The Execution of Mayor Yin and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Revised Edition

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The Execution of Mayor Yin

Mayor Yin and I met only twice, but I shall never forget him.

In the fall of 1966 I went to Xi'an from Beijing and stayed at the home of my friend, Lao Wu, or "old" Wu. His only son, Xiao Wu, "little" Wu, was one of those arrogant Red Guards who, despite the fact that he was only a second-year high school student, exhibited an air of authority, loudly proclaiming such revolutionary slogans as "Support Chairman Mao" and "Rebellion is right and just."

He could not bear to take off his olive-green uniform long enough for it to be laundered, so his collar and cuffs were always shiny with oily grime. But his red armband was bright and clean, and whenever he met anyone he would stand with his right hand on his hip, forcing people to recognize the authority that five-inch-wide band of dazzling red silk represented. He and another Red Guard were preparing to set off for Xing'an County in southern Shaanxi province to kindle the fire of rebellion there. The spirit of revolution lagged in that backward

area, which did not even have a Red Guard organization, so Xi'an's Red Guard Headquarters decided to send two competent cadremen to set up operations.

Xiao Wu volunteered for the job. He was originally from Xing'an and had moved to the provincial capital with his parents when he was twelve years old. He could thus serve the revolution and also revisit his old home and see his friends and relatives. Both private and public interests could be served. Of course, it was taboo to speak of "serving private and public interests," since that was the time of the slogan "Down with private interests; serve only the public good." This sort of thing simply invited criticism. One had to base all personal conduct on Mao Zedong's teachings: "Never think of yourself; think only of others."

It happened that I had just completed my official mission and did not have to report back to Beijing for almost two weeks. On a former assignment I had visited all the famous scenic spots of Xi'an, such as the Great and Small Wild Goose Pagodas, the Forest of Monuments, and the artifacts from the diggings of Banbianpo. Since I had nothing better to do around there, I accepted Lao Wu's suggestion that I accompany his son and a schoolmate to southern Shaanxi to take in the sights of the Hanzhong Basin.

It took us a day and a night by bus to cross the peaks of the Qinling Mountains and reach Xing'an. All along the way it was mountain after mountain, and the bus was forever tilting to one side. I was constantly dizzy and a little nauseated, and even when I got off at the station I felt that I leaned as I walked. The Qinling Mountains are like a massive screen, and the scenery changed completely from the northern to the southern slopes. When we left Xi'an it was already late autumn, and the trees

were bare, the grass a withered brown; but in Xing'an the land was green as far as the eye could see, as if one had found oneself south of the Yangtze River.

Xiao Wu arranged for me to stay at the home of his relative, Lao Yin, while he and his schoolmate went to stay at the county middle school dormitory. Lao Yin was past seventy, but he was still strong and hearty. His wife had died the year before, so he lived all alone in a large one-room brick house, which he kept meticulously neat and clean. He seemed genuinely happy to accommodate a guest from afar. As soon as we stepped inside the door he cheerfully put aside his long pipe, rolled up his sleeves, and began to cook. Xiao Wu and his friend, in the tradition of the Liberation Army, laid down their packs and started to chop firewood and carry water from the well.

After dinner, just as Xiao Wu and his friend were about to leave for the dormitory, a bespectacled man in a cadre uniform strode into the room. When Xiao Wu saw him he hesitated a moment before reluctantly addressing him as Uncle. Then he introduced us, saying, "This is a distant uncle of mine," stressing the word "distant."

We did not know the visitor's name, so both Xiao Wu's schoolmate and I very politely followed suit in addressing him as Uncle. As soon as he finished with the introductions, Xiao Wu hurriedly grabbed my hand to look at my wristwatch. "It's late," he exclaimed, "and I'm afraid the student dormitory will close." In obvious haste, he urged his friend to get ready, then picked up his pack and left with him.

This uncle of Xiao Wu's seemed surprised and nonplussed by their sudden departure. While greeting us warmly his eyes continued to gaze with wonder at Xiao Wu's red armband. He was a very tall man, dark and thin, about fifty years old. His

back was straight and strong, suggesting that he must have presented an impressive figure in his youth. He looked you straight in the eye, and when he listened he bent his head slightly as if afraid to miss a single word. The expression on his face was diffident and gentle. He wore a neat gray tunic, which everyone called a Mao jacket, cotton socks and shoes, showing him to be a typical old cadreman from any part of China, north or south.

He sat down, and after exchanging amenities with Lao Yin, turned and asked me courteously who I was. Upon hearing that I was on a sightseeing visit to southern Shaanxi, he seemed more relaxed and expressed his welcome. He spoke with the sincere diffidence of the midlander. "Our Xing'an is a backward, out-of-the-way place. Aside from this boundless chain of Qinling Mountains and Daba Mountain, there's only the Han River. However, in the mountains to the north there are some waterfalls that are worth seeing. It's too bad that at the moment we're again involved with a campaign that makes it impossible for me to get away, or I'd be happy to escort you there."

Maybe the word "campaign" reminded him of something, for his face darkened and he sighed softly. Lao Yin turned on the room's single light bulb and brought him a cup of hot water, but he didn't drink it. He just sat for a while in silence, then got up and left.

The next day hospitable Lao Yin got up early in the morning to cook some rice porridge, breaking his habit of many years of eating only two meals a day. I was much refreshed after a good night's sleep and suddenly remembered the cured pork and dried beef I had bought in Xi'an. I hastened to offer them

to Lao Yin. As we ate our porridge I mentioned "Uncle" and learned that he was the mayor of Xing'an. His surname was also Yin, and thus he was a kinsman of Lao Yin.

