Chapter 18

Moon Pearl Seeks Divine Assistance
Strange Portents Foretell Great Changes

On the night before her first day at the Dance Academy, Yuezhu knelt by her bed and made a prayer. She had never made a prayer before, and did not feel at all sure of the correct procedure. She knew she should fold her hands together in a *bai* gesture, and bow her head—that was all. So, feeling very self-conscious, even though there was no-one to see her, she knelt by her bed, clasped her hands in front of her, lowered her head, closed her eyes, and prayed.

First she prayed to Guanyin, the White Goddess. It seemed most natural, and she knew Guanyin was the goddess the peasants most liked to worship. She asked Guanyin to help her succeed at the Academy, and promised Guanyin that she would forgo all pleasures, spurn all delights, if only she could succeed.

After praying to Guanyin she said another prayer, for extra insurance. This one was to Shangdi, the god of Heaven itself, the god people worshipped in the West. The fact that he was worshipped in the West counted against him, of course. It might be counter-revolutionary to pray to him, she thought—not that anyone would know. On the other hand, Half Brother said that the Western countries were very rich and successful, so presumably Shangdi was quite potent. Well, you could never be too careful when dealing with the supernatural. Respectfully, she asked Shangdi to grant her good fortune.

She should (Yuezhu soon found herself reflecting) have prayed not for fortune but fortitude. The schedule at the Dance Academy was more grueling than anything she was used to or could have imagined. Classes began at 6 a.m. and ended at 9 p.m., with only two hours for lunch and a nap. On Saturday classes finished early, after lunch, and on Sunday there were no classes at all. The school was always open, however, and the keener students came in early to practice unsupervised, left late, and were there on Saturday afternoons and Sundays.

Yuezhu had supposed she would be able to live at home and take a bus to the Academy every day, but this left her so little time for sleep she moved into one of the dormitories belonging to the Conservatory, going home only on Sundays for dinner with the family. Rising at five, she was at the barre early in time for a few minutes loosening-up, yet still she was never the first student there. Some of the others were very keen, rising at four to get a whole hour and a half in before lessons officially began. Yuezhu tried this for a while, but it was too much for her. The schedule was sufficiently exhausting as it was. Day after day she danced until her joints ached and her limbs could barely move. It was a different world from the leisurely, informal dance groups of her previous experience.

As well as being long, the schedule was very varied. They practiced dance, of course, four or five hours a day; but that was the least of it. There was dance history, dance theory, folk dance study, dance drama theory and practice, choreography and choreology, physiology and health, political study of course, English—everybody was learning English now—and music.

A consolation was that she was able to attend some classes with Baoyu. Boys and girls at the Dance Academy had quite different schedules. The boys had to do a lot of physical training—weight-lifting and calisthenics—to strengthen their bodies, so that they would be able to lift their partners without effort. In foreign-style ballet, Baoyu told her, the male dancers needed to be very strong. Consequently, some of their classes on theory were run a year behind. For dance history and music the two friends were able to study together.

It was the music Yuezhu found most difficult at first. She had been reading music for some years, but only in the Chinese number notation.

Now the students all had to master western notation, bass and treble, sharp and flat, crotchet and quaver, tempo and key. Yuezhu found it horribly difficult, the dense black symbols spread over the staves reminded her of the heavy black characters seen in peasant almanacs foretelling the weather, the harvest, setting out the right day to wash your hair or conceive a child.

"I'm so confused by it all," she confessed to Baoyu coming from music class one day. "'In the key of . . . '—what does that mean, to be 'in the key of . . . '? How can I tell whether a piece is in the key of A, or B, or what?"

Baoyu laughed. "Oh, Elder Sister, it really doesn't matter. So long as you can move with the music, it really doesn't matter if you're tone deaf."

"It matters to Teacher Fang," said Yuezhu. "He scolds me every lesson."

"Teacher Fang is a dusty old pedant."

"Yes, but I have to pass his course."

Yuezhu did pass his course, though, that first semester, and all her other classroom courses. Not sensationally well, but well enough. To her dismay, it was the dancing that gave her real trouble. Before going to the Academy she had always reckoned herself a good dancer. In every dance group she had been in there had been someone better than her; but if she was not first, she was always among the best. Now, at the Academy, she was one of a group selected largely by merit from across the whole nation, and most were better than she. Yuezhu gritted her teeth and concentrated on the ballet exercises, where she was weakest: barre-work, center-work, corps drills.

