

STUBBORN
WEEDS

*Popular and Controversial
Chinese Literature after
the Cultural Revolution*

Edited by Perry Link



Blond & Briggs

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Here is a story whose significance lay almost entirely in expanding the scope allowed to literary creation. Although crudely written and psychologically shallow, "Maple" was very important, and nationally famous, for telling the truth in print about armed conflict during the Cultural Revolution. Until the publication of this story, this physical violence had remained a "forbidden zone" for writers.

Zheng Yi (b. 1949?), a student at Shanxi Normal College, must have known that he was challenging this forbidden zone when he submitted his story to several literary magazines in late 1978. None would touch it. But at Fudan University in Shanghai, students began to copy it by hand and pass it around. The student literary society Spring Bamboo recommended it to the editors of Wenhui Bao, who, although they were divided in opinion about the story, did publish it in February 1979. Political critics had mixed reactions, but readers overwhelmingly welcomed it as a breakthrough.

Still greater controversy surrounded a pictorial version of the story published in Cartoon Strips Lianhuan huabao, Beijing) no. 8, 1979. Chen Yiming, Liu Yulian, and Li Bin, who were young Shanghaiese working at the Bureau of Culture in Harbin, painted a color cartoon strip that not only showed violence—machine guns, grenades, and young people lying dead in pools of blood—but also implicated the Great Helmsman Mao Zedong at a time when such implication violated another "forbidden zone." In the cartoon strip, posters of Chairman Mao appear abundantly in the background at Red Guard speeches and parades. Two frames also show dead youngsters at the bases of huge slogan-posters proclaiming "eternal life" for Mao and "loyalty to death" from Red Guards.

Less than two days after the cartoon strip was released, the Chinese Post Office froze its delivery and asked for instructions from the State Publication Administration. The Administration promptly banned distribution. The editors of Cartoon Strips then appealed to the Central Propaganda Department of the Communist Party, where the decision of no less a figure than Hu Yaobang was reportedly necessary to reverse it. After a ten-day delay, distribution was resumed.

But the public controversy had only begun. The stated objection of the State Publication Administration had been farfetched—that the cartoon strip showed both Lin Biao and Jiang Qing with normal, healthy faces. Were these drawings, the Administration asked, covert support for the Gang of Four? Although this issue was debated in political reviews, the real issues, quite clearly, were the penetration of the two forbidden zones: the showing of armed violence and the implied criticism of Chairman Mao. Letters from readers poured in to the editorial offices of Cartoon Strips, most of them defending the assault on the forbidden zones on the grounds that the young artists were, after all, only telling the truth. Armed with stacks of such letters, the editors

sacrifice. We will avenge him, and once the Cultural Revolution is victorious, we will erect a memorial to him."

Peace. Everything was at peace now. All strength drained from my body, I had collapsed on my bed after a few of the young people brought me home. My head ached until I thought it would explode, but that was just as I wanted it, for as long as the pain persisted, I couldn't think.

A sultry night breeze blew in through the window. My headache seemed to have abated somewhat. Woodenly, I looked up at the photograph on top of the book cabinet. And then I heard again the tick-tock, tick-tock of the little clock. So that was it! It had only been a dream, a terrible nightmare that had seemed all too true to life! Yes! When the sun came up in the morning, my door would burst open with a *pow*, and Jiping would dash in like a spirited colt. The room would fill with life again; everything in it would start to talk and sing. . . .

Children who were born amid all the gunfire that year are now in fifth-grade classrooms studying their books. Of all the people bustling back and forth between the red brick classroom building and the rice-brown administration building (both have long since been repaired and look as good as new), how many even remember that such a "struggle" once took place on those very school grounds? Besides, most of the inhabitants of this town have never been able to distinguish between firecrackers and gunfire anyway.

This year Xiaoning passed the entrance examinations and went off to the university. He came to see me yesterday accompanied by a girl classmate. As luck would have it, she turned out to be the gate guard of yesteryear. Who would ever have suspected that the awkward child with the stern stare would turn into so lovely a young woman? As I listened to my son's former "comrade-in-arms" and "enemy" prattle on at great length about all the new things they had seen and heard, all the new feelings they had experienced, I thought to myself, "Children, you're the lucky ones." In the course of the long lives before you, those dread days will be no more than a ripple, but for my son they came too quickly and ended too tragically. You are the lucky survivors. You will know happiness!

If history is a fair and impartial judge, then the perpetrators of that catastrophe—Lin Biao and the Gang of Four—will stand as the accused while the plaintiff's place will be empty save for a long, long list of names of people who have departed this world. And behind each and every one of those names, there will lurk a nightmare. . . .

of Cartoon Strips hosted two conferences of prominent editors and officials in Beijing in an effort to solidify their support.

The issue of "Maple" was raised again in late 1980 when the Emei Film Studio in Chengdu produced a movie version. The initial review of the film by the Department of Culture was negative. The main criticisms were three: that the villainous Lin Biao and Jiang Qing were clearly shown in documentary footage from 1967 to be standing next to Mao at Tiananmen Square in Beijing; that when the hero carries the dead heroine into the sunset, a great expanding red sun eventually engulfs them both (the symbolism was too clear); and that the narrator, at the end of the film, explains to his young niece that the protagonists of this story are not heroes, and not martyrs—but simply "history." Since all modern Chinese history is "great and glorious," this attribution would not do.

