thought that I, a grown woman, had to be on

guard against a seven-year-old child, my cheeks flushed. This was all Ching-ching's doing! I was extremely angry as I walked away from the wall toward the desk. I closed my ears to the whimpering coming from the next room. The baby inside me moved again; I felt as though an electric current were running through my whole body. Hugging myself tightly, I quickly sat down.

On the desk was a huge pile of books, composed exclusively of the sayings, poems, and essays of Mao Tse-tung. There were various editions: hard-covered ones, pocket books, and every other kind that was available. I sighed as I raised my head to look at the portrait of Chairman Mao hanging on the wall in front of me. He seemed to be smiling slightly, as if completely unmoved by what had just taken place. His cold, aloof look gave me a momentary fright.

At that moment the baby moved again. First I felt numb, then there was a dull pain. I held myself tightly, silently assuring my unborn child: Don't worry, when you come into the world I'll find an excuse to take that portrait off the wall.

Thus, I sat in my room, thinking, planning, and worrying deep into the night before turning out the light and going to bed.

At daybreak An Nai-nai got up to prepare breakfast. I got up at six o'clock since I had to go to the market. I had hardly slept at all, and I looked haggard; my eyes were swollen and my mouth was dry. I felt top-heavy and not too steady on my feet, and I could see that the old woman was concerned.

"You didn't sleep well," she said, "so go back to bed and I'll do the shopping."

I shook my head, muttering without even really knowing what I was saying, "His father'll be coming home soon."

"Now don't you go telling him about it!" she advised me firmly, sensing what was on my mind. "I don't think you should worry so much. What can they do to such a small child for saying something wrong, kill him? In our Huaian County the farmers always use Chairman Mao's name when they swear or take a pledge. It's worse when they start cursing! Many of them have been poor peasants for three generations, and nobody ever did anything to them!"

An Nai-nai's simple honesty comforted me, but there was no way I could make her understand the great difference in the political treatment of peasants and intellectuals.

When Ching-ching got up he was smiling just as usual, even though his eyes were slightly swollen. He'd already forgotten all about the trouble he'd caused.

"Mommy, is today my birthday?" he asked as he picked up his bowl of rice porridge.

I ignored him, my face taut. I was angry, yet amused. After all, a child is still a child. Looking at his plump little face, so innocent, I thought of his classmate Hsiao Hung, and in my mind's eye I could see a child being questioned late into the night. Only this time it was Ching-ching. The thought killed my appetite, and I couldn't taste what I was eating. An Nai-nai, trying to tempt me to eat, opened a bottle of Hangchow fermented bean curd that someone had given her. Thanks to her, I managed to force down my bowl of rice porridge, although I didn't do justice to the famous delicacy she had placed before me.

At a quarter to eight I led Ching-ching out the door, just

as the Chos, who lived next door to us, were coming out of their apartment. Mr. Cho, meticulously dressed in his Mao jacket, stepped briskly along with his head held high, while thin, tiny Mrs. Cho followed behind him. The moment she saw me she smiled.

“Good morning, Wen Lao-shih.”

“Good morning!” I answered hastily, carefully scrutinizing their faces. Mr. Cho nodded at me with a faint smile, then lifted his head again and walked steadily on. Mrs. Cho stopped to pat Ching-ching on the head before hurrying after her husband. I purposely slowed down, and in a little while the Chos' two sons came out. They were already in middle school and proudly wore Red Guard bands on their arms. They stopped and, with smiling faces, called out “Ching-ching” before hurrying on. These two Red Guards didn't seem to behave any differently than usual, so I figured that they couldn't know about Ching-ching. I was greatly relieved, but I would also have to be careful of the Cho family.