"He was commended for his meritorious service during the Revolution and became the acting mayor. After Liberation he continued to serve as a member of the district committee, but everyone continued to address him as Mayor Yin," said Lao Yin.

It turned out that Mayor Yin had been an officer under the Kuomintang general Hu Zongnan, and with thousands of soldiers under his command, he had guarded a strategic pass along the southeastern edge of the Qinling Mountains. Since it would have been almost impossible to take the pass by force, underground Communist agents had been sent to work on subverting Colonel Yin's loyalty. At the time he was a young man in his twenties who commanded the allegiance of his soldiers, men recruited from the area around the Qinling Mountains, so when he resolutely threw down his arms and went over to the Communists, his troops followed him.

"And so, without wasting a single bullet, the red flag began to fly over three counties in southern Shaanxi."

As he finished talking Lao Yin lit his long pipe and took several vigorous puffs on it, blowing out the smoke slowly. His old eyes twinkled, as if the memories of the past could still stir his emotions. Since I have always respected those who could see a situation clearly, discerning what is right from what is wrong, I too applauded Mayor Yin's wisdom.

"I'm not trying to paint a flattering picture of him just because he's a kinsman of mine—you can ask anyone who lives within forty *li* of here. When he went over to the other side he

wasn't seeking personal wealth or position; he only asked for a guarantee of safety for his soldiers, and that they be given the chance to reform and make a new start. I don't think there are many Kuomintang officers who could have behaved like that!"

"There certainly weren't many like that," I agreed.

"Nowadays it's those who come from a good background who have the advantage. During the land reform period the working committee in his village classified his old mother as a poor peasant. But he actually requested that her status be changed, since when his father was alive they'd often hired laborers to help out at the busiest times on the farm, and according to government policy, that would classify them as rich peasants. In the end they put her down as a middle peasant."

"Well, that shows that Mayor Yin was pretty radical!"

"Hm, you don't know the half of it. During the 1951 Three Antis and Five Antis campaigns* he was the only cadreman in the county who came out unscathed. Even the Party Committee secretary was changed several times. As I recall, it was during those campaigns that the first one was dismissed for being corrupt."

"How could they change the secretary of the Party Committee so many times?" I was somewhat taken aback by this remark.

"Ai, the situation in our county was complicated, mainly because the peasants couldn't keep up with the constant political changes in politics. So production suffered. When the

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*The Three Antis campaign (*sanfan yundong*) was directed against corruption, waste, and bureaucratism; the Five Antis campaign (*wufan yundong*) was aimed at bribery, evasion of taxes, theft of state property, skimping on work and cheating on materials, and theft of state economic information.

rate of production failed to increase, other problems developed, and since these problems could not be solved, they got rid of the secretary. To tell the truth, ever since Liberation, production has improved and our lives have gotten a little better, though we still cannot compare with the people in the midlands. You've just come from there and you know that in those eight hundred *li* along the Qin River the harvest from one season can last for two years. The situation isn't bad here, but it's much worse in the smaller areas. Whenever there are periods of bad weather, famine still occurs and people are reduced to eating leaves and grass and the bark of trees. A few years back during a bad harvest I went to my old home in the mountains. My neighbor's daughter could not come out to greet me, for she had no trousers to wear. Her mother had exchanged their cloth coupon for food. This is just between you and me, and I trust you won't turn around and brand me a counterrevolutionary."

I shook my head solemnly. "I'm not a Party member, and besides, I detest those who report on people behind their backs."

Lao Yin spat contemptuously, expressing his agreement.

"There were plenty of hardships here during those three years. But in all fairness, I've lived more than seventy years, and I've seen worse times than these before Liberation. In those days people not only sold their children, there were even cases of cannibalism. During the recent period of bad times, the cadres were just as hungry as everyone else, so the people were placated by firing the Party secretary. The Communists acknowledge their mistakes, and for that I respect them. And in a way it's fortunate that these three years have been so difficult, or else Mayor Yin would've fallen long ago."

"Why, did he do something wrong?"

"He spoke out a few times during the Hundred Flowers period,* and in fact he led the criticism of the agricultural policies. Who would have guessed that there would suddenly be an anti-rightist campaign and that he would almost get a rightist label hung on him? His wife, who'd been working in the county, was transferred, and if it hadn't been for Mayor Yin's meritorious service, she would've been sent to the caves in northern Shaanxi. They had plans to make him a Party member and he'd already made application, but this anti-rightist campaign spoiled everything. Actually, he never wanted to become a Party member anyway. He once told me that never in his life would he be able to master the theories of Marxism.

"After the campaign was launched it was rumored that he would be stripped of his committee membership and dismissed from his position as mayor. But in the spring and summer of 1960 we were plagued with the worst drought we'd ever had, and not a single kernel of corn or wheat was harvested. The peasants' morale was very low, and there were many grain robberies. Even the grain sent by the government for famine relief couldn't solve the problem. So they were not only unable to dismiss Mayor Yin, they had to delegate to him the responsibility for handling agricultural production. During those two years he personally went into the villages and called on the peasants to keep up production. At the same time he relaxed regulations and encouraged the peasants to exert themselves to the utmost. He allowed them to retain small plots of land for private use and permitted them a little more freedom in order

*A campaign for freer criticism of the cadres and bureaucracy begun in 1956 under the slogan "Let a hundred flowers bloom together, let the hundred schools of thought contend." The outpouring of criticism by intellectuals led to an anti-rightist campaign intended to stifle all criticism.

to stimulate self-interest and establish a common market for free trade . . ."

