

Chapter 60

Importance of Showing the Correct Attitude A Sentimental Education

His sentence had been five years, just as Old Bolmo had predicted. Since he had not actually done anything wrong, the charge was only Hooliganism, not Counter-Revolutionary Activities. This was very good luck. As a hooligan, Norbu was merely a common criminal, of no particular interest to the authorities. He was allowed to serve out his sentence in the company of other criminals—a decent enough bunch, he said, once you showed them who was boss.

“But how do you do that?” asked Margaret. The tale was being told in the Xings’ bed, on the evening of the day after the demonstration.

“By force!” Norbu grinned, and made a fist the size of a small bucket.

Had he been sentenced for Counter-Revolutionary Activities (Norbu continued) he might never have got out. Political prisoners were kept in solitary confinement a lot—sometimes for the entire length of their sentences. They were given a poor diet to weaken them, and had to write self-criticisms all the time. If they failed to show a correct attitude, they were beaten, or kept for years in a room without light, so that they went blind, or mad. Sometimes they were killed. At the end of their sentences, if their attitude was still not correct, they were just given another sentence. Not having a correct attitude was counter-revolutionary in itself, so that justified the extra sentence so far as the authorities were concerned. Even if you did get out, nobody would ever speak to you, be-

cause that would make them counter-revolutionary, too. The Hooliganism charge had really been a lucky break. Of course, the common criminals had to do self-criticism, too, and show a correct attitude; but they all had it down pat, and taught it to new prisoners, so there was never any problem with bad attitudes. What you had to do was write stupid, bad self-criticisms at first, and perhaps do one or two mildly bad things—breaking prison property, or fighting, or talking back to the guards. You'd let them beat you a bit for that, then write a slightly better self-criticism, and so on. Give the impression of slow improvement. That's what they liked. They liked to be able to say to their superiors: This one was a really bad element when he came in, but he's completely reformed now. If you did that for them, you'd given them a precious gift, because all they cared about was making good reports to their superiors. They loved you then. They'd give you privileges, and even help you get a new unit after you left, in case your old unit wouldn't have you back, which was usually the case. But you had to make a show of gradually seeing the light. If you said the right things immediately, they would call you insincere and beat you.

“But didn't they know that your change of attitude was just a show?”

“Of course they knew!” Norbu laughed, his laugh rolling round the little bedroom in the last of the evening light. “They knew what we were doing, and we knew they knew. Nobody was fooling anybody. It was just a game, to make them look good to their superiors. You didn't feel you were cheating anybody because everybody knew it was all nonsense anyway. Their superiors probably knew, too, but they looked good to *their* superiors, and so on. Just as everyone knows that the stuff they feed us in Political Instruction classes—Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Zedong Thought—is all crap, but you have to pretend to believe it to get ahead.”

In spring 1987 Norbu had completed his sentence. Secretary Ma wouldn't have him back at the station, so he had had nowhere to go. An acquaintance of his had gone to Beijing, to study at the Nationalities Institute. This was a college near Beijing University, for training cadres from the national minorities, including of course Tibetans. Norbu had never been to Beijing, so he decided to go, to visit his friend and do some sight-seeing. His friend told him that Qinghua, the main college for

science and technology, was opening a new Botanical Institute, as part of the government's program to encourage environmental studies. The new Institute was inviting applicants to enroll for an entrance examination in the winter of that year. On a whim, Norbu had enrolled. He had passed the examination, and been admitted.

"I was born a peasant; I became a worker; then I was a jailbird; now I'm an intellectual! You can really say I'm a man of experience!"

"Huh! Experienced with women, I've no doubt!" This was to tease him.

Norbu leaned over her, cupped one side of her face in his free hand, and gently kissed her lips. "I never forgot you, little Nightingale. Not for one day."

The Botanical Institute was hardly organized yet (Norbu continued). They still had no proper dormitories. Some students actually slept in the classrooms. Norbu himself had got a bunk at the Nationalities Institute, in a room with some other Tibetans. The Nationalities Institute was fun. Practically everybody there was anti-Chinese. The Tibetans all carried Dalai Lama pictures. The Turks were even worse. They called the Chinese by a word which in their own language meant 'locust', because they regarded the Chinese as a kind of pest who had come to Turkestan to steal things.