Madame Blaitsky herself took charge of them for two hours each afternoon, to teach them fundamentals: the five positions of the feet, the eight positions of the body, the five positions of the arms, and all their many variations. Madame Blaitsky was the Russian woman with the cold blue eyes, who had interviewed Yuezhu for both her applications. She used the surname Zhao in Chinese, nobody knew why, but her students all called her Madame Blaitsky. She was a stern teacher, and threw them straight into the peculiar foreign vocabulary of their art with the barest minimum of explanation.

"*En avant*, Han Yuezhu, *cinquième en avant!* You're not concentrating!"

Absent Teacher An's phonetic guidance, Yuezhu's foreign language skills could not engage the French words, or perhaps had just been exhausted. She could hold them in her mind only by making absurd Chinese mnemonics of them. *En avant* sounded like "unforgettable"; the body position *effacé* became "prone to fever"; *en bas* transformed itself into *wang-ba*, a low-class insult meaning "turtle"; and the knee bends Madame Blaitsky called *pliés* were *pili*, the crack! of nearby thunder. Still she could not keep ahead of Madame Blaitsky. As soon as a movement, or a sequence of movements, and the bizarre foreign names for them, became second nature, they were pressing on with the next.

"*Glissade a demi-plié*, you stupid girl! If I'd wanted you to *croisé* I would have said so!"

They were all scared of Madame Blaitsky. Yuezhu had the impression that even the other teachers were scared of her. She would march into classroom studies sometimes, interrupting the lesson without warning, to speak to a student—for she took a strong personal interest in the students' lives, her object apparently being to make quite sure they had no interests of any kind whatsoever outside the world of dance.

At first Yuezhu felt that Madame Blaitsky was picking on her, as one of the weaker dancers in the first-year class, and this fed her sense of inadequacy. In fact, Madame Blaitsky had the same effect on everyone—even on Baoyu, who had endured her attentions the previous year.

"I thought she really disliked me," said Baoyu. "Then I saw that the other students all felt she disliked them. It's just her way of driving you forward."

"I hope you're right. Sometimes when she's watching me do exercises, I feel her eyes can see right into me, into my soul. See all my innermost faults."

"That's her job, to correct your faults. It's nothing personal. It's Sunzi drilling the palace ladies, that's all."

Baoyu was referring to an old story about the great military strategist Sunzi.

Sunzi Drills the Palace Ladies

King Helü of the state of Wu read Sunzi's book and asked for a demonstration of his training methods. "Is it true that you can train anyone at all to be a disciplined soldier?" asked the King. Sunzi said: "It is true."

"All right then," said the King. "Let me see you make soldiers out of my palace women."

Sunzi frowned. "Do I have the authority of Commander-in-Chief for the purposes of this test?"

"Certainly," replied the King.

The palace ladies were brought out on to the parade ground and made to stand in two companies. Sunzi appointed the King's two favorite concubines as the two company officers. He explained to them how to move to the front, to the rear, to the left, to the right, and taught them the various signals for these movements.

When everything had been explained five times, Sunzi asked: "Is it clear?"

"Yes, Sir," replied the ladies.

The drums were rolled for a right turn. Instead of carrying out the movement, the ladies all began laughing. Sunzi said: "When the orders are not completely understood, this is the commander's fault." Again he explained the orders five times, and asked if all was understood.

"Yes, Sir," said the ladies.

The drums were rolled for a left turn; but again the palace ladies fell into laughter and could not carry out the order. Said Sunzi: "When the order is not clear, it is the commander's fault. When it is clear but not obeyed, that is the officers' fault." He thereupon ordered the two company officers to be killed.

Hearing this order, King Helü hastily sent an order to Sunzi. "These are my dearest companions," he said. "Without them my food would lose its taste. Please cancel your order of execution."

Sunzi replied: "The commander must use his judgment, and the ruler must trust the judgment of his commander." Thereupon he had the two ladies killed, the next in rank being promoted to company officers. When the drums rolled again the ladies' performance in advancing and withdrawing, turning to the left and right, was faultless. None dared utter a sound.

Sunzi reported to the King: "The forces are trained and ready. Your Majesty may use them as he wishes. Even if you drive them into flood or fire, they will not falter."

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For all the pain and effort, Yuezhu believed she had found her life's purpose. Even when her self-esteem was at its lowest, when Madame Blaitsky had singled her out for criticism three or four times in a single afternoon, she never doubted that she was doing what she was meant to do.

