

## Chapter 5

Moon Pearl No Longer Cares for Loquats  
A Scholar Unwisely Speaks His Mind

The next day Mother did not go to her office. After breakfast, when Father had left, she told Weilin to sit at the table with her.

“Your little friend,” said Mother. “Miss Han.”

“Han Yuezhu.”

“Yes. You were close friends with her, weren’t you?”

“Yes.” Weilin blushed, thinking of Yuezhu; and lowered his face, hoping Mother wouldn’t see him blushing. Mother had met Yuezhu once. Early in their friendship, before they discovered the bamboo grove, Weilin had brought her to the college three or four times to play in the college grounds, though mainly just to be with her; and Mother had met them on her way home across the sports field.

“Are you still friends?”

“I’m not sure. She’s a Little Red Guard.”

“Oh.” Mother seemed not pleased with this information. “Of course. She would be.”

Mother was silent for a while. Was she going to blame him for having been friends with a Little Red Guard? Weilin thought so, and tried to think of something he might say to excuse himself.

“Her brother is the leader of the Red Guards now,” said Mother.

“Half Brother?”

“What?”

“Half Brother. He’s her half brother. Doesn’t like to be called her brother.”

“Oh. Whatever.” Mother leaned forward, looking earnestly into his eyes. “Weilin, I want you to do something for the family. Something very responsible. Will you try?”

“Of course! I’ll do anything!”

“I want you to find your little friend Yuezhu and explain to her that we are not bad people. We are not black elements. We love Chairman Mao. We would never do anything to harm him. Perhaps if you tell her that, she will believe you. Then, perhaps she will be able to influence her brother. Half Brother, I mean.”

Weilin was doubtful. “I don’t think she’ll listen to me. And anyway, I don’t think she can influence her half brother. It’s more a case of him influencing her.”

“But we must *try*! We must do what we can! For our family, for Father! However small the chance, we must try! Won’t you do this for us, Weilin? For all of us?”

“Yes. Yes, I will,” said Weilin, despair already filling his heart. He remembered Yuezhu’s face, that time he had seen the Little Red Guards marching into town. It was hopeless, of course. “I will,” he repeated. “I will.”

Weilin’s plan was to try to bring back to Yuezhu’s mind the happy times they had spent together in the bamboo grove. To this end he begged some coins from Mother and bought half a dozen loquats from the little store set in the wall of the college. Then he went looking for the Little Red Guards.

It turned out they had been assigned the task of ridding the town of sparrows and mice, in accordance with Chairman Mao’s instruction: *Away With All Pests!* The older of the Little Red Guards had been issued with catapults and BB guns, and were stalking under the trees in South Lake Park looking for sparrows to shoot. The younger ones, Yuezhu included, were catching mice and rats. Or not: having already set out the town’s small supply of traps, they were reduced to patrolling the kitchen and toilet areas with sticks, hoping to see a rodent in the open. Yuezhu was behind the refectory at Number One hospital, staring resolutely at a large

rat-hole where the wall met the ground, holding up a piece of two by four poised to strike any creature that might emerge.

She saw Weilin approaching her, and at once assumed the proper Red Guard glare: jaw firm, lips pressed together; but she seemed not to have mastered the squinching of the eyebrows, and attained only a sort of cross-eyed effect. Her hair was no longer sticking out in pigtails, the way he had liked it. Now it was cropped short, making her neck, her swan-neck, look even longer.

“Yuezhu. I haven’t seen you for a long time.” Weilin smiled as he came up to her, trying to be just like before. But Yuezhu only crossed her eyes more ferociously, and turned her gaze back to the rat-hole. She said nothing.

“I wanted to talk to you . . .” Looking down at her crouched over the rat-hole, Weilin could see the sturdiness of her frame, count the vertebrae running down the whiteness of her neck into the rough army-green blouse. A wave of hopeless longing washed over him, and he lost his words.

“Hush!” She hissed. “You’ll scare them back into the hole.”

“Do you really think they’ll come out?” asked Weilin, glad of the conversational opening.

She looked up at him, momentarily forgetting to glare.

“Of course they will. Half Brother said so. You just have to wait.”