The film directors managed to accommodate all of these criticisms. The faces of Lin Biao and Jiang Qing in the documentary footage were thrown out of focus; a thick fog was substituted for the big red sun; and the sound track with the narrator's last words was erased. But the picture of his silently moving lips had undeniable effect for those who knew the story of the editing, or those astute enough to infer what he must have been saying.

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Translated by Douglas Spelman.

1

By October 1967 the struggle between the two factions in our area was at a fever pitch. Representatives were bargaining hard in the "study session" sponsored by the central authorities. On the local level, the two sides were trying to capture strategic positions which had political, military, or economic significance—aiming to achieve *faits accomplis* which would win for them things they could not win at the negotiating table. The three counties which comprised the outer defense ring for the faction called the Rebel Headquarters Regiment (RHR) fell in quick succession as the Jingtang Mountain faction (JM) consolidated the forces of eight counties and brought them to the walls of the city.

At this critical juncture, the Cultural Revolution leaders, meeting in Beijing, expressed their heartfelt concern for the two factions; then, speaking separately to each side, they clarified their position: "Rebellion is justified! You are the true leftists, and we support you!" They also emphasized the principle of Jiang Qing's September 5th speech to "Attack with Words and Defend with Weapons":¹ "We will not be

1. See glossary.

caught barehanded when the class enemies attack," and "We will defend ourselves against any attack, then will counterattack." According to reports from Beijing, both factions had put together excerpts from several of Jiang Qing's speeches on Attack with Words and Defend with Weapons and had distributed these everywhere. Each side thought they were the true leftists, the rebels fighting to defend the revolutionary line of Chairman Mao. Everyone was putting Attack with Words and Defend with Weapons into practice.

The War Department of our RHR decided to strike before the other side completed its deployments for attacking the city. We would seize immediately the Attack with Words and Defend with Weapons broadcasting station in the No. 6 Middle School. This broadcasting station had been like a wedge in the area we controlled. Once the battle for the city got started, JM would need only to launch a thrust from this wedge to put enemy both in our face and at our back, forcing us to wage war on two fronts. If we couldn't hold, and they tore holes in our line, we would have to withdraw from the whole central area and would be squeezed into a remote nook in the northwest. Unthinkable! The task of taking the broadcasting station was given to our Youth Defense Division.

The division's leadership held a lengthy planning meeting that was marked by intense squabbling. Finally Li Honggang, one of the leaders, came to tell me that they had decided to send me to scout out the situation. Their reason was that I, an art teacher, had never taken part in armed combat; all I ever did was run around with my easel, painting watercolors, which had led everyone to suppose that I was a carefree artist. In fact I had already carried out several scouting assignments.

I circled around to the side of the school and carefully climbed over the surrounding wall. Inside, the soft, gentle switches from several rows of tall weeping willows hung to the ground and intertwined with the dense wormwood—it was like a primeval forest untouched by man. I stealthily groped my way through this willow thicket so dense it could shield wind, until I saw a strange scene before me.

The athletic field was all grown over with weeds and crisscrossed with connecting ditches and battle trenches. Several recently constructed machine gun positions stuck up like horns. The main building was pockmarked with battle holes, and a ragged battle flag fluttered in the autumn breeze, now and then revealing the words "Attack with Words and Defend with Weapons." Two rows of red maples encircled the main building, glinting like torches in the noontime autumn sun. Under the trees were big iron stoves packed with gunpowder. I made a quick ink sketch and was hurrying to open my paint box to mix the right colors when the urge to turn and run gripped me, driving away every other thought. So I plastered plain

colors onto the paper, first using grass-green to cover the field (I didn't dare actually draw the battle trenches and machine gun positions—I just indicated where they were by little marks in the clumps of grass), then earth-yellow for the main building, lake-blue for the sky, red for the flag, and olive-green for the willows. Finally I mixed a little red with orange-yellow, steadied my hand, and carefully detailed the leaves on each one of the torch-like maple trees. I loved these fire-red maples; I painted them every fall. I also marked among the trees the locations of those fearsome stoves. When the battle came these would be most. . . .

"Don't move! Raise your hands!" A deep, threatening voice came from behind me.

Damn! All at once my heart stopped. The easel in my hand was snatched away before I could react.

"March!" There was nothing to do but shove the branches aside and walk out of the dense willow thicket. Several youths carrying semi-automatic rifles surrounded me.

"What did you come here for?" A boy grabbed my collar. He looked like an eighth-grader at most. Not long ago I probably could have elicited a tearful apology by simply raising my voice at him.

"You RHR bastards!" he cursed venomously. "We haven't finished you off yet?" He thrust his dagger to the base of my neck.

"I didn't paint anything—a picture of the scenery—a pen drawing with a little color—" I was so nervous I could only stammer.

"Still won't cough up the truth, huh? Ya mother! Wanna live or die?" As he was yelling, he prodded me with his gun.