"Aiya, Uncle Yin," I couldn't keep from interrupting him, "there you go, bringing up that Three Freedoms and One Contract affair!* You should know that the aim of the Cultural Revolution is to discover who was responsible for that fiasco. The wall posters in Beijing are already hinting at Liu Shaoqi, without mentioning names, and urging that this restoration of imperialist policies be soundly criticized!"

"Is that true?" The old man stared at me.

"Of course it's true!" I lowered my voice. "I heard many people saying so with my own ears."

"I'm getting so old I can't keep up with things." As he shook his head in discouragement the few white hairs on his forehead quivered. Suddenly his attitude hardened again and he knitted his brow so tightly that his face looked like a withered orange. "I don't understand," he said angrily. "Wouldn't the peasants have revolted if he hadn't done what he did?"

"Don't talk like that!" I warned him hastily. "If your relative did carry out this policy, then he won't be able to escape being criticized and condemned."

The old man began to laugh, saying with a careless shrug: "So what? Public criticism is common fare for the cadres, and even little fry like me have been publicly criticized countless times over the past few years."

"You're right. They say that this time the purpose is to oppose and guard against revisionism. Our main task is to dig up the roots of Liu Shaoqi's revisionist policies. As to the people

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*(*Sanzi yibao.*) The Three Freedoms were extension of plots of land for private production, free markets, and increase of private enterprise. The One Contract was a contracted obligation by each household for producing a fixed quantity of grain.

who merely carried out his policies, they will only undergo thought reform."

"That's as it should be," the old man agreed, somewhat mollified. "When Mayor Yin was pushing that Three Freedoms and One Contract way of thinking he was only following orders from above. How could he have invented something like that himself? Ever since the anti-rightist campaign he has been County Committee chairman in name only."

Although his mind seemed clear on the matter now, Lao Yin became preoccupied, remaining silent and thoughtful. When he was not busy he would sit on a small stool in the doorway smoking his long pipe, his eyes blinking nervously as though he were troubled.

Things really moved fast after that. In the two days since I'd last seen Xiao Wu, large red and green posters had appeared in the small county town, announcing the establishment of a local Red Guard organization. They called on all citizens and students to rise up and join in the revolution, pointedly urging all political cadremen to purify themselves by fire and carry out their revolutionary duties voluntarily.

The main thoroughfare of the town was the east–west highway. Lao Yin's house was at the west end, and standing on tiptoe by the side of the road looking eastward, I could see all the most important buildings in town: the county high school, the elementary school, and the movie theater at the farthest end; the County Committee office, the department store, and the bus station in the middle; and the county hospital near the west end. During those few days I often saw middle school students with brushes and pails full of paste, which they smeared on the walls with bold strokes before sticking up the large posters. Peasants going into town on business stood around watching curiously,

the younger ones even pointing as they exchanged comments. Occasionally the people's attention was captured by the noise of a motor, as a small tractor would come down from the mountains, filled with many enthusiastic, windblown faces. As soon as they had passed, everyone's eyes would turn back to the huge black letters and the rousing slogans of the posters:

DRAG OUT THE CAPITALIST ROADER XXX!
WE SHALL FIGHT ANYONE WHO TRIES TO COVER UP!
XXX MUST BOW DOWN AND CONFESS HIS GUILT!
XX, YOUR CRIMES HAVE BEEN FOUND OUT. YOUR
DAYS ARE NUMBERED!
SHAANXI RED COMMAND AND XING'AN REVOLUTIONARY
GROUP, MARCH FORWARD COURAGEOUSLY!

On the streets people could be heard loudly discussing the accusations against the Party secretary. The Red Guards wanted to hold a big meeting to criticize and denounce him for resisting the Sixteen Points,* for sabotaging the campaign, and for corruption. They even threatened to parade him through the streets! Then just as the campaign reached its peak, a large new poster suddenly appeared on the main gate of the county elementary school denouncing another cadreman. I walked over to take a look at it, but the crowd was three or four deep, so it took me some time to work my way up to the poster.

The heading read: "Who is the Real Class Enemy?" Beneath it was a smaller caption: "Beware of Catching the Small Shrimps and Letting the Big Fish Slip Away!" It urged

*The sixteen points (*shiliu tiao*) adopted by the eleventh plenum of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on August 8, 1966 for the purpose of regulating the activities of the Red Guard.

the people to drag out the real class enemy from the County Committee, the underworld criminal, the warlord of the Kuomintang era. It stated that he had masqueraded as a radical, lied about his background, and habitually fleeced the people, and that his landlord-class wife had resisted any and all kinds of reformation, and so on. At first I didn't know whom this referred to, but when I heard the people around me discussing the matter, it was clear that it was aimed at Mayor Yin. The flames had finally reached his head. Although I realized that the situation was inevitable and was dictated by the course of events, I heaved a sigh nonetheless.

After dinner that evening Xiao Wu came to see me, bringing a bus ticket to Hanzhong for the next day. I mentioned the poster I had seen that day and casually asked him what the problem was with his "Mayor Uncle."