“Perhaps you should rattle the stick inside the hole,” suggested Weilin, really keen to help. “I mean, perhaps they’re just asleep in there.”

“No! This is the right way! Half Brother said so!”

“All right. But you look like Mr Guard the Stump Waiting for a Rabbit.” This was an idiom everybody knew, based on a story from ancient times.

### **Guarding the Stump, Waiting for a Rabbit**

A farmer was working in his field when he saw a rabbit running very fast. The rabbit ran straight into a tree stump and knocked itself out. The farmer picked it up and took it home. His wife made a delicious rabbit stew. After that the farmer

would not work his field any more. He just stood by the stump, waiting for another rabbit to come.

Weilin had meant this as playful banter, in their old style. However, Yuezhu took offense. She resumed her cross-eyed glare.

“I’d rather be Mr Guard the Stump Waiting for a Rabbit than Mr Black Element. That’s your father, Mr Black Element! Everybody knows!”

“No, no. Yuezhu, listen to me. My father is very good. A kind man, a sincere teacher. He loves Chairman Mao! He’s not a black element!”

“Is so!” Yuezhu pursed her little lips, and crossed her eyes with such determination the irises almost disappeared. “What’s more, he’s a *spy*! We have evidence! Your father is a spy for the American Imperialists! For the . . . the . . . the *Xi Ai Hei*!” Her voice had gone down into her chest, into those round rich tones Weilin had once found so thrilling. Now they seemed full of menace.

“Yuezhu, that’s nonsense! My father doesn’t know anything about the CIA! He’s just an Assistant Professor at the Teachers’ College! How could he be a spy? What secrets has he got?”

“We’re going to struggle him until he confesses,” said Yuezhu with satisfaction.

Weilin was close to tears, from frustration and despair. “Yuezhu!” he shouted, feeling his voice shake. “It’s me, Weilin! Don’t you remember? Don’t you remember our happy times together in the bamboo grove? When we played Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai? Look, Yuezhu, look—I’ve brought you some loquats. I always remember how much you like loquats.” He held out the brown paper parcel on one palm, and opened it with the other hand to show the loquats.

Something crossed Yuezhu’s face, just for an instant; then she locked her eyeballs and set her jaw again. “Those are old things!” she said. Stepping forward, she quite deliberately slapped aside the hand holding the loquats, scattering them on the ground. Then, suddenly, with a vocal force that almost knocked Weilin from his feet, she yelled out: “DOWN WITH THE FOUR OLDS!” Straightening up, she brandished her stick, her face now set in an expression of utter malevolence. Weilin fled, leaving the loquats scattered there on the brown earth.

\* \* \*

It was some days before Father was struggled again. During those days, he and Mother both stopped going to work. They stayed at home playing Honeymoon Bridge with the deck of cards that had somehow escaped the Red Guards' vigilance. Then, late on Sunday evening, Father was sent for.

An escort of Red Guards came for him. One of them was Miss Down With, who Weilin now knew was actually called Comrade Gao. Father got up and went to the door with them. Comrade Gao turned and beckoned to Mother.

"You, too. Everybody."

"I'll go. But I don't see why the child has to go," said Mother.

"Because you're all black elements!" shrieked Comrade Gao. "You all need to have your thinking cleansed! To have your bad thoughts corrected! Come on!"

They left the building and walked down to the basketball courts. The light was failing, but the basketball courts were illuminated by some floodlights that had been set up on tall poles at each side. There was a big crowd all around, spilling back on to the path, and beyond, on the other side, on to the running track. Most were students, but there were teachers too, and some of the college workers. The Red Guards were all at the front of the crowd, and seated on ramshackle metal-frame bleachers at one side of the main court. Some of the Little Red Guards were up on the bleachers too, though not Yuezhu. Below these bleachers were some of the college faculty, six of them, all kneeling down, all with their heads bowed. They had placards round their necks. The placards said things like KUOMINTANG AGENT! or COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY! One of these teachers was Lecturer Wang from the Mathematics Department, Father's chess companion. His placard said ACCOMPLICE OF THE TRAITOR LIANG.