"Turkestan? What is that?" Norbu had used a transliteration, *Tuerqisidan*. Margaret had never heard it before.

It was the region Chinese people called Xinjiang, which means "new territory". But the Turks hated that name, which they said was insulting. *It may be "new territory" to the locusts, they'd say, but it's been our homeland for a thousand years!* They all talked about a place called "Turan", which they said had existed in ancient times, stretching from the borders of China to the Mediterranean. That had been the homeland of the ancient Turks. The modern country Turkey was just the western rump of Turan. One day Turan would rise again, said the Turks. It would be the biggest country in the world, because half of China and half of Russia were really parts of Turan. Everybody would speak Turkish and practice Islam. They all looked down on the Chinese. They liked to chant:

Don't know how to sing,
Don't know how to dance.
Don't know how to trade,
Haven't got a chance!

“But how do the authorities react to all that anti-Chinese sentiment?” asked Margaret. “Don't the Tibetans and Turks get into trouble?”

Norbu laughed at this. The authorities didn't know anything about it. The minority students could say what they liked. There were some informers, of course, but you just shut up when they were around. A few of the lecturers could speak the minority languages, but not usually very well. Only two could speak good Tibetan, and they both sympathized with the Tibetan people. One of them was even a secret Buddhist. But of course the lecturers had no real power. All the power was in the hands of the cadres who ran the place, and they were all Chinese. They were the usual corrupt, self-important Party time-servers with bean-curd for brains. None of them could speak any minority languages, not a word! Some of the bolder students made a game of it. If they passed one of the cadres on campus they would break into song, using Tibetan, or whatever their language was. They would use the tune of a folk-song, to make it sound authentic. Except that the words of the song would be something like: Hey, Chinese devil, shove a horse's prick up your ass. Or: Hey, Chinese pig-fuckers, stay in your own country and leave us alone. Then the cadre would nod and smile, glad to see a member of the cherished national minorities singing so happily in the capital of the Motherland.

This threw Margaret into a fit of laughter. Norbu laughed at her laughing, and they laughed, and embraced, and kissed, in the Xings' broad wooden bed.

When they could laugh no more, Margaret said: “Really, you're all very bad. Trying to split the Motherland. I don't agree with it at all.”

Norbu rolled onto his back and lay looking up at the ceiling, hands behind his head. He'd been thinking a lot about it, he said, while living at the Institute. On the one hand, of course the Tibetans, Turks and so on wanted to rule themselves. That was natural. Nobody likes to be ruled by

foreigners. And the Chinese had behaved very badly in those places, made a lot of people hate them, especially with their anti-religious attitude. That was why there was so much bad feeling. On the other hand, when the students at the Nationalities Institute talked together, they always acknowledged that they were part-Chinese themselves, because of their education. Most of them had been hand-picked by the Chinese authorities, given some special intensive Chinese education, as Norbu had in his youth, in the hope they would become collaborators. Most of them hadn't, of course; but by the time they finished their education, their thinking was more Chinese than minority. In some ways, they were closer to young Chinese people of their own age than they were to their grandparents, who had religion in their bones. Most of them hadn't really realized this until coming to Beijing. In the capital, for the first time, they had met reasonable, educated Chinese people; not at all like the rough peasant cadres, ex-cons and military types you get in the border areas. People you could talk to. Even, very occasionally, people who sympathized with the independence movements in the minority areas. This kind of encounter softened the attitudes of the minority students. Most of them had some Chinese friends. Though of course, you always had to be much more careful with Chinese people.

“Yes. You were very careful with me. You told me your Dalai Lama picture was a picture of your father.”

Margaret was nestled against him at the side, her head on his chest. Instead of a scuffed photograph stitched into the lining of his jacket, Norbu now had a proper Dalai Lama pendant: a tiny colored picture of the pontiff in a brown robe and yellow hat, surrounded by some Tibetan writing, all imbedded in a hard lucite disk, the disk itself framed with fine-worked silver, and hanging from a silver chain. Norbu had taken the pendant off the previous night when they undressed, folding it in his hands and murmuring a prayer over it in his own language before setting it down reverently on top of the Xings' chest of drawers. However, constant wearing of the heavy pendant had left a mark on his breast-bone. Margaret touched the mark with her fingers, then ran her fingers over his pectorals to the nipples. His body seemed even larger without clothes. His skin was dark in the fading light. She caressed his belly and private parts.