It was no accident that the school authorities had placed us in this dormitory. There were three families in this wing: our door was exactly opposite the Wangs', and the Chos lived between us. Mr. Wang came from a scholarly family in Nanking, where his father had been a professor. But because his grandfather had been an official in the Nationalist government, he had always been ultraradical in order to prove his loyalty to the Party. People said that at the beginning of the Red Guard movement, when the posters proclaimed that it was forbidden to use household help, he immediately fired Tung-tung's nai-nai. Tung-tung had weighed only two catties and eight ounces at birth, and the old woman had taken care

of him from the time he was taken out of the incubator at the hospital. The separation was a cruel one. Four years is a long time, and they had grown very close to each other. Nai-nai and Tung-tung, and even Auntie Wang, broke down and cried. Mr. Wang alone, frowning silently, remained unmoved.

His was the first family in our compound to respond to the call of the Red Guards, so to show their appreciation, the Guards tore down the poster pasted on his door, to the accompaniment of drums and gongs. Later, as the number of unemployed women grew, they petitioned Premier Chou to intervene, and shortly thereafter a notice was quietly circulated that permission to hire household help could be given under certain circumstances. By then Mr. Wang had joined the May Seventh movement and was in the labor reform program in northern Kiangsu. Since Auntie Wang often had to work the night shift, she wanted to have the old woman back, but Mr. Wang was adamant. On nights when the temperature was below zero, poor Auntie Wang had to wrap Tung-tung up in so many quilts he looked like a football and carry him on her back. Sometimes when it was snowing I would take pity on the child and insist on keeping him, letting him sleep with Ching-ching. It was because of this episode that I stood in awe and fear of Mr. Wang.

Mr. and Mrs. Cho were both important Party members. Since they were always being sent out to attend meetings or to investigate questionable colleagues, they were never able to find the time to go and work on the farms. Perhaps that was the reason they were both particularly enthusiastic about the greatness of the farm labor program, loudly praising

Chairman Mao's May Seventh Directive and declaring how this path should be followed to the end. That was particularly true of Mr. Cho, who was an expert on all the political phrases and terms and spouted them fluently. Behind his back people called him the "super-leftist," but no one dared ask him to his face when he would personally follow the path of the May Seventh Directive. The Chos' sons surpassed even their parents in their zeal. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, when the boys were only elementary school students, they were already very proficient in organizing the other children to "search and confiscate" among the families in our dormitory. They were fierce and unrelenting, and everyone in the compound—young and old—was wary of them.

"Remember, Ching-ching," I warned him, "you're not to go and play at Auntie Cho's home anymore." But I knew that the safest way would be to try to keep him at home.

On the morning of September eleventh I woke up with great excitement; my husband would be arriving that noon. Now that what I had looked forward to for such a long time was coming true, I felt apprehensive. My rapidly beating heart grew heavy, weighing me down.

Just as I finished washing up, An Nai-nai came in with a smile to show me what she had bought. She had gotten up at four o'clock to buy fresh vegetables and fish at the Dragon Way open market. The sight of her purchases and her smiling face made me happy, but also somewhat ashamed. I had lived in China several years, but I still had not acquired the habit of giving up sleep for the sake of satisfying my appetite.

As I was about to leave for work, taking Ching-ching

along as usual, An Nai-nai said, "His daddy's coming home today, so why are you sending him to kindergarten?"

"Mommy, I don't want to go!" Ching-ching protested.

"I think you'd better go," I said after thinking it over. "Nai-nai can work better then."

He was very disappointed, but just then the Wangs' door opened and Tung-tung came out, satchel in hand, behind his mother. The moment the two children saw each other they began talking, and Ching-ching's protest was quickly forgotten. Then the members of the Cho family emerged from their door, and after a flurry of greetings, we all went our separate ways.

It was a beautiful sunny day; everything was bright and clear. The path to the kindergarten was lined with French firmiana trees, and the sunlight filtering through the leaves cast speckled shadows on the cobbled path, flitting and dancing in the breeze. Even as I stepped on the dappled shadows my mind was busily trying to analyze the facial expressions of the neighbors from whom we had just parted: The "super-leftist" had held his head high in his usual unapproachable manner. Had his wife stopped to pat Ching-ching's head? The two Cho boys had hurried away after calling out, "Auntie Wen." Had they been in a hurry to go to school or were they trying to avoid me? And Auntie Wang had called out only a brief good morning to me, then hurried off to chat with Mrs. Cho about the weather. Seeing her so friendly with this Party member, I wondered if she would tell her about Ching-ching.