"It's all true!" I ignored the pain as I tried frantically to explain myself. When he started glaring at me again, I just stammered a slogan at him over and over: "The supreme instruction: 'Fight with words, not with weapons!'"

"Hey, you know your *Quotations* pretty well! Let him go, Little Rabbit." A girl walked slowly around from behind me. "Give us another verse! Page 11 of the *Quotations*, hurry up!"

"Revolution is not a dinner party, is not—"

"Is not what? Huh? Cat got your tongue? Hurry up!"

"Is not a dinner party, is not like writing an article, is not like painting or doing embroidery—"

"OK!" She stopped me, took the easel from one of her friends, and waved it in front of me. "It's not like painting or doing embroidery—you can't be gracious, virtuous, respectful, frugal, or deferential! Revolution is violence—understand?"

Then she picked up my painting while several of them gathered around her.

"Look at those maples—pretty!"

"Hah! Really smart! And look at our battle flag, look at that red!"

Stubborn Needs

"You can even see the slogan on our building: 'We will not attack unless attacked; but if attacked, we will certainly counterattack!'"

The group gathered around the painting and began an animated discussion—even the boy pointing the dagger at my chest couldn't keep from twisting his head to look. My heart calmed down a bit; it was a good thing I hadn't left in a rush after all—the color was acting as a camouflage!

The girl in charge raised her eyes and looked me over.

"If you're just sketching, why not draw what's there? Why didn't you paint the battle trenches and the stoves?"

Seeking to blunt her attack as much as possible, I replied calmly. "They ruin the scenery. I couldn't put them in the painting."

The hint of a smile flickered in her eyes. She turned her head and said to her classmates: "I'll take him to the main building. You all carry on with your regular duties!"

The remark stopped me cold.

"Let me go, young comrades!" I begged them. "I won't dare come again! This is all a big mistake!"

The girl grabbed her rifle and loaded it.

"Mistake? Even if it's a mistake it's got to be explained! Stop babbling, take your easel, and get going! What are you looking all around for? Don't try to make a break for it—you're a suspect! I'm not going to kill you, but I could snap your leg in two pretty quick!"

That's it! Hopeless! A chill went through me. Once inside the main building, it wouldn't be easy to get out. Even if I didn't crack under interrogation, I'd be right in the middle of the battle that would begin tonight. Should I run? No, that wouldn't do—she looked like she really would fire. Nothing to do but keep marching in terror toward the main building.

We followed a path through weeds that covered our ankles, made a couple of turns, and reached the maples in front of the building. The girl suddenly overtook me with two strides. She raised her gun.

"Teacher Wang," she said softly. "Don't you recognize me?"

A student of mine? A flash of joy and surprise brought me to a halt.

"You're—"

Short hair like a boy's, square face, thin lips, proud arched nose, and under the disheveled bangs a pair of still child-like eyes flashing a haughty light in the shadow of the trees.

"Ours was the first class you taught in 1962, right after you graduated and were sent to our school to teach art!"

She saw that I still couldn't recall her, so she pulled her hair back.

"I cut off my braids—Lu Danfeng."

"Danfeng!" I remembered. Now she was an announcer at the JM

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broadcasting station, but in her senior year she had been Secretary of the Youth League branch for the C class. I had taught her for a few days in ninth grade.

"Were you really just out for fun, not to spy? You can paint anywhere; why did you have to come here?" she scolded angrily. "And at a time like this!"

All I could do was smile broadly and lie through my teeth.

"I haven't been back to school for almost a year, and I've thought about it a lot—the colors are so rich in fall, the best season for painting scenery—the green of the willows, the poplars already turning yellow. And then the maples—they turn all red as soon as the frost hits them—"

"You're not lying to me? Then—I'll let you go! Follow the base of the wall to the north; when you hear me fire a shot, turn east and you'll come to the willow grove."

Looking into her bright, sincere eyes, I felt the urge to tell her that all hell would break loose tonight—on the good and the evil alike. I wanted to tip her off but couldn't come out with it—the duel to the death between our two factions sealed my lips. I settled for saying, "Danfeng, I've heard they're coming soon to besiege you!"

"Yeah, we knew all along! But struggle demands sacrifice. If you're afraid of dying, you shouldn't make revolution! Besides, we've got *them* surrounded too; they've got nothing on us if they want to fight!" Then, waving the painting in her hand, she said, "You can't take this painting with you, Teacher Wang. If you still want it, I'll have to keep it for you!" She ended by smiling and then declaring stiffly that: "Chairman Mao says, 'After traveling the hard road of battle, the easy road will come.' When our red regime has consolidated its power, when the Great Cultural Revolution is finally victorious, then you can paint however you like!"

All I could do was turn in silence, barely able to restrain my tears.

"Stop! Teacher Wang, you know Li Qian'gang, don't you? I heard he changed his name a while ago. Because the two parts of the character 'Qian' mean 'black' and 'today'—too reactionary—he changed it to Honggang [red steel]. They say he's now a leader of RHR. He used to be in the Student Union."

I nodded.