“No I didn’t. You *guessed* it was my father, and I didn’t contradict you. But you’re right, I was careful. I didn’t know anything about you.”

One of the officers of the Provisional Students Union, that was organizing the demonstrations (Norbu went on) was a Turk. His name was Erkin. He had been instrumental in setting up that day’s march. The Turks at the Nationalities Institute didn’t like him much because he was too Sinified. A lot of other people didn’t like him because he was too full of himself. However, he was a great organizer, and very stubborn. The head of his college, Beijing Education Institute, had spent five hours—until three in the morning!—trying to persuade him not to march. A lot of students didn’t want to march, either, because they were scared. There had been a fierce editorial in *People’s Daily* the previous day. They were sure the authorities would try to stop the demonstration by force. Some of them had written their wills last night! At Qinghua, all the student leaders had resigned from their positions in the Provisional Union, out of fear. But Erkin was determined to march. He had said: “If nobody else wants to march, I’ll march myself! I’ll go and stand in front of Xinhua Gate alone, and shout for the leaders to come out!” He would have done it, too. He wasn’t scared of anything. When the other students saw that, it gave them heart, so they marched.

“And you really had a great success. So many students marching! I’ve never seen so many people marching. Even the parades in New York City can’t compare with today’s demonstration!”

“Not only the students. See how many citizens came out to support us! That will make the leaders stop and think.”

“But do you think they will take some action against you?”

“Depends. If it were up to the Beijing Party Committee, they would. That Li Ximing is a big shit. He really hates our movement. But what can they do? What can they stop us with? They only have the police. And you saw how we pushed through the police lines. Some of the policemen were smiling at us, you saw it yourself. Beyond the police, what can they do? There’s only the army. Are they going to use the army against us, here in the capital, with all the foreign TV cameras here for Gorbachev? I don’t think so.”

“What about after Gorbachev has gone?”

“Then they might. But that’s three weeks away. In three weeks, we should be able to get some concessions out of them.”

“But I don’t understand what concessions you want. All I heard today was Long Live Democracy and Down With Corruption. What do you actually want?”

Norbu chuckled. “What *I* want is, for Tibet to be free. I don’t care about China. But if you can get some democracy in China, that will help us get our freedom. With democracy, people can vote for their leaders, right? Well, in Tibet, everybody will vote for the Dalai Lama. Everybody, a hundred per cent. The whole world will see that. You Chinese will have no face to stay in Tibet after that. And even if we don’t get democracy, we might get some press freedom. With press freedom we can explain our case to the Chinese people. They’ve never heard it. If they can hear our case, I’m sure they won’t want to go on keeping us like prisoners in China against our will. So even if we can just get a few reforms out of the leaders before Gorbachev comes, that will be good for us. That’s what I hope for. But some of the younger students are very naive. They think they’re going to bring down the government, and march Deng Xiaoping through the streets with a dunce’s cap on his head. They’re stupid. That’s not going to happen. Old Deng’s too smart for them. But he might give us some concessions.”

They talked until very late, then made their third *tongfang* and fell at last into the long still sleep of joy and satiation. Margaret woke in the bright light of late morning. Norbu had left the bed and was putting on his clothes. She watched his strong, dark body. When he had dressed he went out. Margaret drifted back into sleep. When next she woke he was climbing into bed beside her, holding a large paper bag. Inside the bag were some sweet, sticky pastries he had bought from a street vendor. They feasted on the pastries, and on soda from the refrigerator. The pastries were still warm, the soda effervescent and cold. To Margaret it seemed like the food of the Immortals.

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A great novelist once observed that “perfect happiness, even in memory, is not common”. No doubt she would have added, if she had thought of it, that every human being is nonetheless permitted at least a glimpse of that perfection.