As I walked and wondered my head began to ache. Ching-ching was skipping and running ahead of me. As I followed

him my forehead dripped with perspiration, and my stomach tightened spasmodically. I wiped my forehead with one hand and held my belly with the other, panting heavily. When I finally reached the kindergarten, the other children were already there, and I saw Hsiao Hung sitting on the floor playing with some wooden blocks. She was wearing a pink smock on which her mother had embroidered the words "Love Labor." Suddenly she raised her head and called out, "Hi, Ching-ching's mommy." I managed to smile at her before I turned away, for my eyes were filling with tears.

When I came home at noon I was surprised to find Ching-ching sitting on his father's lap with his face wreathed in smiles.

"What's the matter with you? You look terrible!" my husband cried. He put Ching-ching down, hurried over to hold me, and made me sit down on the edge of the bed.

"Nothing," I said. "I just walked too fast."

Ching-ching stood on a chair and began to leaf through the pile of children's books on the table, exclaiming, "Look, Mommy! Daddy brought me all these books!"

I could tell at a glance that they were the usual comic books about catching special agents. I said nothing, although I really didn't like these children's books, for they fill the children's minds with the concept of spies and special agents. In Ching-ching's mind there were only two kinds of people in the world: the good ones and the spies. It was as though China had become a nation of spies.

It had been a long time since my husband and I had seen each other and there was so very much to say. But now we just looked at one another, not knowing where to begin. His

hair was clipped short, his face was deeply tanned, and he looked healthy and strong. His patched blue cloth shirt and trousers had turned gray from many washings and were covered with new patches. He didn't look any different from the laborers in the commune on the outskirts of Nanking.

An Nai-nai was cooking lunch in the kitchen, and the whole house was filled with the fragrance of fish cooked in wine. My husband smiled faintly and looked at my large belly, but all he said was, "The food smells good!"

"Lunch is ready!" An Nai-nai called. "Go wash your hands, Ching-ching."

Ching-ching reluctantly left his books, climbed off his chair, and went into the kitchen.

"You must be careful when you buy children's books," I quickly told my husband. "Don't buy any that have too many pictures of Chairman Mao."

"Don't worry," he answered with an understanding smile. "My colleagues have already warned me that it's best not to buy comic books like those about the heroes Lei Feng and Wang Chieh, as there are pictures of Chairman Mao on almost every other page. Children have caused a lot of trouble by spoiling the Chairman's picture when they color the books."

He leaned closer to me, lowering his voice to a whisper, "My colleagues remove the pages with Chairman Mao's pictures on them before they give the books to their children. I've done the same thing. Just don't say anything about it. We've got to be very careful with Ching-ching. He's at a difficult age, understanding the words we say, but not fully comprehending their meaning. Don't let him draw on the

ground, and don't give him any chalk or pencils. If he should get into trouble, with our background we couldn't clear ourselves even if we jumped into the sea to try to wash our sins away. And now with the old woman living with us in the house, we must be extra careful. These days one must always be on guard."

"Yes, yes," I hastily agreed, avoiding his eyes as I felt another dull pain.

During lunch both my husband and An Nai-nai kept heaping fish and vegetables into Ching-ching's bowl.

"Ching, have you been a good boy at home?" his father asked him. "Have you done anything naughty?"

"No!" Ching-ching declared unhesitatingly, busily stuffing fish into his mouth.

An Nai-nai looked at him, then went on eating without saying a word.

My husband kept urging me to eat more fish. "A pregnant woman must eat fish. It contains a lot of calcium and phosphorous."