Danfeng became very pensive, slowly turning her gaze to the maple leaves overhead and saying nothing for a long moment. Suddenly she jumped up lightly and broke off two full red maple leaves. As she brought the leaves up to her face to examine them closely, a faint bashfulness, almost impossible to detect, flickered at the corners of her mouth.

"Take a note to him for me, will you?"

As she spoke, she slung her rifle onto her back, grabbed my

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easel, and with the leaf stems clenched in her mouth, quickly scribbled several lines on a sheet of my sketching paper. Then she deftly folded it and handed it to me.

"Don't let anyone else see it, give it to him yourself—OK?" As she took the leaves out of her mouth, she said, "Give these to him too," and finally smiled unguardedly.

They were two torch-like maple leaves joined at the stem. I took them and put them with the letter in an inside pocket. I remembered that when Li Honggang had applied to join the Youth Defense Division of RHR, some people had objected that he was awfully close to Lu Danfeng, who was a mainstay of JM. Later, after he continued to flatly deny it and because he was so courageous in battle, he was allowed to become a formal member. Now it appeared there really had been something to it. Yet—this evening—I looked at Danfeng with sympathy and foreboding.

Danfeng took her rifle from her shoulder and flipped off the safety. She looked at me with a quiet smile as if to say, OK, go! I turned and ran.

"Halt! Halt!" Danfeng shouted. I ran even faster. Bam, bam, bam! Her gun sounded and a hail of bullets flew over my head, sending the maple leaves in all directions. Remembering what Danfeng had told me, I turned immediately to the east and plunged into the willow grove. The dense willow branches slapped my face and the irksome weeds pulled at my feet, but I continued running wildly. Suddenly I tumbled into a hole, almost knocking myself out. When I tried to climb out, my legs wouldn't respond. I could already hear the sound of rapid footsteps behind me. At this critical moment I discovered that I had fallen into an uncovered hot air duct. Without another thought I started burrowing into it. No sooner had I crawled in than I heard voices outside.

"Did he crawl into the duct? I didn't see anybody jump over the wall!"

"We'll keep watch here, you go get a flashlight."

Although in great pain, I frantically crawled farther in.

2

When I emerged from the hot air duct I was totally exhausted and looked barely human. My clothes had been ripped to shreds by bolts inside the duct, my body was covered with cuts, and my feet were bare, my shoes having disappeared. If anyone had wanted to paint a "fugitive," they couldn't have found a better model. But even worse, I found that I was inside the main building! I had escaped capture only to deliver myself even more directly into their hands. Yet I was afraid to climb back in, for what if someone came crawling through

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looking for me? There was nothing to do but replace the cover of the duct, slip into a classroom, and hide.

I had just caught my breath when I heard several rumbling explosions and the crack of rifle fire. They had not waited for me; the battle was on. I leaped to my feet and peered out the window. Several long sections of the wall in front of the school had been blown to rubble. Our troops had already surged in but were pinned down by machine guns from bunkers on the playing field. They were pressed flat on the ground, unable even to raise their heads. Our own machine guns that were providing cover for the attack were howling like the wind but couldn't stop the enemy fire and succeeded only in blowing hundreds of leaves down from the trees.

The battle grew fiercer and fiercer. There was a machine gun right over my head, so my location got lots of special attention. Soon there was no glass left, and even the shutters were shattered. My only resort was to crawl to a classroom on the north side, where I knew there would be no fighting because we had left the north side to them as an escape route. Suddenly a voice came from outside the window.

"Listen, Danfeng, we probably could get out easily to the north. There's a housing area just over the wall. They've surrounded us on three sides and left the north open. It looks like they want to uproot us and drive us out of the city. Get hold of the Front Army Headquarters and get a clear answer from them—are we supposed to hold on here or not? And make sure they know our opinion, which is that we are a dagger pointed straight at RHR's heart, and we will hang on to the finish!"

"We've got to complete our mission! Off we go, Little Rabbit!"

I listened tensely, with bated breath, as the sound of two sets of footsteps faded into the distance. On the north, just as a precaution, we had hidden one machine gun. I hoped my comrades there would obey orders strictly and remain as standbys—not try to lead the attack. A long few minutes passed without any gunfire, and my agitation subsided somewhat.

I lay down under the windowsill, with recollections of Danfeng drifting through my mind—

Danfeng used to be a Youth League cadre and one of the school's most avid readers of Chairman Mao's *Quotations*. When the Cultural Revolution came and Lin Biao published his "Preface to the Second Edition," Danfeng not only committed it all to memory, but—at a schoolwide meeting to exchange experiences in studying Chairman Mao's *Quotations*—actually recited, one by one, every quotation in the little red book and explained how she "repeatedly studied and repeatedly used" them. To illustrate the Chairman's principle of "study first what is urgently needed: erect a pole and immediately see the

shadow" [i.e., get instant results], she abruptly stood up, walked in front of the speaker's table, and, under the glaring spotlight, cast her shadow over the lectern. This had drawn appreciative laughter from the audience. When Danfeng realized how ramrod-straight she was standing on the stage, she couldn't help laughing: "Actually I'm not a pole, you know!" As the entire hall rocked with laughter, Danfeng's ebullient smile and the principle of "erect a pole and see the shadow" were vividly planted together in everyone's mind.