There was a morning that December, shortly before the western New Year, when she was walking down the path from her dormitory to the main building. It was pitch dark, of course—little more than five thirty—and the ancient city was quiet under its night-time haze of ice mist and coal smoke. The only sounds were the faint rattle of bicycles on the road beyond the outer wall. Inside the main building some lights were on, one of them in the practice room where the keenest students were already loosening up. Coming down the path, Yuezhu could make out one of the dancers in the room practicing *ports de bras,* and she automatically checked off the movements: *première, seconde, demi-seconde, troisième* . . . The particular aspect of things at that moment—the beams of light from the windows cutting through the smoggy dark, the dancer all unawares beyond the glass, the distant rattle of bicycles, the silence and peace, even, somehow, the prospect of an arduous day's work under the unforgiving eye of Madame Blaitsky—it all came together with her own mood in an instant of perfect dedication. *This is my fate*, it all said. *This is where I should be.* A great swell of emotion lifted up her heart; not merely satisfaction on her own behalf, but unselfish things—love for dancing, and determination to do her best at it, whatever that best might be.

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Submission to her art, with all its tribulations. And gratitude—to her father, who had betrayed his principles for her, to her teachers, most of all to Chairman Mao, who had swept away the cruelties and hopelessness of the old society and created the opportunity for her to fulfill herself, to serve the people by enriching their lives with beauty. She had always loved Chairman Mao, of course, but she had rarely felt her love for him as deeply as she did at that moment. The cynicism of the capital, and indeed of the time, which had been settling on her like the gritty winter dust of Beijing, all fell away for a moment, and she loved Chairman Mao with all her heart.

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It was not Chairman Mao, however, but Prime Minister Zhou Enlai who forced himself on Yuezhu's attention that winter.

In January the Prime Minister died. The Dance Academy students got the news at the beginning of Teacher Fang's music class one Friday morning. Several students burst into tears right there. Everybody had liked the Prime Minister. The people all loved Chairman Mao, of course; but the love one felt for Chairman Mao was more in the nature of devotion, as one might feel for a benevolent deity—devotion mixed up with awe, gratitude, submission and respect. People's feelings for the Prime Minister were more on the human level. He could not part the seas and open the sky, as the Chairman could; but there were many stories in circulation about his acts of kindness and selflessness towards the common people, stories of a kind that were never told about Chairman Mao. Father liked the Prime Minister, Yuezhu knew that. She had the impression—of course, Father would never had said such a thing out loud—she had the impression he liked the Prime Minister more than he liked the Chairman.

Yuezhu herself had long since given up paying attention to current affairs. She was astonished at the emotions that appeared when the Prime Minister's death was known. Several of her classmates were red-eyed and distraught all that day. One or two of them could not dance. They went back to the dormitory and stayed there, sobbing into their pillows.

"It's the ones from intellectual families," said Baoyu. "They suffered a lot in the movements, and they always felt the Prime Minister stood up

for them. My father says the ones who loved the Prime Minister most really hate Chairman Mao. They blame him for the movements."

Yuezhu was shocked by the words ". . . hate Chairman Mao". She had never heard this combination of syllables before. It sounded like an obscenity. "How can anyone hate Chairman Mao?" she asked, almost by reflex.

Baoyu shrugged. "I don't know. That's what my father said."

Baoyu had even less interest in public affairs than she had, though because of his father's position he always knew the latest gossip about the country's leaders.

On her Sunday visit home, Yuezhu could see that Father was worried about the situation. It was a negative for his chief's faction, somehow. *When the lips are gone, the teeth are cold*, Yuezhu remembered him saying at the time Lin Biao died. But Lin Biao had been plotting against Chairman Mao, so of course it was necessary to purge all his followers. Nobody had ever accused the Prime Minister of plotting; indeed, the newspapers they read in Political Study class were full of eulogies for him. So why should Father's chief be affected? Yuezhu read one of the eulogies again, in the quiet period before dinner, and noticed now that it was less than unrestrained, had in fact a sort of guarded quality to it. These things were so deep, who could understand them?

Father said nothing to enlighten her. Yuezhu thought she would ask Half Brother when he came home in April. It was a firm family tradition now that he would come home for her birthday in April every year. It was not so easy for military people to get leave at Spring Festival, but her birthday was only a few weeks later, so it was almost the same thing.

Before Half Brother could come home, however, there was an incident. Yuezhu was never clear about the origin of or reasons for the incident, but it made a big sensation in the capital.