Margaret knew, looking back on that time from later years, that her happiness that Beijing spring was indeed perfect. She knew this as one knows one has been sleeping; at the time, reflection on her state of mind seemed not to be required. Still she was very occasionally aware—strolling through sunlight and shade beneath the trees which redeem the streets of Beijing, idling in bed on a sunbeamed afternoon listening to gentle pop music on the Xings’ cassette player, watching Norbu drink his beer direct from the bottle amid the din of a dumpling-parlor—at those moments Margaret was aware that the events of her American life, only a few weeks previous by normal measurements of the passage of time, had receded and dimmed until they seemed no more substantial than the court intrigues of the fabled Emperors. She caught herself thinking of her husband; and was puzzled and amused to find that she could recall his name only with an intellectual effort, such as one might have to apply when trying to bring up some date once memorized for a school history lesson. It was all very remote, and surely not at all important.

In part, her feelings of detachment and irresponsibility were encouraged by a sense of being *hors de combat*. The Chinese life Margaret knew, the life she had grown up in, and which was still the life of practically all her fellow-countrymen, had been regimented to a degree unimaginable to free people. One’s work, one’s home and family life, one’s leisure time, one’s very thoughts and feelings were subject to supervision by functionaries of the State. It is true that the supervision did not often have to make itself felt; likewise it is true that a caged bird does not have to be continually dashing itself against the bars of its cage to know that they are there. A Chinese work unit was essentially a kind of open prison; a Chinese education was intended mainly to impress upon the student the might and infallibility of the ruling faction; a Chinese newspaper consisted principally of advertisements for the power of the State.

Most citizens were mere inmates of this system. They had to submit to being deceived, manipulated and stifled by it—or else be murdered by

it. However, a citizen who could contrive to step outside the prison, to escape from the various instruments of supervision, enjoyed nearly perfect freedom. He reported to nobody, paid no taxes, discharged no obligations, attended no meetings, fulfilled no quotas.

There were three conditions to be satisfied before a person could attain this enviable position: he had to have plenty of money, be of no interest to the authorities, and possess a foreign travel document. During those few weeks of sunlight in the spring of 1989, Margaret was in that blessed state. She was free and happy to a degree she had never known before, and perhaps would never know again.

At the center of it all was Norbu. She knew at once, when she saw him marching in the sunlight that Thursday, that what could not be forgotten had not been forgotten, and that her life belonged to him. She had marched with him, taken a late, much-needed dinner with him at a noodle parlor near the railroad station, and then, gorged and a little tipsy, in a joy actually and literally breath-taking, had given herself up to him altogether.

Marching with him, talking freely with him over dinner, Margaret saw that this was not altogether the Norbu she had known seven years before. The mountain roughness of his manners had not left him, but was much less in evidence. He had acquired a certain polish, a certain thoughtful maturity.

This was especially clear to Margaret when she saw him among his classmates. They were all much younger than he (the Botanical Institute, being a new foundation, had only a freshman year), and seemed to look to him for leadership. Norbu in his turn spoke of his classmates—at any rate, of those who had marched in the demonstration—with paternal affection. (*My committee!* he had introduced the front row of marchers to Margaret.) He had been elected Chairman of the Botanical Institute's representatives in the student movement, and took his responsibilities seriously. Twice in that following week he left the apartment early for meetings, returning in late afternoon. Margaret had a second key made for him, so that he could come and go as he pleased. The old woman who kept an eye on the Xings' apartment for her Neighborhood Committee was easily won over with a bag of oranges.

Norbu himself, after his initial astonishment, had taken Margaret's appearance as a matter of course, the completing of a pattern, the consummation of something foreordained long since.

The very first time he had seen Margaret, in the arboriculture unit at Nakri Agricultural Research Station, she had appeared to him somewhat more than human. Her skin so smooth and pale! her features so regular! her every smallest movement so charged with grace! Norbu could not honestly have said he fell in love with her at that first encounter. She was a wonder to him, but not an object of desire. At that time, his affections were involved elsewhere. But nine months later, when they surprised each other among the tumbled stones of the old monastery, he had been more receptive, and she—her voice, her face, her figure—had captured his heart for ever. It was not quite true, as he told her, that he had not forgotten her even for one day. Some license must always be given to lovers' cant. But it was very nearly true.

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In the vanity of his youth Norbu had thought himself sophisticated. Whatever their motives, the Chinese had given him a good education at the boarding school in Xining: history and literature, mathematics and science. And it had gone on all through the Cultural Revolution, when most secondary schools were closed, or given over to little more than Political Instruction. The history was all twisted to the advantage of China, he knew that now; and there had been no education in Tibetan culture at all, so that he could read the language of his ancestors only slowly and with difficulty. Still, he had felt himself to be at a higher cultural level than the other inhabitants of Nakri Agricultural Research Station.