Another time, the students called a meeting to launch a campaign to criticize the school leadership for obstructing the great mass movement to study Chairman Mao's *Quotations*. Someone would read a page number and make the leaders recite a few quotations. It was hilarious. Neither the Party Secretary, the principal, nor the Dean of Students was any good at it, and all made fools of themselves. Principal Zhang grew indignant and complained that nobody could pass by these rules. Danfeng stood up and walked to the stage. She shoved her book of quotations into Principal Zhang's hand and said, "Come on, any section you want!" Principal Zhang was dumbstruck. Then everybody took turns calling out page numbers, about a dozen in all, and discovered that Danfeng could rattle off the obscure quotes as effortlessly as the common ones. Even the chairman of the meeting was dumbstruck. He thumbed through the *Quotations* at some length, then announced his choice—page 271, paragraph two. After everybody flipped through their books, a hush fell over the room. Danfeng thought for a moment before replying.

"The book of quotations has only 270 pages, so there is no page 271, much less a paragraph two." Thunderous applause obliterated the end of her sentence. In the row where all the school authorities sat, one head after another bowed—

The fighting on the south side of the main building seemed to be moving farther away. I lay on the concrete floor completely unmindful of it, inexplicably having allowed myself to become lost in these recollections. Suddenly, a long burst of machine gun fire issued from the north. In fright, I leaped to my feet. It was immediately obvious that it was our precautionary machine gun, hidden on top of the water tower, that was firing.

I saw a rifle-carrying youth—it was Little Rabbit, who had poked me with his gun—fall slowly off the low dirt wall, clutching a case of ammunition. He twitched once and then lay still. Another pair of hands appeared at the top of the wall. The machine gun fired again, and the two hands disappeared. All was silent. Danfeng! Was she finished, just as easily as that? I crumpled to the floor.

I could hear above me a flurry of footsteps, voices, breaking glass. One of the machine guns on the south was apparently being moved—there obviously had been a new development. I stood up

again. At the base of the dirt wall a hole had appeared—whether made by a bayonet or the barrel of a gun I do not know. Danfeng thrust her hands through it, grabbed one of Little Rabbit's feet, and pulled him in. Presently the hole got bigger, and a moment later someone began pushing their way out. When I squinted I could see that Danfeng had clamped her left arm around Little Rabbit's neck and was using her right hand to pull herself along the ground. She apparently was trying to use the corpse in her embrace to shield herself and thus cross the open stretch of blockaded ground in order to deliver the command from headquarters.

In a flash both sides understood. The RHR machine gun in the water tower began spraying bullets like a rushing torrent. The JM machine gun and rifles over me also started firing wildly in an attempt to give cover to Danfeng. But the RHR in the water tower were not diverted; they kept their aim riveted on Danfeng, surrounding her with dust. She crawled with great difficulty because she was also dragging two ammunition cases and two rifles which were bound to her legs—

Finally! Finally she got to a corner where the machine gun fire could not reach. The people waiting there rushed up to her and picked her up. But she fell kneeling in front of Little Rabbit's corpse and began to wail.

Unable to keep watching, I turned my head away.

3

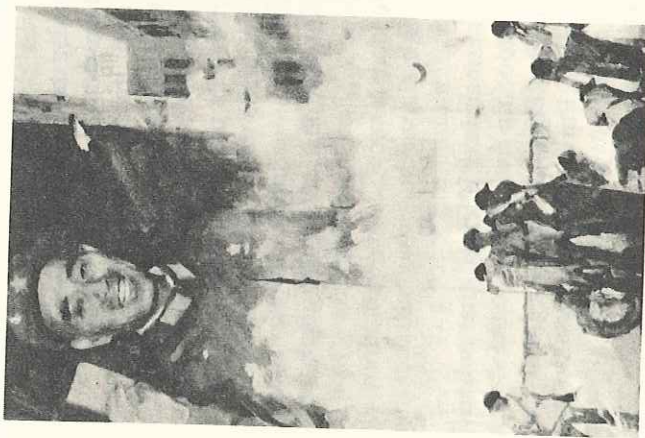
On the south, the battle raged stubbornly on, back and forth. The JM group had relinquished their front line on the playing field and had withdrawn all their people from the side buildings and back into the main building. They had shortened the battle line and concentrated their forces, but still had made no move to break out of the encirclement. It looked as if the command which Danfeng had struggled so courageously to deliver was to shore up defenses until help could arrive.

The JM forces wouldn't budge an inch. They were waiting until the leaders of the RHR Youth Defense Division realized that they would call on the support of the JM surrounding the city. They would not take the safe route out which RHR had left for them. We had no choice but to steel ourselves, dig in, and intensify the attack.