When they saw Weilin's father coming, the Red Guards all started yelling. Father was forced out on to the court with the other teachers, and made to kneel down. Comrade Gao stood behind him. She pulled up his arms to force his head down, then let go and stepped back. Weilin and Mother were not allowed out on the court. They were kept at the side,

behind the Red Guards. Weilin found himself standing next to one of the college workers, a member of the administrative staff. Weilin had met the man once, when he went with Father to get some papers typed. The man was watching the proceedings out on the court without much interest, and splitting sunflower seeds with his teeth.

“That’s your old man, isn’t it?” said the worker.

“Yes,” said Weilin.

“Well, he’s in for it.”

“Here’s the blackest of all the black elements!” shouted Half Brother as Father took up his position. “The leader of the traitorous clique in the Mathematics Department!” He pushed his face right up to Father’s. “CONFESS YOUR CRIMES!”

“I have committed no crimes,” said Father, not very loud but quite clearly, his head still lowered.

Half Brother let a short pause develop. Then, in a level, incredulous tone: “Do you dare to defy the justice of the masses?”

He spun round theatrically to address the crowd.

“Comrades! Our Party is in danger! Our Motherland is in danger! Our Chairman Mao is in danger! Traitors and black elements are trying to pull down our Party!”

“Down with the traitors!” shrieked Comrade Gao. “Down with the black elements!”

“Down with! Down with!” roared back the Red Guards. The teachers and workers joined in, slightly off-beat.

“Here at Hibiscus Slope Teachers’ College we have uncovered many black elements. They have been spreading their poison all over our college. We must root them out, one by one! They must be forced to confess their crimes!”

“Down with the cow ghosts and snake demons!” shrieked Comrade Gao. “Down with the dog’s-head traitors!”

“Down with! Down with!” screamed back the mob. One of the college workers, a cook from the refectory, whom everyone thought a bit retarded, did one too many Down Withs, making several people laugh; but the Red Guards turned on the crowd with their fiercest, most practiced glares, and the laughing stopped at once.

Half Brother turned back to Father. “Do you think you can escape the people’s justice? Confess!”

The Red Guards, followed by the crowd, took up the cry. “Confess! Confess!”

They had a placard ready for Father. It was a big white sheet of card with some string to go round the neck. There was nothing written on it; apparently Father had to write the characters himself. The placard was laid on the ground in front of him. A Red Guard came forward and gave him a big wood-handled writing-brush, already dripping with ink.

“What would you like me to write?” asked Father, his voice mild and even.

“TRAITOR AND SPY!” screamed Comrade Gao, shaking a fist in the air. The crowd took up the cry. “Traitor and spy!” they roared. “Traitor and spy!” The worker next to Weilin was shouting it, too, waving a fist in the air; but he brought the fist down rather quickly, to reach into his pocket for another sunflower seed.

“Maybe I’ve got some old thinking,” said Father in the same calm tone, when he could be heard. “Maybe my thoughts need correcting. But I’m not a traitor or a spy.”

“Oh, aren’t you?” Half Brother turned and pointed at Lecturer Wang, kneeling with his placard. “Wang Baojiang!” Lecturer Wang hastened to his feet, head still bowed.

“Before I had a teaching position at the College I was one of Assistant Professor Liang’s students. In a class on tensor calculus, Assistant . . . I mean, Traitor Liang said that the universe is probably finite. But Engels says it is infinite!” He lifted his head now, and glared indignantly at Father. He attempted the dramatic pointing gesture, without much effect, his placard getting in the way. “This is trying to turn our minds against Marx and Engels! This is trying to turn us against the Party!”

“I really don’t remember making that remark,” said Father carefully. “But Engels was a social commentator, not a cosmologist . . .”

He said more, but it was all shouted out by the Red Guards. They went on shouting for some time, shaking their fists at Father. When the shouting died down a little, Half Brother called out another name. One of the Red Guards, a pretty young girl student, stepped forward. She had the

eyebrow squinch down to an art. Her face looked like one of those in a propaganda movie, a peasant girl who has just been raped by the Kuomintang landlord, but knows that the People's Liberation Army is on its way to avenge her. She waited for silence; then assumed the approved posture—feet apart, arm pointing straight at Father—and spoke out.