On hearing the word "Uncle" his face turned bright red, and his nostrils twitched with indignation. He began to grumble about the difficulties of organizing work, complaining that the mountain youths were backward and stubborn and had no understanding whatsoever of policies. The newly organized revolutionary corps, it turned out, had been manipulated by someone in the background who, without warning, called for first purging the mayor and then arresting the Party secretary.

"This must be the work of Liu Shaoqi's running dogs," Xiao Wu said as he ground his teeth. "They want to protect those heading down the capitalist road, so they've changed the direction of the campaign and begun striking an already dying dog."

"Why? Is your uncle a veteran of political campaigns?" I quizzed Xiao Wu.

He shrugged his shoulders. "At most he is only a rightist who has slipped through the net. My uncle . . ."

At this point he stopped abruptly and shook his head vigorously, as though he had made up his mind to disavow the family relationship.

"Everyone knows that Yin Feilong has been the mayor in name only these many years. To go after him with all this fanfare is straying far from the main path. This is nothing short of catching the small shrimp and letting the big fish slip away. That Party secretary is rotten and corrupt, and he behaves immorally with women. The people were really angered, yet they let him go so easily. I suspect he's the one in the background who is manipulating some of the Red Guards and creating this split. But when I suggested that we go after the real culprit, there were some who accused me of trying to shield my own relative. Their mothers' . . . !"

He grew angrier as he talked, so full of resentment that he could not sit still on the bench. Suddenly he stood up and pounded his fist on the dining table, almost breaking the dishes. I was startled and did not know how to comfort him. I glanced at Lao Yin. He blinked his eyes indifferently as he smoked his long pipe. Occasionally he would look coldly at Xiao Wu without saying a word.

As soon as the sun set behind the mountain, the wind began to rise. It became stronger and louder. Afraid of being caught in a storm, Xiao Wu refused to stay any longer; he turned up his collar and hurried off. Lao Yin turned on the light and cleared the dining table. He boiled some water and then banked the fire, while I packed a bag for the next day's trip.

By the time we finished washing up it was nine-thirty, a time when most people in this mountain city had already retired. Just as we were about to turn out the light and get into bed, there was a very soft knock on the door. Lao Yin was

sitting on the edge of the bed, bending over to take off his shoes, and apparently hadn't heard it. Wondering who it could be, I unbolted the door. A figure slipped in with the wind, and quickly closed the door behind him. In the light of the swaying lamp I could see that it was Mayor Yin. His coming to call at this late hour took me completely by surprise.

He apologized for disturbing us. "It isn't often that I have a chance to meet a comrade from Beijing, so I couldn't refrain from asking you a few questions."

I invited him to sit at the table. Lao Yin pulled his shoes on and came over to join us. Mayor Yin removed his cap and glasses; and probably because he did not know where to begin, he took out his handkerchief and concentrated on polishing his glasses. His bronzed face, appearing larger than usual without his glasses, was overshadowed with fatigue and uncertainty. We were sitting very close to one another, and I noticed a scar under the corner of his left eye that stretched across to his ear. There was also an inch-long surgical scar on the back of his right hand. I surmised that they stemmed from his days as a soldier. Except for these marks, it would be impossible to imagine him now as the "warlord" the large posters accused him of being. I didn't know whether he was aware that his name had been posted, and I couldn't bring myself to ask him.

He remained silent for a moment, then suddenly looked directly at me and came right to the point: "Just why are we having this Cultural Revolution?"

From the note of urgency in his voice I could easily imagine his turbulent state of mind. And yet at that moment I myself was unclear as to the actual significance and purpose of the Cultural Revolution. I could only recite to him all the familiar statements that I had read in the papers and heard in various discussions.

The more he listened, the more puzzled he seemed to grow; his head leaned far to one side; his brows were tightly knit.

"I still don't see what this Cultural Revolution has to do with me." He waited until I had finished my stock response before he continued, carefully putting his glasses back on. "I've never been the leader in this county—not even the second in command. I've never been involved with organization, propaganda work, or any policy making. Whatever the Party told me to do, I did. I only have one head, which the Party can reform any way it wishes to. As for my family history, I've already reported it five or six times since Liberation. What's there to cover up, to lie about?"

He mumbled the last sentence to himself, and as he finished talking he bent his head, supporting it with his right hand. The scar on the back of his hand looked like a vine from which the grapes had been plucked clean; it glowed red under the light.

Neither Lao Yin nor I knew what to say. My host coughed dryly, reached into his pocket for matches, and mechanically lit his beloved pipe, which was already a shiny black from a lifetime of use.

I pulled out a pack of Front Gate cigarettes and offered it to Mayor Yin, but he shook his head and said that he didn't smoke. I lit one for myself as I tried to console him. I urged him to have faith in the policies of the Party and the people, and above all to believe in Chairman Mao's doctrine of "criticizing severely but sentencing leniently." By the time my cigarette had burned all the way down, my mouth was dry from talking. If I had continued I would have said nothing but lies.

He listened attentively, nodding his head now and then, although he could not hide a slightly bitter smile. "I'm not worried about myself," he declared frankly. "This is the only good thing about having no children. But I have feelings of

regret, though I don't quite know why. It's as though I've never done anything, never contributed anything to the nation, to the people."

"You mustn't think too much," I said. "None of us must think too much. As long as each one of us does his best, we're contributing to the welfare of the country."