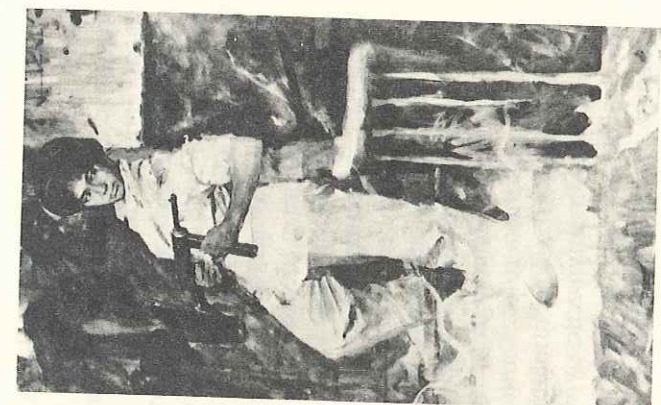
Several feints by small RHR detachments had succeeded in destroying those awesome "thunderclaps"—the big iron stoves. Our RHR comrades battled their way through a bloodbath and finally managed to surge into the main building, where an intense struggle for control immediately ensued.

On the first floor the sounds of gunfire and grenades had already

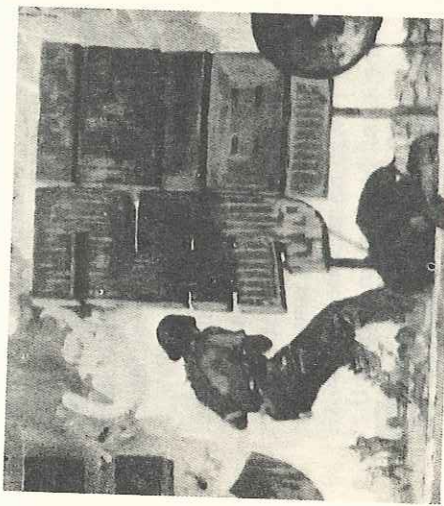
Short Stories



Criticized for showing Lin Biao without distortion.

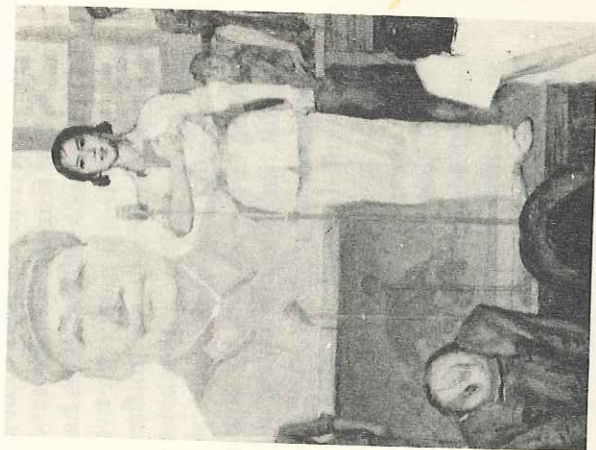


Broke into forbidden zones by showing violence.



The giant character is "bound" in "May his longevity know no bound."

The "Maple" Cartoon Strip



Criticized for implicating Mao Zedong.

ceased as the fighting moved toward the second floor. I heard a rush of footsteps in the corridor but was afraid to open the door for fear of walking into a burst of gunfire. Then I heard Li Honggang's deep voice and let out a wild scream, "Li Honggang!" The footsteps stopped. I opened the door and rushed out.

Li Honggang stopped short, then rushed over and grabbed me. A clamoring crowd gathered around. "Aha, when we heard that burst of gunfire at noon we figured you were done for—you're a tough one!" My eyes filled with hot tears from that special emotion which warms the depths of one's being when one unexpectedly meets comrades on a battlefield of life and death. Before I could say anything, two shots rang out from nowhere and one comrade fell to the floor. Everyone else scattered frantically. I grabbed a gun and charged up the stairs with my friends.

The JM troops, in order to conserve ammunition, began to hurl down on us things which they had stockpiled for the purpose—cement slabs, dismantled radiators, tables, chairs, instruments, and an occasional grenade for good measure. Our casualties were heavy. The urge for revenge goaded each of us to an emotional boiling point. We seemed about to explode. With no thought for our lives we pressed the attack, ever upward floor by floor—

Finally we captured the fifth floor. The remnants of the JM forces had fled to the roof, not stopping even to carry their wounded with them. They were desperately defending the small skylight which gave access to the roof. There was no way to throw grenades up, and guns were of no use. And we were suffering more casualties.

Li Honggang considered the situation, then called for a small bag of gunpowder and put it on a pile of tables which reached to the ceiling. At the same time he ordered those at the skylight to continue their fierce attack. When the powder went off it shattered two ceiling slabs and left a hole half the size of the room. Before the dust had settled, Li Honggang shouted and led a charge to the roof, where he seemed to arrive at a single bound.

"Youth Defense Division comrades! To victory! Charge!" he yelled, spraying bullets in every direction.

Everyone charged up the pile of wrecked tables to the roof. In less than a minute the gunfire stopped and the fighting was over. JM casualties were everywhere. Never again would they use megaphones to shout us down with quotations; never again would they crawl up to slaughter our RHR soldiers with machine guns and grenades.

Sunset came before anyone noticed it. Our bodies went limp as we all sat down to catch our breath. Li Honggang reached over to feel the barrel of my gun, and his parched lips broke into a smile.

"It's a little hot, huh? What do you say, Teacher Wang—you weren't used to it at first? This is the way steel is forged!"