The incident happened at the Qingming Festival, early in April. Qingming was not a public holiday. Indeed, it was not officially a festival at all. It was associated with filial piety, and with sweeping the graves of one's ancestors. These were, of course, ideas and practices left over from the old society, and so they were officially frowned upon. Still, it was surprising how many people seemed to be away from their posts on

Qingming. Yuezhu had noticed it even at West Wall Number 14, where every other student was the child of some senior party or army official.

This particular Qingming fell on a Monday. On Sunday, the day before, some of the people of the capital used the festival to express their devotion to the late Prime Minister. They took big pictures of the Prime Minister to Tiananmen Square, set them up on the Martyrs' Monument in the middle of the Square, and banked them with flowers and memorial placards and poems.

Yuezhu herself did not see this. Her class had been issued their first real dance shoes the day before, and she and the other girls spent Sunday morning in the dormitory sewing on the ribbons that laced up around their ankles. There was a special way to sew on the ribbons—Madame Blaitsky herself showed them. You folded down the heel of the shoe, which was made of soft satin, and marked the corners where the fabric turned on itself. Those were the right points at which to tie the ribbon.

After fixing her shoes, Yuezhu hastened over to West Wall District to see her family. Sunday was her only chance in the week to be with Father and Mother, and she wanted to hear news of Half Brother, to know whether and when he would be able to get leave for her coming birthday. At home Father was pacing the floor, looking at his watch. He acknowledged her entrance with a grunt, then went back to pacing.

"It's his chief," said Mother in the kitchen. "You know, his chief follows Comrade Deng Xiaoping, and it looks as though Comrade Deng's in trouble."

"Yes. He's a capitalist roader," said Yuezhu unthinkingly. It was something they'd learned in Political Study class. Actually, Comrade Deng Xiaoping had not been named in the article they had studied, but everyone knew the piece was about him.

Mother laughed. "Is that what they say? Well, I don't pretend to know anything about these things. But your Father says if they push old Deng out, we might have to leave the capital."

Father's car arrived, and he left. Nowadays his unit always sent a car for him. He had still not returned when Yuezhu left to go back to the Academy, and the family had had no news of Half Brother. It was late evening, but the streets seemed to be full of people, all walking north-

wards, away from the Square. It seemed that something was in the air, though Yuezhu could not have said what it was. Father; Half Brother; the unexpected throngs of people drifting silently up from the Square—things were unsettled somehow. It brought to her mind the catalog of natural disorders in the first chapter of *Three Kingdoms Romance*, that heralded the fall of the Han dynasty: earthquakes, tidal waves, poultry changing sex, strange mists and vapors seen in the halls of the Imperial palace.

On the part of the bus route that ran along White Stone Bridge Road she witnessed something astonishing. A car went by, one of the shining black cars that party leaders and senior officials were chauffeured around in, exactly like the one that had come to fetch Father that afternoon. There were still people on the sidewalks here, not as many as nearer the Square, but groups and lines of them walking north—ordinary-looking people in rough workers' clothes and caps. One group stopped to shout at the car. Yuezhu could see them clearly, shouting and shaking their fists at the car as it sped by. Their faces were angry. Incredibly, one young man jumped into the road to shout at the car's back as it sped away. Yuezhu felt afraid even to have seen the incident. The other people on the bus looked afraid too. They were all looking down, pretending they had not seen.

Next day there was an announcement in mid-afternoon: students were to stay in the Academy grounds. Most especially, nobody was to go to the Square. The students all talked about it in the dining hall that evening, but no-one knew what was going on. It was two days later, Wednesday, that everything became clear. Yuezhu heard it from Baoyu, who had gone home on Tuesday evening.

"All the wreaths and memorials people left in the Square on Sunday," he told her over lunch. "Public Security took them all away Sunday night. When people went to the Square on Monday and saw everything had gone, they were angry. There was a big demonstration. Some police cars were burned. The people smashed up some government offices. Public Security had to restore order. My father was out all night."

"Wa! People feel so strongly about the Prime Minister!"

Baoyu shrugged. "Sure. Everybody loved the Prime Minister."

"Then why did they take away the people's offerings?"

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"I'm not clear. Something to do with Chairman Mao's wife. She never liked the Prime Minister, you know."