But he smiled sadly as he shook his head in disagreement. "When I first heard about Communism I was almost thirty years old. At that time I wasn't at all clear whether the Communist ideals would ever be realized, or what it would be like if they were. I believed only that they were better than Sun Yat-sen's doctrine of the Three Principles of the People. The Communists' style was superior to that of the Kuomintang, and Mao Zedong was better than Chiang Kai-shek—Chiang Kai-shek made no real effort to resist the Japanese.

"It's too bad I found out about it too late. I was inducted into the army when I was fifteen and I experienced so many hardships. I was interested only in my own survival and how I could climb up and become the commander of a regiment, then a division, and eventually become a general. My only thoughts were of myself. So when someone told me that the Communists wanted to teach people to live for others and to work for the common people of China, I began to feel how insignificant and unclean I was. I felt that my life had been empty, that I had lived in vain. I remember I was once so moved that my hands began to sweat until the horse whip in my hand was dripping wet.

"But after all, I come from a lowly background and didn't have much book learning as a child, so even though after Liberation I joined several study groups, my level of culture was too low. I never could understand the doctrines of Marxism. I

sometimes believe that their books were written only for the intellectuals, or that they weren't meant for the Chinese people in the first place. Before the anti-rightist campaign the local Party organization directed me to study Liu Shaoqi's *How to Be a Good Communist,* and I seemed to gain something from that. After all, he speaks our language. Now we've been directed to learn the teachings of Chairman Mao. A few days ago we brought out several dusty volumes of his works from the storeroom."

I told him that Liu Shaoqi had been forced to step aside and that his *How to Be a Good Communist* was considered poison because he had quoted sayings from Confucius and Mencius. Mayor Yin was completely dumbfounded by this news.

"What's wrong with Confucius and Mencius?" he asked. "I once studied an article by Chairman Mao that also had quotations from Confucius and Mencius!"

"When Chairman Mao uses them that's different, of course," I said matter-of-factly. "But when other people use them it's with the ulterior motive of serving their counter-revolutionary aims."

Since I wasn't much clearer on this point than he, I hurriedly changed the subject. "Why were there discrepancies in the two reports you made about your family background?"

At this he stared at me as though he were being held forcibly by someone who would not let go.

"I did report falsely," he acknowledged frankly, his face filled with contrition. "Not long after I'd gone over to the Communists I was placed in a study group where we studied the policy of leniency toward prisoners of war. The cadre called on the people to be truthful, to empty their hearts. There was one man who took the lead in approaching the Party, and the

sins he confessed were truly frightening. Execution by a firing squad would have been too light a sentence to hand down, but he was forgiven. We officers who had surrendered were moved to tears.

"Everyone fought to be the first to go to the Party cadre to talk, to confess, to empty his heart. It was as though the more evil our pasts contained, the more glorious we'd become. I was even sorry then that my father wasn't a warlord or a secret police officer! So when I filled out the forms I wrote 'landlord.' It was at least believable, since who didn't believe that all of Chiang Kai-shek's officers came from the tyrannical landlord class?

"During the land reform campaign in 1953 the working committee in my village classified my family as poor peasant, because at the time of Liberation my family had no land at all. We'd had some land at first, but in 1948 it had been given to my sister as her dowry. My parents lived on what I sent them, which was much more than they could earn from farming. At that time I felt that being classified as poor peasants was in fact not being truthful to the Party. My father had died, so I wrote to the Party secretary of the county, asking that we be classified as rich peasants. Afterward, the county notified my mother that she had been changed to upper middle peasant. In fact, it was my brother-in-law who later suffered from this, since he was classified as a rich peasant because of the added farmland. So he became a member of the Black Five* This added burden caused trouble between him and his wife, and affected their marriage."

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*The Black Five (*hei wulei*) were landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists.

His voice gradually grew hoarse and finally died away, leaving behind only a tragic smile. I could find no words to comfort him and merely heaved a deep sigh.

"It's getting late." This was the first time Lao Yin had opened his mouth. He'd put aside his long pipe and was sitting there with his arms folded, looking worriedly at Mayor Yin.

The wind had died down a bit, but now the pattering of the rain could be heard, sounding like spring silkworms chewing mulberry leaves. Mayor Yin stood up as though he had just awakened from a dream, put on his cap, and muttered something incoherent. Lao Yin kept shaking his head as we saw him to the door. Lao Yin offered him the umbrella by the door but he refused and strode out. We watched his tall figure disappear in the wind and rain, into the darkness of the night. Lao Yin bolted the door and turned out the light, and in silence we groped our way to bed.

The next day I left for Hanzhong.

I returned to Xing'an a week later. It was sunset, and the mountain peaks, the trees, and the houses were all bathed in brilliant gold. The bus station was plastered with posters in large characters and brightly colored cartoons and propaganda pictures, so dazzling to the eye that one did not know where to look. With my bag in hand I strolled around the small waiting room. One look at the headlines and I knew that Mayor Yin had become the target.

I went over to the county middle school to take a look at the posters there. As I passed by the door of the theater I saw that the movie advertisements had been papered over with huge slogans. The notice "Closed in order to concentrate on revolutionary activities" was pasted over the ticket window. The area around the front door of the County Committee headquarters

was deserted except for a middle-aged man, his back hunched over and his head bowed as he swept the steps, watched by a young fellow who was blowing smoke rings. Perhaps he was the secretary of the Party Committee, but I was not in the mood to ask questions. The street seemed livelier than it had been a few days earlier. There were more people walking back and forth, mostly middle school students in green uniforms with red armbands. The color red was everywhere: red-lettered slogans, posters in large red characters, red signboards. In the light of the setting sun they presented a scary and menacing scene. I discovered that the names of all the shops had been changed. Now there were the Red Guard Department Store, Serve the People Restaurant, Red Guard Photography Shop, Protect the East Eatery, The East Is Red Theater, and Serve the People Agricultural Equipment Repair Shop.