I nodded my head uncertainly, wondering to myself: How could I describe that sensation, novel yet fearsome, when I fired my first shot? These hands of mine, which had always held paintbrushes, had actually picked up a gun and killed people! Is this the way "struggle changes people"?

We suddenly noticed that someone was slowly climbing to her feet in one corner of the roof. Holding two grenades high in her hand, she walked toward us swaying back and forth. And she kept right on coming! We all panicked at this surprising event and flattened ourselves on the roof in spontaneous unison. Li Honggang was first to come to his senses; he jumped up, raised his gun, and shouted, "Put down your weapons! Quick, or I'll fire!"

The attacker stopped and slowly lowered her right arm, which had been holding the grenades aloft. She took off her helmet and threw it to one side. Aha! That short hair even with the ears, that boyish short hair was fluttering softly in the evening breeze—

"Danfeng!" Li Honggang let out a startled whisper and stood stock still, as if he were made of wood and clay.

Danfeng didn't answer. She slipped the grenade ring off her little finger, and as her hand went limp the grenade fell beside her foot. She walked slowly to Li Honggang and reproached him bitterly.

"Why did you have to come? Why did you come? Why? Your hands are smeared with the fresh blood of JM people—executioner! Executioner! Ex—e—cu—tion—er!"

She suddenly grabbed her head with both hands and staggered backwards. Li Honggang sprang forward and caught her around the waist.

"Danfeng! Danfeng! Snap out of it!" Li Honggang was shouting anxiously into her ear.

"Qian'gang, do you still remember me?" Danfeng gradually came to her senses. She seemed exhausted as she ran her hand through her disheveled hair and said with a bitter smile, "Back when it all began, we never would have imagined a final parting like this, would we?"

Tears ran down her cheeks. "How great it would be if I could see the final victory of the Cultural Revolution with my own eyes!" She grabbed the front of Li Honggang's shirt and twisted it tight. "Qian'gang," she implored, "hurry and come to your senses! Come back to the revolutionary line of Chairman Mao! Hurry and point your gun the other way, Qian'gang!"

Fighting tears, Li Honggang turned his face away.

"No! You—you surrender!"

Danfeng stiffened with anger and pushed Li Honggang away. She took several steps backward, straightened her old, faded, blood-stained uniform, and flashed a scornful smile.

"I'll be true and faithful even to death! Go ahead and shoot, chicken!"

Li Honggang—the former regimental head of our Youth Defense Division, who never flinched no matter how heavy the fire—now began to tremble all over.

"You've got no guts!" Danfeng yelled at him, then turned and walked to the edge of the building.

"Danfeng! Danfeng! Danfeng!" Li Honggang's shouts were high-pitched, clipped, and filled with terror. The gun in his hand began to shake violently. But Danfeng did not hear, for Li Honggang's cries were drowned out by the slogans she shouted in her strident broadcaster's voice: "Our Jinggang Mountain fighters cannot be annihilated! Communism is invincible! Defend to the death Chairman Mao's revolutionary line! Defend to the death Chairman Mao, defend to the death Lin—"

With this last shout, Danfeng took her last step.

Total silence. From below came a dull thud, like a sack of grain hitting the ground.

"Ah—" Li Honggang wailed hysterically and fired a whole clip of bullets into the magnificent glow of evening.

Everyone rushed forward grabbing frantically for his gun, then wrestling him to the rooftop.

I don't know what good soul had straightened her body and arranged her clothes. She was just lying there, quietly lying on the maple leaves which had been shot down during the fighting. The evening breeze wafted by, blowing down a few cinnabar [dan] red autumn maple [feng] leaves, which swirled down on her full, young breast and landed beside her blood-drained face. It was only then that I remembered the note and the leaves she had asked me to give to Li Honggang, and I now hurriedly pulled them from my pocket. The note was still in one piece, but the leaves had long since been crumpled out of shape. I looked up, thinking to pick two new ones in their place, but even after I pulled several down, I was unable to find any which were joined on a single stem. This surprised me, and only after looking at the tree for a long time did I discover that only the leaves at the very tips of branches are joined on one stem.

I didn't know what I should say to comfort Li Honggang. I stood next to him for a long time before I handed him the note and the joined leaves.

"She asked me to give you these," I said.

"When?"

"Not long ago, at noon, when she released me."

Li Honggang carefully unfolded the letter. Dusk had fallen, so I pulled out a match and struck it. The words could scarcely be made out:

Qian'gang: All's well with you, I trust? I miss you and also hate you—do you still remember the last time we met? I could see then what you would do. I can only long for the day of victory, when, in celebrating victory, all my wishes will come true!

The match went out. Li Honggang's hands trembled as he stared at the leaves dumbly. Noticing his intense gaze, I struck another match for him. Up from the stems, the color of the leaves blended from orange to red until, at those five splendid leaf tips, it was a red as pure, bright, and intense as red agate. Delicate red veins spread over the orange face of the leaves like blood vessels. They were so red it seemed as if life's blood still coursed through them. How beautiful, how moving, these frost-nipped leaves could be!