Of course, Yuezhu did not know. She did not know anything about these high matters, and felt uneasy hearing about them. "Just think," she said, not really thinking herself, just wanting to get back to generalities. "If this is the reaction when the Prime Minister dies, what will people do . . . "

She stopped herself short. Of course, Chairman Mao would have to die some time; but it was not very respectful to talk about it. Baoyu caught her meaning though, and smiled at her.

"If what my father says is true, we shall soon find out."

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After the Incident, things quickly went from bad to worse. The official called Deng Xiaoping, to whom Father's chief was attached, was now being vilified by name at Political Study classes. Apparently the leaders blamed him for the Qingming disorders. A prudent man, he took himself off to the South, and Father's chief went with him. Father had no choice but to follow, and the Han family had to give up their apartment.

"It needn't affect you at all," Mother told her, when she went to help them pack, on the very Sunday they should have been celebrating her birthday. "You've got accommodation in the dormitory. You can come down to see us in the vacation."

"It's easy to say," said Yuezhu. "But you know that I'm only at the Academy because of Father. If he's disgraced, I may get thrown out."

"Nonsense. They'll respect your ability. Nothing that happens to Father will reflect on you."

Baoyu was less sanguine. "It's a movement," he said, "a big movement. The leaders are all struggling for position when Chairman Mao dies. Even my father doesn't feel secure, I can see. Nobody knows what will happen."

In fact nothing happened, except that Comrade Deng Xiaoping was now vilified by name in the editorials they read at Political Study. It was clear to Yuezhu now—it seemed to her that she had been dull and stupid

not to have thought it through before—that Father's chief, and therefore Father himself, and therefore the entire Han family, were attached to this Comrade Deng Xiaoping, about whom she knew next to nothing, and that their fortunes would rise and fall with his. For the first time since she had been a Little Red Guard, politics now had some content for her—entirely negative content, at this point. To further discomfit her, Half Brother made no appearance for her birthday, and sent no explanation for his absence.

It really seemed that there was a movement in the air. On top of the regular Political Study sessions, the leaders at the Conservatory held two mass meetings. The main point of the meetings was to get all the students and teachers to criticize Comrade Deng Xiaoping, which of course they all did. In the field of music (said their final resolution), Comrade Deng Xiaoping had spoken disparagingly of the model revolutionary ballets and operas of the last few years, had sponsored productions that distorted the image of workers, peasants and soldiers, and, in short, had opposed what the proletariat supported and supported what they opposed. The students and teachers of Beijing Music Conservatory unanimously called upon the leaders of the Party to publicly condemn the revisionist and capitalist-roader Comrade Deng Xiaoping.

"At least nobody got struggled," said Baoyu. "I really used to hate those struggle meetings."

"I'm only afraid they'll close down the Conservatory again," said Yuezhu.

The Conservatory did not close. The Dance Academy ended its formal summer term in a whisper of anticlimax, there being no graduation ceremony because the Academy had only been reopened two years before so no-one was yet ready to graduate. After a few days' uncertainty Madame Blaitsky told them the practice rooms would be open all summer, but there would be no classroom teaching. Nobody minded this latter; all the students wanted to stay to practice; so there was little difference between term-time and vacation-time as far as Yuezhu was concerned, except that she had some leisure, and freedom to come and go.

She welcomed the opportunity for extra practice. It was clear to her now that, even with her best efforts, she was in the bottom third of her

class so far as dancing ability was concerned. This she was determined to improve. Through all the stifling heat of July she rose at five, exercised all morning, alternating barre and center-work, took a long nap after lunch, then went back to the practice rooms for another three or four hours dancing. Madame Blaitsky had gone to her home in the northeast for the summer, and the other teachers were not much in evidence. Baoyu, careless in his superiority, came in no more than two or three times a week, but there were always students in the practice rooms, ready to help, criticize, encourage.

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Half Brother appeared one sweltering day in mid-July just before noon, walking right into the practice room where Yuezhu and two other girls, enervated by the heat, were struggling through *enchaînements* together—five minutes of dancing alternating with ten minutes of fanning themselves and gossiping.

"I went to your dormitory, Little Sister, but they told me you were practicing. Such dedication! Have you eaten?"

Half Brother looked very fine and handsome, wearing a shiny brown leather belt over his smart green uniform. There was a gun holster in the belt, with the polished wooden butt of the gun visible beneath the cover.

He had come in a military jeep, with a driver. Now he took Yuezhu off across the city on a thrilling ride in the jeep, the air rushing past her face to cool and refresh her. Yuezhu had traveled in the backs of trucks, but never before in a car of any kind. To speed along Eternal Peace Boulevard in the jeep, past the vermilion walls of the Forbidden City, the driver sounding his horn at the scattered cyclists, seemed to her the grandest thing in the world.