The station was a lousy assignment. If he had gone straight from school to college Norbu might have graduated college with a clean file, and things would have been different. But the college admissions process was all in a shambles in '75 because of some movement, so he had spent a year at home with his mother, listening to her stories and those of his relatives—such as had survived and dared to speak—and that year

had radicalized him. At agricultural college in Xining he was known for outspokenness and got black marks on his file. On graduation, instead of being given the good assignment his academic grades justified (a job in the provincial capital or in metropolitan China, or even the opportunity for postgraduate study) he was sent to tend saplings in Nakri.

And there he had been, stuck in that place among the sweepings of west China: released prisoners from the camps without the wit to get transfers back to their home provinces, PLA veterans who enjoyed the extra opportunities for arrogance and bullying that were available in a minority area, and fellow-Tibetans so cowed that their only idea of national self-assertion was scrawling *fuck Chinese pigs* on the walls of the communal privies, using Tibetan characters the Chinese couldn't even read, or circulating bitter little jokes: *Did you know that our Tibetan yak is the longest animal in the world? It grazes in Tibet, but it's milked in Beijing.* And then suddenly this goddess had appeared, with her pale luminous skin and large round eyes and voice that made your blood feel hot—even more obviously out of place than himself. Two foundlings: a prince and a princess cast among peasants: it was on that basis that his first thoughts about Margaret had formed, seeing her occasionally round the station.

The fact of her being Chinese had complicated his feelings at that time. Two of the three women Norbu had had sex affairs with up to that point had also been Chinese; but they were coarse creatures from the western provinces, dark-skinned and flat-nosed. He had seduced them with contempt, made them do all the most degrading things he could think of, then abandoned them without remorse—a small revenge for what China had done to his country.

The third of those adventures had been love, with a Tibetan classmate at the agricultural college in Xining. Nyima had taken the route he himself ought to have taken, if he had not been so loose-tongued: she had graduated with good grades and a clean file and gone to Beijing for further study. Her letters the first year had been warm and he thought he had understood that she would come back to Qinghai for summer vacation in 1981. But she had not come back. Her last letter, which did not arrive until late August, had given no coherent explanation; and at the

time Margaret arrived at the station Norbu had been struggling with despair, and with the task of writing a return letter that would clearly show his feelings, without compromising his pride.

The letter had never been written. Try as he might, he could find no way to respond that did not involve him in pleading, and that Norbu would never do. By the time of the encounter with Margaret on the mountain the following spring, he was resigned to his loss—wounded, but philosophical. Then he had heard that voice, seen her pale, perfect face under the all-revealing deep blue sky of the high plateau, and it seemed that everything past had been swept from his mind.

Life rarely allows us such neat transitions, of course. After his arrest and sentencing—for nothing, for being in the same town, and loudly drunk on Tibetan barley beer, when a patriot sent a quisling off to a thousand lives of suffering—Norbu had served his term dreaming of Margaret. Dreaming without hope: it was inconceivable that she would wait five years for him, and improper that he should ask her to. It was, in any case, very unlikely that she would still be in Qinghai after five years. Her father had a good position in the army, Norbu knew from speaking with people who had seen her file. Whatever the true reason for her being exiled to the far west, her family would be able to recover the situation after a year or so. Then she would be back in Beijing, and would certainly forget all about him, as Nyima had. Still he dreamed of her, to fill the mental vacancy of life in the camp.

It was not a bad camp, as camps go; but the inmates were not allowed to read anything except Party gibberish, nor even to play cards, and conversation with the uneducated criminal types Norbu found himself among was extremely limited. Using his fists, and his wits, he had established himself among them well enough to get good food rations. He had even managed to have a sex affair with one of the camp nurses. She was a Tibetan too, an ugly, smelly creature twenty years his senior; but it was a sensational achievement under the strict discipline of the camp, and when knowledge of it seeped out among the prisoners, Norbu's status became unassailable, and the remaining four years of his term had been as comfortable as time in a Chinese labor camp can ever be.