From a distance I could see a large crowd of people standing in front of the middle school. As I drew near I realized that a debate was going on. The crowd was so densely packed that not even a needle could be slipped into it. I had decided to turn back, but suddenly I heard a familiar voice. Whose was it? To get a good look, I stood on my bag with my back against the wall of the school. Three Red Guards were in the midst of an argument, two against one. The lone battler was a square-faced, bushy-browed youth who was obviously on the defensive. His face was fiery red, and he was cursing loudly as he mopped his brow with his handkerchief. His opponents were elated at having gained the upper hand; with heads held high, eyes bulging, and spittle flying left and right, they looked like victorious fighting cocks. The more aggressive one was none other than Xiao Wu. His face, too, was red, and his neck was

thickened with shouting, but his manner was overbearing and his head was held higher than anyone else's.

"I say again," the unyielding, square-faced youth was shouting, "that we should act in accordance with the policies of the Party. Since he recanted and has served the Party well, there should be no digging into past records. That is what Chairman Mao has taught us."

"Hah!" Xiao Wu said contemptuously. "You haven't yet learned all the teachings of Chairman Mao. Chairman Mao also said that wrongs must be righted and vengeance must be exacted sooner or later. What do you say to that? Now is the time to seek revenge for our brothers!"

"You see! If he can turn against his own relative for the sake of righteousness, where do you stand?" the other one demanded fiercely.

"If one has killed then he must pay with his life. There is no other way!" Xiao Wu pressed his point.

"A blood debt must be paid in blood!" his companion shouted.

Their sentiments were echoed by some students, and although the square-faced youth continued to argue stubbornly, he was finally shouted down.

Maybe it was due to fatigue from the long journey, but I suddenly felt dizzy and nauseated. I hastily jumped down and picked up my bag. In the dying rays of the sunset, I walked toward Lao Yin's home. All along the way cries of "The killer must pay with his life" rang in my ears.

As I reached Lao Yin's doorstep the last rays of the sun died away. I was tired and hungry. All I wanted was to lie down and rest, but as I entered the house I was upset to find two guests

already sitting there. A white-haired old man about Lao Yin's age was reading from a red copy of *Sayings of Chairman Mao* in such a heavy Shaanxi accent that I could not make out what he was reading. The other person was an old woman, whose eyes were glued to the little red book in her hand. She remained motionless until she heard my footsteps; then she looked up, as if she had just awakened. She stared at me in surprise, her mouth hanging slack, as though her jaw were dislocated. The old man paused for a fraction of a second as he glanced at me, then continued his reading. Lao Yin stood up from the edge of the bed, nodded at me, and sat down again. He placed the little red book on his knees and stared at its cover.

I put my bag alongside the small cot where I had slept more than a week before and went to get some water to wash up. I began to regret that I had come back to Xing'an. I could have gone directly back to Beijing from Hanzhong, but I had come back to pick up a bag I'd left behind and to buy a wooden bathtub for a friend in Beijing. How could I have known I'd arrive just when they were rectifying Lao Yin! He was in hot water, and having someone from outside the province staying at his home could only make matters worse. As I washed my face I made up my mind that I would leave immediately if transportation could be arranged.

Lao Yin came over to ladle out water to wash the rice, and then he busied himself with making a pot of rice porridge. When it was ready he placed it on the table along with a dish of pickled vegetables. The old man and woman stood up as if they had cast off a heavy burden, picked up the little stools on which they had been sitting, and left. As soon as they were out the door Lao Yin went to the cupboard and got out the bowl of Hunan smoked pork I'd brought from Xi'an.

I told him that I planned to return to Beijing the next day. He nodded. "It's best to leave this place as soon as possible." With that, he bent over to eat his porridge and didn't say a word about his own troubles.

We had just put down our bowls and chopsticks when a new team sent by those in charge of the study class came in. One was an elderly woman, the other a self-possessed woman of about forty with short hair, very much an efficient cadre member.

"Lao Yin, have you thought it over?" the younger woman asked as she pushed open the door. Her sharp eyes swept over the dishes on the table.

"I really don't know a thing," Lao Yin replied as he cleaned up the table.

"Use your head and try to remember," she said patiently. She chose the most comfortable place to sit—beside the table, with her back to the wall—and seemed prepared to stay for a long time. The old woman sat down on the other side of the table and, taking a copy of *Sayings of Chairman Mao* from her pocket, gazed fixedly at Lao Yin.

"This only happened twenty-some years ago, so why can't you remember?" the middle-aged woman continued. "Besides, he was serving under your son. So many people knew about this, how come your son never mentioned a word to you? He was only eighteen years old, so full of life, and that evil warlord Yin Feilong shot him! This is class hatred; how can you not avenge that? And how did your *own* son die? These are the accounts that the Cultural Revolution must settle."

"My son died a year before the liberation of Shaanxi," Lao Yin replied gently as he carefully wiped the table.

"How did he die? As cannon fodder for Yin Feilong! He was stubbornly anti-Communist and forced all the young boys

to become cannon fodder. This is a most abominable crime! You've already reached a ripe old age, so what do you have to fear? Stand up and settle accounts with him!"