“In our class on mathematical logic, Traitor Liang recommended a book by the Englishman Bertrand Russell. This Mr Russell was a paid hireling of Chiang Kaishek. He wrote a book against the 1917 revolution in Russia. In that same class, Traitor Liang said that truth and false were absolute and independent of social facts—against Chairman Mao's thinking, that true and false depend upon the class character of the proposition.”

“LONG LIVE CHAIRMAN MAO!” roared a man's voice in the crowd. The Red Guards yelled it back, and there was another spell of chanting. “Write! Write!” they ended up with. “‘Traitor and spy!’ Write it! Write it!”

“I'll write whatever you like,” said Father. “But not ‘Traitor and Spy’. I won't write that. I won't confess to that. I'll write ‘Counter-Revolutionary’ if you like. Or ‘Dog's Head Demon’, or ‘Big Black Element’. But I'm not a spy.”

“Oh, no?” Half Brother turned to the bleachers. Three male students got up and went down to join him. One of them was carrying Abramowitz and Stegun's *Mathematical Tables*. Half Brother took it from him and waved it in front of Father's face.

“If you're not a spy, then what's this?”

“Why, it's a book of tables. You know that . . .”

“An *American* book.”

“Certainly.”

Half Brother held up the book with both hands, open somewhere in the middle. He held it up over his head, facing the Red Guards. “An American book!” he shouted. “Full of numbers! So many numbers! Look! What does he need so many American numbers for? IT'S HIS CODE BOOK! HE'S A SPY AND THIS IS HIS CODE BOOK!”

Everybody started yelling now. One of the three who had come down, a tough-looking character wearing an army cap, ran forward and punched

Father on the side of the head. Thuck! went the punch, and Weilin could hear it above the crowd. Father fell over on his side, the ink-brush flying out of his hand and skittering away across the court, marking the ground with irregular splashes of ink. Father lifted himself up at once, back to the kneeling position. He put a hand up to the side of his head that had been hit, and shook his head once or twice, as if to clear it. The rough-looking Red Guard stood over him, as if preparing another blow; but Half Brother held him back with an arm.

Now Mother had pushed through the ring of Red Guards, out on to the court. “Stop this!” she screamed. “It’s all nonsense! You are mad, you are all mad! What has my husband done, that you call him a traitor and a spy? How can you believe this nonsense?”

Half Brother glared at her. “Teacher Yu,” he said, using Mother’s maiden name. “You should denounce your husband. He is a black element, you know it very well. If you don’t denounce him, that means you are a black element, too.”

“None of us is a black element!” shrieked Mother, holding her head with her hands. “You’ve all gone mad!”

Half Brother laughed—a rich, hollow laugh. “What a performance!” he laughed. “What an act!” Suddenly he was stern again. He made the exaggerated pointing gesture at Mother. “You know very well what you’ve done! Don’t put up this show of innocence! In your apartment, alone together with Traitor Liang, you have spoken bad words about our Chairman Mao—against the Party, against the country, against the people! You know you have, you can’t deny it! Do you think we don’t know? Han Yuezhu!”

Now Weilin saw Yuezhu. She had after all been in the crowd of Little Red Guards at the side of the bleachers, out of his line of sight. She stepped forward. Planting her feet wide apart and crossing her eyes, she pointed at Father.

“The Traitor Liang’s son told me his parents never read books by Marx or Lenin or our Chairman Mao! He said his father said they were too boring. And he told me his father was close friends with Counter-Revolutionary Traitor Fan Huizhong. And he told me his father never listened to our Chinese revolutionary music, he only liked to listen to the

stinking foreign music, and he said our Chinese revolutionary music was garbage. And he said his father told him the most important thing was mathematics, because it was absolutely true, but everything else was only *supposed* to be true, and . . .”

“Liang Weilin!” Half Brother was pointing right at him. Weilin was petrified. He could not move. Comrade Gao ran over and grabbed him, pulling him by the arm. Now he was out on the court with Father and Mother. Mother had her hands over her face, and seemed to be sobbing. Father was just kneeling there impassively. Then he turned to look at Weilin just for a moment, and smiled. It was his old smile, the smile he used when he had made one of his sarcastic remarks, or when he was going to trump you in a card game. The smile lasted only a second, but Weilin never forgot it. It was the last time he saw Father smile.