Still Margaret's image had occupied his dreams, and his waking

dreams. When Yexi had invited him to Beijing, after his release, the thought was there—all but unconscious—that he might find her; that she might, against all odds (there are very few single twenty-nine-year-old women in China) not be married; that at least he might see her and hear her again.

It was not Margaret he saw, however, but Nyima. This was in the fall of '87, when he was living illegally in Beijing, doing pick-up work on the construction sites that were then appearing everywhere. He had met Nyima by chance at the house of Thupten Rongda.

Thupten was a *genyen*, a Tibetan lay teacher of religion, who lived in one of the old dusty alleys northeast of the Forbidden City. All the Tibetans in metropolitan China sooner or later found a *genyen* to whom they could go for spiritual advice and instruction. The Chinese authorities frowned on this, of course, to the degree they knew about it, and a *genyen* who wanted to stay out of trouble had to operate under cover, living as a clerk or laborer; or more often just as a retiree, as most of the *genyen* were old. Thupten was one of the younger ones—little more than fifty, Norbu thought—but he had studied as a monk in Tibet before the 1959 cataclysm. He had not studied long enough to be ordained, which was the reason he was merely a *genyen* and not a *lama*. Furthermore he had spent seventeen years in the camps—the Chinese had imprisoned all the monks and nuns they did not kill—where of course there was no opportunity for study. Still he knew the main sutras and prayers, and the special hand gestures called *phyag-gya*, and even some of the complex, difficult chants of the *lama gyudpa*, the cantors. Norbu had heard about him from Yexi, his friend at the Nationalities Institute, and they had gone there together to try to learn more about the religion of their ancestors. Later Norbu had gone by himself. Thupten Rongda was one of the more popular *genyens*, and there were sometimes as many as half a dozen people crammed into his tiny room. The third time Norbu went by himself, Nyima had been there with two other Tibetan women.

She had been cool to him then, he in the dust-covered overalls of a common laborer, and she with the other women at her side, and of course Thupten growling his way through the “Seven-Limbed” Sutra. She was still cool when she came to the meeting he set up, at a dumpling parlor in

the East Wall district; but agreed to go to the hotel room he had booked, and fell into his arms with very little difficulty once the door was locked behind them, and cried out to him in her moment of joy in just the way he remembered from long before in the far west.

She was married by this time, of course. The husband was a research biologist at Qinghua University, away on a scientific expedition in Guangxi Province. Though Chinese, he was a sensitive and well-educated man, and tolerant of Nyima's weekly visits to Thupten Rongda, though he had no wish to delve into Lamaism himself. Hearing that Nyima's husband was away, Norbu thought at first that their apartment might be available for future trysts. No, said Nyima. The apartment contained her mother- and father-in-law and infant daughter. Norbu was sleeping in a spare bunk bed at the Nationalities Institute, so with Nyima's apartment out of bounds they could be alone only by renting hotel rooms. Since Norbu had little money—he had been sending his surpluses back to his mother in Nakri—the places he found were seedy hotels for workers and low-level cadres in East Wall and Chongwen districts. Norbu had paid premium rates for the best rooms, with en suite toilet and shower when available, yet still the seediness oppressed her, he could see. So did the disparity in their social rank—he a low-level manual worker, living in the capital without proper papers, she just appointed full lecturer at Qinghua. After only three or four meetings Norbu could feel her pulling away from him.

It had, in fact, been Nyima who had told him about the new Botanical Institute, at a meeting one bitter cold day in November '87, in an ill-heated room overlooking the Flower Temple street market, a vendor shouting his wares under their window: *Corduroy jackets! Corduroy jackets! Just arrived from my supplier in Hong Kong!* Norbu, who still imagined something could be made of the affair, jumped at the opportunity to re-enter the academic world, to restore himself to a social position at least in the same sphere as her own, if not at the same level. He had prepared frantically for the exam, and passed gloriously; but by the time the results were announced, in the spring of '88, they both knew there was no future for them together.

Norbu himself had begun to feel disgust at the sordid places they

were obliged to use, the raised eyebrows of the desk clerks when the lovers presented their i.d. cards, the sniggers and stares of the other guests, the grimy damp bedding and arbitrary plumbing, the universal heavy stink of stale tobacco smoke. Nyima had begun skipping meetings, pleading family concerns—infant sick, in-laws suddenly called away. Norbu, now almost thirty-one, knew enough of the world to understand that this affair could have no result. Nyima was content with her husband, as content as one can expect to be after five years of marriage. In his absence, Norbu had served as a substitute for the physical needs a woman naturally has; once the husband returned, there would be nothing to hold her to Norbu, nothing but sentiment and guilt.