"Covering up for a relative will only add to your guilt!" The old woman also had to have her say. "Don't let his frequent visits fool you. He's like the weasel that comes to call on the chicken at New Year's time; his intentions are anything but honorable! If he has done nothing wrong, why should he try so hard to seal your mouth?"

The room was already so dark that we couldn't see each other's faces, yet Lao Yin made no move to turn on the light. He just sat silently on the edge of his bed. I was dead tired and wanted only to lie down. Finally I could hold out no longer and turned on the light. As the two women opened their books to look for a quotation, I slipped out the door and went to look for Xiao Wu.

Apparently Xiao Wu had established quite a reputation for himself, for I had no trouble locating him. He had become the deputy commander of the revolutionary corps, as well as director of propaganda. He occupied an office all by himself and had even been assigned a female secretary. On the door of his office was a new sign, "Propaganda Office: No Admittance Except on Business," written in red characters. All the lights were on, people were coming and going, and it appeared that they were prepared to work through the night.

Xiao Wu was wearing a brand new uniform with a wide leather belt. His face glowed; he was the picture of a vigorous, self-satisfied young man who has made it to the top.

I was intending to ask him why he had changed his opinion of his uncle, but the female secretary kept glaring at me. I told him only that I had to rush back to Beijing on important busi-

ness and had to leave the town the next day. I asked if he could help me get transportation.

"Leave it to me," he declared as he patted his chest. "I'll let you know first thing in the morning."

In a period of less than two weeks Xiao Wu had changed a great deal. The way he talked, the way he moved, reminded me of someone delivering a speech. He was filled with self-confidence—indeed, with arrogance.

Since everything was arranged, I stood up to take my leave.

"Leaving? It's still early." He ostentatiously turned up his left sleeve and looked carefully at his new watch.

I smiled, but didn't say anything, and left the Propaganda Office to take a walk alone. The street was nearly deserted even though it was only nine o'clock; most of the stores had closed and many homes were already dark. The mountain wind was blowing and the night air was as cold as ice water. A half moon hung over the mountains; the somber, cloud-covered peaks looked like crouching beasts waiting for the chance to pounce.

Heading into the wind, I walked down the road from east to west and back again. Since all the shops were locked up, there was nothing to do but go back to Lao Yin's home. The two women were still there exhorting Lao Yin, who was sitting on the edge of the bed listening politely as he smoked his long pipe. I was so tired I couldn't stop yawning. It was almost ten o'clock. The woman who looked like a cadre member noticed me glancing at my watch, so she got to her feet, saying, "You'd better get some sleep; we'll talk again tomorrow." With that, she and the old woman quickly left.

They were, after all, mountain people, and they had genuine warmth. I was quite touched, for even though they were carrying on a reform session, they were considerate enough to

let people go to bed early. In the outer provinces they often took turns interrogating from eight in the morning until late at night.

I was so exhausted that when I turned out the light and got into bed my bones ached. But before I closed my eyes I made an effort to say a few consoling words to the old man. "Lao Yin, you'd better just tell them all there is to tell. There's no night or day in their 'verbal persuasions.' They won't stop until they've achieved their goals, and why should you go through all this trouble? It's better to have faith in the Party and in the people, to clear up this matter and be done with it . . ."

My voice became lower and lower, as if I were talking to myself, and it finally died away in the darkness. After some time Lao Yin's bitter laugh broke the silence.

"But I don't know what happened. I just heard that during the war there was a soldier who disobeyed an order and Yin Feilong personally shot him. I didn't know the soldier and I didn't see it happen, so what can I say? If they want to get rid of Yin Feilong, let them go ahead and get rid of him. Why must they dig into dead issues? As for my son, he was killed fighting the Communists. What can I say?"

What could he say? This question for which there was no answer followed me into my dreams.

The next morning, to my surprise, the ingenious Xiao Wu had actually been able to procure a letter of introduction for me so that I could get on that day's flight. I was suddenly transformed into a "special observer" of the revolutionary corps and didn't even have to pay for the ticket. As the plane was taking off, Xiao Wu even came over to wave goodbye to me. I waved back through the window, but I quickly lost sight of him as the

town of Xing'an disappeared into the distance. Outside the window there was only mountain after mountain, the never-ending chain of the Qinling Range.

On a windy afternoon in the spring of 1968 I was walking in Beijing's Dongdan Park when I ran into a cousin of Xiao Wu's. I'd met him only once before, in Xing'an, and it was he who recognized me and called out. He was wearing a heavy cotton padded jacket and had a bag slung over his shoulder. He was sitting on a bench peeling a pear. I was pleasantly surprised and sat down beside him to chat. He had come to Beijing with a group of Red Guards to file a complaint. The Red Guard Headquarters of Shaanxi had split into two factions, struggling with each other over the policy of "attack with reasoning and defend with force." His faction had taken the initiative of sending representatives to the capital to ask for the support of the Cultural Revolutionary Group of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

I asked about the recent situation in Xi'an and about his uncle and cousin. "Your cousin has risen even higher, hasn't he?" I asked somewhat jokingly. "What is his position now?"

Unexpectedly, this question brought a shadow over the young man's face.

"Things have not gone well with my cousin . . ." He stammered slightly, as though he could not decide how much he should tell me. "He hasn't been back home for three months, and nobody knows where he is. My uncle is so angry with him he's developed stomach trouble."