Out on the basketball court the illumination from the floodlights seemed much brighter. Those nearby seemed oddly distinct in the harsh white light, those further away strangely distant. There was Father kneeling, his head bowed again now, and Lecturer Wang and the other teachers, all in a row. There was Mother, her face in her hands, swinging her upper body from side to side in convulsive weeping. There was Yuezhu, still stuck in that absurd theatrical pose of accusation. And here was Half Brother, looming over Weilin, his round spotty face clenched in stern indignation.

Half Brother waved Abramowitz and Stegun in his face. “Do you recognize this book?”

Weilin tried to speak, but he couldn’t. He began to cry. Seeing this, the Red Guards all started yelling. “Denounce!” they yelled. “Denounce! Denounce!”

“Tell me!” commanded Half Brother. “Do you want to be a traitor, like your father?”

“No,” whimpered Weilin. Father had his head bowed, looking at the ground.

“When the foreigners were here last year, did your father use this book?”

“Yes.”

“How did he use it?”

“He . . . he just looked up numbers in it, and wrote them down.”

“He wrote them down on paper?”

“Yes, on paper.”

“And gave the paper to whom?”

“To whom? He didn’t give it to anybody. It was just his work.”

“He gave it to the foreigners, didn’t he?”

“No. No, he didn’t.”

“Then whom?”

“Nobody. He didn’t give it to anybody. It was just his work.”

Half Brother took a step back and made his mocking laugh again.

“You’re a stubborn little fucker, aren’t you? Well, we’ll find out what you know! We’ll teach you to defy the people’s investigations!”

He half-turned, and beckoned someone. The rough-looking boy came up, the one who had punched Father. This time he was not empty-handed. He was carrying a shoulder-pole, the type that peasants use for carrying bundles. It was an old, worn shoulder-pole, made from one half of a piece of thick bamboo split lengthwise, smooth and gray from long use. The rough boy stood over Weilin, gripping the shoulder-pole with both hands.

“Tell us who your father’s accomplice is, or we’ll beat you black and blue.”

Weilin had what seemed like an inspiration. Old Professor Fan! Since he was dead, they wouldn’t be able to prove anything. Without thinking further he said: “Fan Huizhong. My father gave the paper to Fan Huizhong.”

Half Brother nodded slowly. “So. The traitor Fan, who was condemned as a Rightist by the Party ten years ago! The traitor Fan, who nursed grievances against the Party, against the people, against the country! The traitor Fan, who destroyed himself in a final act of counter-revolutionary cowardice when he knew that his crimes were being uncovered!”

Yuezhu, who had held her dramatic pointing pose right through up to this point, now ran forward to where Father was kneeling. “Traitor!” she squealed. “Big traitor! Dog’s-head turtle-egg traitor!” She began pummeling Father with her tiny fists, punching at his head and shoulders.

Father submitted to half a dozen of Yuezhu's blows; then, suddenly, brushing away the little fists, he stood up. He looked straight forward, at the crowd of students and workers.

"You . . . you . . . my students, my colleagues."

Father's voice was strong and clear. Everyone fell silent, waiting to see if he would confess.

"I have done my best to be a good teacher. To give you the spirit of mathematics. That everything must be proved. That nothing can be taken for granted. That even things that seem very obvious must be subjected to strict logical inquiry. Now you are taking another path. A path of unreason and nihilism, of blind obedience to dogma. Not even a dogma arrived at collectively after long inquiry, but dogma from a single uncultivated mind, the ignorant ravings of a demented despot . . ."

"Yushu!" It was Mother, screaming his name to stop him. "Yushu, don't . . ."

Mother and Father both were drowned out by a roar of anger from the Red Guards. The rough-looking youth who had been threatening Weilin turned to Father. Lifting the shoulder-pole right above his head, he swung it round and struck the side of Father's head with it. Stunned, Father staggered a few steps, but did not fall. But now the Red Guards were on the court. One of them grabbed him by the hair, pulling his head down, and smashed a fist into his face. Another kicked him in the belly. Then they were all over him, a yelling, kicking scrum of frenzied youth. The other teachers who had been kneeling on the court got to their feet and ran, their placards flapping from side to side as they passed from the circle of brightness under the floodlights to the darkness beyond. The teachers, students and workers who made up the rest of the crowd just stood and watched for the most part, though a few of the students were in there with the Red Guards. Comrade Gao had gone into the melee. Mother was just standing there screaming, screaming.