Girding up his pride, anticipating the inevitable, and his spirits in any case lifted by the prospect of attending the Botanical Institute in September, Norbu had broken off the affair in July, a few days before Nyima's husband was due back in the capital. She made token protestations, but her relief was clear to see. When all was over, Norbu was mildly surprised to find that nothing was left behind at all: no loss, no regret, no guilt or shame, not even the bruised dullness he had felt when she left him the first time. He and Nyima had been carried forward as far as they had by sheer inertia; everything between them had died months before.

Norbu had turned his face to the future without effort: to his new studies and new friendships, and to the first stirrings of the student movement. Nyima did not trouble his thoughts. After a few weeks she had disappeared utterly, leaving only dry memories with as nearly as possible no affect at all. He could call on Thupten Rongda without being fearful of meeting her there; though in fact she was never there again, perhaps having switched *genyens*—there were two or three others in Beijing—for fear of meeting him. And with the ebbing of all thought of Nyima there came back to him Margaret's image, tiny and perfect, fitting so precisely into some cavity of his soul, like a thing left exposed when flood waters have receded. She had always been there, he knew, and always would be there in some way: a dream of perfection and grace, persisting illogically in a heart which believed itself to be fundamentally placid and practical.

Those first few months at the Botanical Institute, Norbu had little time for daydreaming; but when those moments came, it was always to

Margaret that his thoughts turned. He enjoyed a brief, good-natured flirtation with a Mongolian girl at the Nationalities Institute, another of Thupten's congregants (Mongolians have the same religion as Tibetans); still Margaret was there. She did not vex or distress him; she was merely there, tiny and perfect in that warm velvet fold of his thoughts.

Thus, though Norbu had been stunned to see her face so clearly, so suddenly, in the crowd on White Stone Bridge Road, when he recovered himself he saw that her reappearance in his life that Thursday was a right thing, a fitting thing. By the time of their love feast that evening he had no doubts. This coming together was foreordained, a falling to rest, a settling to equilibrium. It was sweet indeed, the sweetest thing Norbu had ever known, to look at her pale round face across the table, to hear the voice that thrilled him so much, to embrace and enter her.

Not that he was swept off his feet altogether. What man ever is? When the first rush of surprise, delight and gratification had ebbed, there were reservations to be tallied. Norbu, at thirty-one, was an undergraduate student; Margaret, some months younger, was famous, or at any rate known, all over the world. As irksome as the distance in rank between himself and Nyima had been, here was a social gap as wide as the entire globe. Norbu's own great store of self-confidence allowed him to discount most of this gap, but not all of it. Then there was the student movement, to which Norbu had privately and silently dedicated himself, for his country's sake, on the simple calculation that anything vexatious to the Chinese Communist Party must be good for Tibet. Margaret had marched with him that first day; would she still march with him if things got ugly? All in the movement were willing to make sacrifices, even of their lives—was she? And then there was the fact of her being Chinese.

As Norbu had told her, in all honesty, his feelings about the Chinese had softened since coming to live in the capital. He had heard Nyima speak of the sympathy and guilt nursed by those thoughtful Chinese, like her husband, who understood what had been done. He had learned that a nation's crimes do not stain all its citizens. Yet still, when at last he held Margaret in his arms, seen her pale flesh and penetrated it, he could not repress a shiver of vengeful satisfaction at having plucked the

conqueror's sweetest flower. It was shameful and unworthy—he felt that at once; but he was too rational, too self-aware, to ignore it.

Still, these were small clouds in a clear sky, their shadows passing across the landscape as mere momentary flickers of hesitation or doubt. Probably no love affair since the beginning of the world was without some such blemishes. Many have endured for a lifetime with far worse. Norbu was happy: Margaret's complete and unreserved acceptance of him spoke for itself, soothed and delighted and enfolded him, enraptured and entranced him. As April turned to May that momentous Beijing spring, the two lovers strolled all unknowing from their plural pasts into a singular future, hand in hand and very well content with each other.