I felt badly for my old friend when I heard this. Xiao Wu's cousin said that the two of them unfortunately were in opposing camps. Xiao Wu's group had been fiercely involved with

militant tactics, and it had been publicly announced that the group leader was to be arrested. Most likely he'd gone into hiding.

"You two made yourselves entirely too conspicuous," I said bluntly. "Don't you see that times have changed? How can they let you go on rebelling? Soon the People's Liberation Army will take over. You young people just won't learn; you don't realize the importance of discipline in an organization, and you fight constantly for power and your own self-interest. If you continue like this there's little chance you'll come to any good!"

Greatly chastened by my harsh criticism of the Red Guards, he explained defensively, "We do have our faults. My uncle said the same things. This is my first trip outside of Shaanxi. I've never asserted myself in any situation, and this time I took the opportunity to come and see Beijing. I'm not like my cousin. He's gotten in too deep and can't pull himself out—his father said he let success go to his head. At the time of the execution of Mayor Yin he was so 'red' he was almost purple . . ."

"What did you say?" I interrupted him, not believing my ears. "They executed Mayor Yin?"

He nodded. "That was early in 1967."

"On what charges?" As soon as the words were out of my mouth I waved my hand. My heart was filled with despair and sorrow. "Never mind. I know what the charges must have been. As far-fetched as possible. When all is said and done, he was a revolutionary in the cause, so how could they have put him to death?"

"At the time everyone felt it was a necessary step for the sake of the revolution. If they didn't execute a few people they couldn't establish their authority and extend their influence. Afterward we all knew we'd gone too far. There were some in

our faction who wanted to settle this account for him, but the time didn't seem right, so the matter was dropped. Yin Feilong wasn't the only case; there were many more like him."

As we talked a sudden gust of wind swept up pieces of paper and sand and swirled them in the air. The sun had long since been driven to some unknown place, and the desolate sky was a sheet of yellow mist. I shut my eyes tight and turned my face away from the rough wind, but this boy who had grown up on the yellow sandy highlands wasn't fazed by it. When the wind was at its strongest he even excitedly threw open his arms as if he wanted to catch hold of it. When the wind had passed he picked up where he had left off.

"I arrived in Xing'an on the day of Yin Feilong's trial. I remember that when the verdict 'Immediate execution' was announced. Mayor Yin's head fell forward. If it hadn't been for the two Red Guards behind him, who caught hold of him, he would have fainted. His wife tried to rush up to the platform, screaming all the while, 'You people follow the policy! You must follow the policy!' But she was immediately dragged away. After that the people began to cool down. Only the Red Guards around the platform clapped and shouted. My cousin jumped right up onto the platform and started shouting slogans like 'Blood debts must be paid in blood!' 'The execution of the warlord, counterrevolutionary Yin Feilong is a great victory for the thought of Mao Zedong!' At first we shouted with him, but our voices became fewer and lower. At the time I was so choked up my chest was bursting with pain. At the final shout of 'Long live Chairman Mao!' he was joined by only one voice, and it was coming from the platform. Everyone looked up—it was Yin Feilong! His arms were pinned behind him, and his glasses had fallen off, but his head was high. His face was

waxen, and his eyes were staring straight ahead as he shouted over and over: 'Long live Chairman Mao! Long live Chairman Mao!' We were all stunned. The only sound was his lone voice."

"Ah . . ." I drew a long breath. My chest felt as if it would burst. I was speechless.

"As a rule, in public trials the prisoner's mouth is gagged for fear that he might shout counterrevolutionary slogans. But someone said it wasn't necessary this time, since he probably wouldn't have the nerve to do so. And then when he began to shout 'Long live Chairman Mao!' the ones holding him didn't dare cover his mouth for fear of doing the wrong thing. Then the people at the back surged toward the platform. They completely ignored the chairman of the meeting, who was calling out, 'Intensify order and revolutionary discipline!' The Red Guards rushed up onto the platform to keep the people from going up. The chairman was afraid that a riot might break out, so he quickly ordered an immediate execution. So four or five men dragged Mayor Yin out onto a truck, and without even parading him down the street, they drove directly to the rock pile. You know the place, don't you?"

I nodded. Once when I'd gone into the canyon on a cart I'd passed it—sheer cliffs on both sides of a large fan-shaped area strewn with rocks and boulders, the dried-up river bed of an old mountain stream.

"They tied Mayor Yin to a wooden stake that had been stuck in among the rocks. As they pointed their rifles at him, he raised his head and shouted again, 'Long live the Communist Party! Long live Chairman Mao!' His eyes were bulging as though they would burst from their sockets, and his lips were bleeding from biting them. Everyone was scared out of their wits. How could they open fire on such slogans? They had to

stop him from shouting. My cousin had a large handkerchief, so he went up and stuffed it into his mouth. Then the executioners began to fire. This time there was no shouting, no cheers. No one wanted to go up for a closer look. The body just hung limply from the wooden stake, completely alone. I turned my head. I didn't dare look. A peasant slapped me on the back and asked, 'How could they shoot him when he was shouting "Long live Chairman Mao!" like that?' "

"What was your answer?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders and gave a bitter smile. "I told him to mind his own business."

We both fell silent. Another burst of wind. Dusk was falling earlier than usual.

"How is Lao Yin?" I asked.

"He's dead."

Xiao Wu's cousin said he had to attend a meeting, and hurried off. I didn't ask how Lao Yin had died, for I was reminded of the quotation from Mao Zedong that was part of our daily reading: "People die all the time."