I felt a bit guilty when I looked at his bright, cheerful face, filled with the joy of being home again. As I listened to him tell how he had learned to cut hair and patch clothes I pulled myself together and finished my lunch.

On my way back to work in the afternoon I met Tung-tung's father. He was pushing his bicycle along with one hand and balancing a large covered food tray with the other. One look and I knew that he had bought roast duck from the famous restaurant Ta San Yüan. He nodded politely as I greeted him, his white teeth showing up against his dark face.

After dinner that evening, while my husband was waiting

for his bath water to heat, Ching-ching and I took our stools out into the garden as usual to sit for a while. In Nanking, as soon as September arrives the mornings and evenings grow cool, and it is very pleasant to sit outside after dinner. During the summer many of the families even move out into the garden to eat their dinners. Every day at twilight our compound was crowded with tables and chairs, as the teachers and their entire families sat around in T-shirts and shorts, a fan in one hand and a pair of chopsticks in the other. The evenings would ring with their laughter and spirited conversation.

That night we were sitting in our usual spot under the Wangs' kitchen window. Auntie Wang, who always came home from work late, was just then beginning to cook dinner. The smell of vegetables and oyster sauce wafted out through the window. As she walked around the kitchen she was humming a tune that was unfamiliar to me—this was unprecedented; I had always thought that she knew only revolutionary songs. I could see just the upper half of her body; she was wearing a bright red short-sleeved blouse, her hair was newly trimmed, and she was smiling as she worked. She was a typical southern woman, always dressed in up-to-date clothes, but this was the first time I'd seen her in such bright colors. Seeing her so happily occupied, I hadn't the heart to greet her. Many of the teachers who had just returned from work were outside in the compound busily greeting one another. It seemed noisier than a special holiday.

About nine-thirty, when Ching-ching and An Nai-nai were already in bed and my husband and I were just preparing to retire, there suddenly came the sound of a child

crying. I recognized Tung-tung's voice and, startled, began to put on the blouse I had just taken off.

"Don't meddle in other people's affairs," my husband said.

"I'll just take a look," I answered as I hurried to open our door. I saw that Mrs. Cho had already poked her head out her door to listen.

"What's going on?" I asked her. "Why is Tung-tung crying so hard?"

"I don't know," she answered, as she opened her door a little wider.

Tung-tung's father had been talking in a loud voice, and suddenly, as though someone had pulled the plug on the radio, there was no more sound. Even Tung-tung's crying trailed off and became a soft sobbing. Mrs. Cho and I listened for a while but we could hear nothing more, so we closed our doors.

"What was it?" my husband asked as I came back to bed.

"Nothing," I answered. "Tung-tung was crying."

And yet I was worried. We had been neighbors for several years and I had seldom heard Tung-tung cry. The Wangs loved their son dearly and never raised their voices when talking to him. I worried that it might have something to do with Ching-ching, and I didn't sleep well that night. I woke constantly, the child within me so heavy that I had a hard time breathing.

The next day was Sunday. I purposely left our door open, hoping that Tung-tung would come over to play, but I neither saw nor heard anyone from the Wang family. I urged my husband to take Ching-ching to the Ming Tombs

and the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, but he said that since it was Sunday it would be too crowded; he would take the boy on the following day, which was his birthday. Meanwhile, it had been a long time since he had gone downtown, so right after an early lunch he took Ching-ching and went off light-heartedly.

In the afternoon the coal man delivered our ration of a hundred coal bricks, which he piled up right in front of the door. An Nai-nai would not let me help as she carried them, four at a time, into the kitchen and stacked them under the sink. Since I couldn't help her, I began to sweep up the coal dust. The Wangs' door was slightly ajar, and Tung-tung peeped out at me.

"Tung-tung, where's your mother?" I asked as I swept.

"Taking a nap," he whispered, opening the door a little wider to stick out his head.

"Why were you crying last night?" I asked in a whisper.

He gazed at me silently, his eyes blinking.

"Your father didn't scold you, did he?"