Li Honggang pulled out his *Quotations*, opened it, and removed two maple leaves from it. These were also a pair joined on one stem, but they had long since withered. Their color was dull and had none of that delicate vitality.

"It was last October, more than a year ago, not long after the movement started, and before RHR and JM had split into two factions—" Li Honggang mumbled his reminiscences as if to himself. "That evening was the last time we opened our hearts to each other. Just before we parted, she plucked two maple leaves and gave them to me. 'Here,' she said, 'for you.' When we parted she said, 'Let's throw ourselves totally into this great revolutionary struggle and together sweep away all forces of evil and fight for the great truth of Communism!' We never even held hands; all we ever did together was talk about life, ideals, struggle—"

The autumn breeze blew gently, rustling the maple leaves. As I imagined myself hearing these wisps of conversation between the two youngsters as their school, I too seemed to meld into that bitter, misty scene.

"Hey—another light?" asked Li Honggang. I struck another match, and Danfeng's beautifully written characters once again appeared on the sketching paper:

But unless you return to the revolutionary line of Chairman Mao, there is no point in speaking of the slightest personal happiness between us! You must turn your weapon the other way, you must see the light!

Otherwise, remember, "revolution is not a dinner party, not like painting or doing embroidery—"You will die by my gun on the field of battle!"
Danfeng

Li Honggang's hands fell limp, and the letter and leaves swirled to the ground. He went to one knee at Danfeng's side, one huge tear after another falling to the ground. I lit several matches together, and in that moment of brightness she seemed filled with the same vitality I had seen in her at noon. She still had her short boyish hair, square face, thin lips, and impudent arched nose. But her large childlike eyes had forever lost their proud sparkle.

Li Honggang gently brushed back the hair on her forehead, murmuring: "It turns out I didn't die by your gun—you, you—you died by—oh!"

No longer able to contain himself, he began to sob.

"Danfeng—Danfeng—oh, oh, Danfeng!"

A maple leaf drifted onto Danfeng's mouth, making it seem that she was wistfully kissing goodbye to love, to youth, and to life—kissing everything that she had now left forever.

Everything seemed blurred as tears filled my eyes. The matches went out, and all receded into the indistinct night.

From the distance came the rumble of gunfire; JM had launched its attack on the city. A call to assemble rang across the campus as the newly conquered broadcasting station burst forth with a rousing Mao-quote song: "Develop the style of fighting courageously, never fear sacrifice, never fear exhaustion or continuous warfare." The supremely bitter siege had begun.

Li Honggang forced himself to stand up, wiping the tears from his face with his sleeve. Throwing a final glance at Danfeng, he stumbled toward the assembly bonfire.

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Two years later, after much seesawing back and forth, our enemies finally gained power. In an effort to consolidate this power, they indicted a group of "war criminals," including two charged with "throwing Lu Danfeng from five stories to her death." One was sentenced to death and one to probation. A few days later, it was charged in a study session that Li Honggang had forced Danfeng to jump at gunpoint. This could not be considered "a life taken in battle," since Danfeng had already put down her weapon. JM spent several days and nights searching everywhere for Li Honggang, who had long since left the RHR and had "drifted" for many months. He was finally found, arrested, and sentenced to immediate execution.

That day, as the police van made its way through the crowd, I

Stubborn Weeds

couldn't bear to watch. Instead, I took a slow walk, alone with my thoughts, along a quiet out-of-the-way road. The maple trees flanking this road had turned red again, looking like clumps of brightly burning fire. The scarlet tops of the trees looked as if they were covered with blood fresh from a wound—thick, bright, dripping—

CHEN GUOKAI *What Should I Do?*

This immensely popular story circulated in several versions by word of mouth before it was written up by Chen Guokai and published in the Guangzhou literary magazine Literary Works in February 1979. It quickly established a great new popularity for that magazine throughout China. In the form of officially approved excoriation of the Gang of Four, the story provided an outlet for very intense feelings about personal and family tragedies that had directly affected many people during the Cultural Revolution. After its publication, the editors of Literary Works received a record number of letters from readers, overwhelmingly favorable and many stating that they knew of similar cases themselves.

During the last two months of 1979 People's Literature conducted a preference poll among readers for short stories of the current year. When the poll was finished a prestigious committee of senior writers, editors, and officials awarded twenty-five prizes using the poll as a "basis." "What Should I Do?" was said to have placed second in the poll but, after consideration, it was listed eighteenth on the prize list. The prize committee probably recognized the story's relative lack of craft and subtlety. But there were other reasons why the story was controversial and could not be rated too highly. For one, the extremely emotional reader response to the contemporary problem of broken families could easily seem detrimental to the official goal of "stability and unity". A second problem was that the story broached the taboo subject of bigamy, and although the suggestion was only barely made, this little irrelevant fact accounted for much of the story's fame among readers.

Chen Guokai (b. 1938) is from a Hakka family in rural Guangdong. A junior high school graduate, he has worked in a chemical fertilizer plant and as an electrician in a repair shop. In October 1979, as a result of the present story, he was invited to become a professional writer with the Guangdong Writers' Association. He has written many stories since then and become quite well known.

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Translated by Kenneth Jarrett.

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