They came at last to an old mansion in the Front Gate district south of the Square. Half Brother helped her out of the jeep, then led her through a leafy outer courtyard to a small reception room in what must once have been the servants' quarters. From here a waitress in a starched white tunic led them through the inner courtyard to a clean, airy dining-room set with small tables, each table covered with a white cloth. On the wall at the

far end of the room was a large landscape painting in the old style. Most of the tables were occupied, small groups of people—mostly men—in shirt-sleeves or T-shirts, bottles of beer on the cloth in front of them, glass tumblers, dishes of food in various stages of consumption.

"Southwestern cuisine," said Half Brother as the waitress led them to their table, the best in the capital.

"It looks very bourgeois," said Yuezhu. "What would Father say?"

Half Brother laughed. "Father's ideas are out of date now," he said. "There are fewer and fewer who think like him."

"Isn't it expensive, though? Are you sure you can afford it?"

"Not a problem. I want to make up for missing your birthday."

The food was very good indeed. Not really fancy, just varied and well-made. All the dishes were southwestern specialties: pickled eggs, savory bean curd, sliced chicken with a blistering hot black pepper sauce. Half Brother ordered beer, but Yuezhu would drink only tea.

"You should take a break from your dancing," said Half Brother. "Go down to Guangzhou to see Father and Stepmother. They seem to be well settled in now."

"To tell the truth, I don't want to draw attention to the fact that my family's in Guangzhou with Comrade Deng Xiaoping. I don't know what they'd put in my file."

Half Brother laughed, selecting a choice cube of bean curd. "It's nothing. Comrade Deng will soon be back in the capital. You'll see."

Yuezhu was surprised to hear him speak so easily and carelessly. He, a military man! She looked round a little nervously, but no-one was in earshot.

"I don't think you should make so light of it," she said. "Comrade Deng's in deep disgrace. Every unit in the country has denounced him. The Party's turned away from his path, left him behind."

Half Brother chuckled knowingly. "Little Sister. Don't try to make a chicken from fragments of bone. The Party"—he gave the words a sarcastic spin, throwing them back to her— "is waiting for a certain very important person to die. So that the ruling faction, who have that person's support, can be sent off to be managers of cement factories in Gansu Province" [naming a remote and impoverished region of the northwest].

"I can't believe you're serious," said Yuezhu. "How can you know such things?"

"Oh, the army knows everything. What's the Party without the army? The Chairman said it himself. 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.' There's nothing goes on that my seniors don't know about. And then, sooner or later, it trickles down to the officers' mess. Trust me, Little Sister, Father's setback is only a temporary one."

"But how can you be sure? It could be years before . . . " Instinctively, Yuezhu looked around again. " . . . before anyone important dies. The Prime Minister only just died in January."

"It won't be long," said Half Brother emphatically, and took a drink of his beer.

"I can't imagine what our country will be like without . . . when that person has left the world."

"Don't worry." Half Brother wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Our country will prosper. There'll be no more of these foolish movements. We shall accelerate Socialist Reconstruction. Our country will be the richest and strongest in the world. All the other countries will fear us. Even America—they will shake with fear!" He laughed, so loud that some people at nearby tables looked over, and Yuezhu wondered if the small quantity of beer he had drunk might be having a bad effect on him.

"Well, that would be wonderful," she said cautiously. "Of course, I hope you are right. But the immediate situation is that Comrade Deng is in disgrace, and our father's chief along with him."

"The masses support Comrade Deng," said Half Brother firmly. "Do you know about the demonstrations at Qingming earlier this year?"

"Yes. I even saw something of them."

"Well, that's the mood of the people. This leftist faction can't control them. 'When the rulers are wise, there is harmony under Heaven.' Soon we shall have wise rulers again, and our country will be strong and happy." He grinned across the table at her, the old clever grin she knew from her earliest memories. "Trust me, Little Sister."

Whatever the worth of Half Brother's insights, the general tension of the country's political situation had by now communicated itself to ev-

erybody, even to those who gave no thought to large matters from one year's end to the next. Everyone was nervous, but of course no-one wanted to speak about these things for fear their words might come back to them at a struggle meeting. And at last—the great affairs of mankind being linked to the natural world as they are, in ways no human mind can fathom—at last that tension penetrated the crust of the earth itself.

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