He hesitated, then said slowly, "He spanked me." He blinked, as though he were still feeling the hurt.

"Really!" I cried out in surprise, dropping the broom and knocking over a coal brick, which shattered into pieces.

"See what you've done!" An Nai-nai came rushing over, very upset at the waste. She snatched the broom away from me and did the sweeping herself.

"Why did your father spank you?" I walked over to him. Pressing close to the door, I whispered, "Did you do something bad?"

"I said a reactionary slogan," he admitted ingenuously.

"What?" I gasped. "It was *you* who said it? Now exactly who did say it, you or Ching-ching?"

He nodded, then shook his head.

"I won't say it again. Daddy told me not to tell anyone . . ."

"Tung-tung!" Mr. Wang suddenly called out from inside, frightening the boy. Tung-tung pulled his head back in and slammed the door.

"What's happened?" An Nai-nai had heard only part of the conversation. She straightened up, forgetting her sweeping, and stared at me inquisitively. "Who said it?"

"Maybe it wasn't Ching-ching after all." I began to feel a glimmer of hope. Just then, since the door had been slammed hard against my belly, I felt a stab of pain.

"What's the matter?" the old woman asked as she saw me clutch my belly with both hands.

"It's nothing," I answered reassuringly. Then I felt my womb constricting into a tight ball and I was frightened. "I'll go and lie down for a while."

But how could I rest? I paced up and down in my room, holding my belly as I anxiously waited for my husband and son to return. I couldn't be sure how much time had passed before I heard Ching-ching's voice calling out, "Mommy!" When An Nai-nai hurried out to open the door, he came rushing in, a box in his hand. "Mommy, new shoes! Daddy's going to take me to the Mausoleum tomorrow on my birthday!"

I rushed over and grabbed him. "Come with me," I cried, dragging him into the bedroom. My husband immedi-

ately followed us inside, asking over and over, "What's the matter?"

I pulled Ching-ching over to the desk and with a severe look pointed to Chairman Mao's portrait, demanding in a low voice, "Ching-ching, I want you to tell me the truth. Tung-tung said that he was the one who said the reactionary slogan. Now did he or didn't he?"

The moment he heard the words "reactionary slogan" and looked at Chairman Mao's portrait his face froze.

"Reactionary slogan? What reactionary slogan?" My husband grew tense and agitated as he grasped Ching-ching's shoulders tightly.

"I didn't say it!" Ching-ching shook his head repeatedly as he gazed fearfully at his father. "I didn't say it. It was Tung-tung . . ."

"Ah!" I let out a sigh of relief. I felt as though a weight had been lifted, and my heart soared.

"What did he say? Tell me quickly!" His father frantically shook him by the shoulders. "What did he say? Where did he say it?"

"In the yard," Ching-ching stammered, pointing to the window. "Tung-tung dared me . . . to say Chairman Mao . . . a rotten egg. But I wouldn't say it. It was Tung-tung who said it!"

"When was this? Answer me right now!" I demanded impatiently.

"I think it must have been yesterday afternoon," An Nai-nai interrupted. She had followed us unnoticed into the room. "They were playing in the yard for a while."

"Yesterday?" Stunned and disappointed, I felt as if I had fallen from a cloud.

"What? Children saying reactionary words like that!" My husband's face was dark with anger as he shook the child fiercely. Ching-ching was so frightened he burst into tears.

"Stop crying!" my husband shouted. "How about it? Did you say it or didn't you? Answer me right this minute!"

Ching-ching cried even louder. I began to feel faint. An Nai-nai caught hold of me, crying out, "Oh, oh, look at her face!" I was taken to the hospital that very day and after a whole night's ordeal I gave birth, a couple of weeks early, to our second child.

My colleagues often remark with envy, "Wen Lao-shih, your two sons have the same birthday." I invariably answer with a smile, "Thanks to Chairman Mao."

And truly I did have Chairman Mao to thank, for from then on Auntie Wang became my very close friend, and even her husband nodded and smiled whenever he saw me.