Half Brother was still standing in front of Weilin. He had looked angry, listening to Father; but when the Red Guards rushed on to the court his expression changed. He seemed surprised by the violence of their attack.

“Comrades!” he called out. “Comrades! Let’s do things properly!” He stepped forward and pulled at the tunic of a Red Guard on the outer edge of the melee. “COMRADES!” with more authority, and an edge of alarm.

The Red Guards untangled themselves and stepped back. Father was curled up on the floor in a ball, his hands clasped tight over his head. There was blood on his head and hands; and the sleeve of his tunic was ripped right off, and there was blood on his bare arm. By some quality of the floodlight the blood looked black rather than red, but Weilin knew it was blood. He thought Father must be dead, and he began to cry uncontrollably. Mother was still screaming. Weilin could see, through the fug of tears, that Yuezhu was crying too. Not for Father, though: she had been trampled in the rush of Red Guards and was sitting on the ground nursing a shin with half the skin scraped off it.

“That’s the end of the struggle meeting,” Half Brother announced suddenly. “Let’s show good order to the masses.”

The masses had, in fact, mostly drifted away. They could be seen in the darkness beyond the floodlights, walking away across the athletic field and down the path to the dormitories. Only eight or ten students were left at the basketball court, and two workers—one of them the eater of sunflower seeds.

The Red Guards formed up in ranks and files, Little Red Guards in the rear, and marched off down the path to the student dormitories singing “The East Is Red”:

The East is red, the sun has risen!  
China has brought forth Mao Zedong!

Yuezhu was limping along at the back of the Little Red Guards, supported by two others. Weilin could not stop himself crying. Father dead! How would they survive with Father dead?

Mother was kneeling by Father. “Bullfrog! Oh, my foolish old Bullfrog! Can you hear me?”

To Weilin’s wonder and delight, Father groaned. Not dead! Father not dead! He ran across and knelt down next to Mother. There was a big pool

of blood under Father's head; but Father was moving, straightening his arms and legs gingerly, groaning.

"We must get him to the hospital," said Mother. "He's badly hurt."

"How can we move him?" wondered Weilin.

Mother stood up and addressed the nearest person, the eater of sunflower seeds. "Please help us. Help us get my husband to the hospital."

Sunflower Seed seemed to wake suddenly from a daydream. "What, me? No fucking way! They'll call me an accomplice! I've got a wife and kids to think of." He turned and walked off.

Mother appealed to the others. There were four students standing together, two others each standing alone, and a worker. The worker walked away. The group of four looked at each other, but nobody moved.

"I'll help you," said one of the lone students. "Teacher Liang is a good man, a good teacher. They shouldn't have beaten him up like that. It was wrong. They can call me an accomplice if they like. I don't care. It was wrong."

He was coming forward as he spoke. When he reached Father, he said: "We must stop the bleeding, that's the main thing. Then, there's a hand cart back of the boiler house. We'll get him on that and take him to the hospital."

Another student, one of the group of four, came to help them. The others slipped away. Father's tunic shirt was badly torn, so they got it off him altogether and tore it into strips for bandages. Father's head and face were all covered with blood. There were two big round wounds on his head where the skin had been split. His face was badly bruised and his lower lip split, and some teeth had come out. There was a long, deep gash on his arm, nobody knew from what. His arms and shoulders, when they got the tunic off, were covered in black bruises. But there were no open wounds other than those on his head and arms, and the student, feeling up and down Father's limbs, said there were no broken bones. Father seemed to be conscious, but could only groan.

They found the handcart and got Father on it. Then, with the students pulling at the front and Mother and Weilin walking behind, they took Father to Number One Hospital. But the hospital wouldn't admit him. Mother begged with the admissions clerk, but she would not yield.

“He’s been done over by the Red Guards, anybody can see that. Nobody here will treat him. It’s more than our lives are worth. We’ve had the Red Guards here, too, you know!”

A doctor appeared, and Mother called out to him; but grasping the situation, he only scuttled off down a corridor. At last they had to take Father home.