

ALSO BY ANCHEE MIN

Katherine

Becoming Madame Mao

Wild Ginger

Empress Orchid

Red Azalea

ANCHEE MIN



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To Qigu

I was raised on the teachings of Mao and on the operas of Madam Mao, Comrade Jiang Ching. I became a leader of the Little Red Guards in elementary school. This was during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution when red was my color. My parents lived like—as the neighbors described them—a pair of chopsticks: always in harmony. My father was an instructor of industrial technique drawing at Shanghai Textile Institute, although his true love was astronomy. My mother was a teacher at a Shanghai middle school. She taught whatever the Party asked, one semester in Chinese and the next in Russian. My parents both believed in Mao and the Communist Party, just like everybody else in the neighborhood. They had four children, each one a year apart. I was born in 1957. We lived in the city, on South Luxuriant Road in a small two-story townhouse occupied by two families. The house was left by my grandfather, who had died of tuberculosis right before I was born.

I was an adult since the age of five. That was nothing

unusual. The kids I played with all carried their family's little ones on their backs, tied with a piece of cloth. The little ones played with their own snot while we played hide-and-seek. I was put in charge of managing the family because my parents were in their working units all day, just like everyone else's parents.

I called my sisters and brother my children because I had to pick each one of them up from kindergarten and nursery school while I myself was only a kindergartner. I was six when my sister Blooming was five, my second sister Coral was four and my brother Space Conqueror was three. My parents made careful choices in the names they gave us. They were considered eccentric because the neighbors named their children Guard of Red, Big Leap, Long March, Red Star, Liberation, Revolution, New China, Road of Russia, Resist U.S., Patriotic Forerunner, Matchless Red Soldier, etc. My parents had their own ideas. First they called me Lin-Shuan—Rising Sun at a Mountain. They dropped it because Mao was considered the only sun. After further contemplation, they named me Anchee—Jade of Peace. Also, it sounded like the Chinese pronunciation of the English word "angel." They registered me with it. Blooming and Coral were named after the sound of chee (jade). There were two reasons why my parents named my brother Space Conqueror: one was that my father loved astronomy; the second was to respond to Mao's call that China would soon build its own spaceship.

As I understood it, my parents were doing work that was saving the world. Every evening I would pick up the children and fight with the kids on the block all the way

home. It was like eating a regular meal that I got a purple cheek or a bloody nose. It did not bother me too much. Although I was scared of crossing at traffic lights and dark alleys, I learned to not show my fear, because I had to be a model for the children, to show them what bravery meant. After I arranged for the children to play by themselves in the living room, I went to set up the stove to cook dinner. It always took me a long time to light the stove, because I did not understand that wood and coals needed air to burn. I stuffed the stove as I sang songs of Mao quotations. One time, when I tried many times and the stove would not light, I lost my patience. I went out to play, thinking that the stove was not burning. Then a kid came and told me that there was smoke coming out of our house window. This happened three times.

I tried to put the children to sleep while the sky was still bright. The children's little feet kicked the cotton blankets and made new holes over the old. The blankets soon became rags. When the room quieted down, I would lean on the windowsill staring at the entrance to the lane, waiting for my parents to appear. I watched the sky turn deep blue, Venus rising, and I would fall asleep by the window.

In 1967, when I was ten years old, we moved. It was because our downstairs neighbor accused us of having a bigger space than they had. They said, How can a family of six occupy four rooms while a family of eleven has only one? The revolution is about fairness. They came up with chamber pots and poured shit on our blankets. There

were no police. The police station was called a revisionist mechanism and had been shut down by the revolutionaries. The Red Guards had begun looting houses. No one answered our call for help. The neighbors just watched.

The downstairs neighbor kept bothering us. We cleaned the shit night after night, swallowed insults in meek submission. The downstairs family became uncontrollable. They threatened to harm us children when our parents were not at home. They said their second daughter had a history of mental illness. Therefore, they could not be responsible for what she was going to do. The second daughter came up and showed me an ax that she had just sharpened. She said she could chop my head in two like chopping a watermelon. She asked me if I would like her to do it. I said, You wait here and I'll tell you whether I would like it or not later. I grabbed my sisters and brother and we ran and squeezed ourselves in a closet all day.

One day when my mother stepped into the door after work, the second daughter jumped on her. I saw them wrestle into the stairwell. Mother was pushed, crushed on the floor, and was slashed with the scissors. I was in shock. I stood right next to my mother and saw blood pouring down her face and wrists. I wanted to scream but I had no voice. The second daughter went downstairs and cut her own wrists with the scissors. She then rushed to a curious crowd outside the door, bloody hands raised high in the air. She shouted, Look at me. I am a worker who was attacked by a bourgeois intellectual. Comrades, this is a political murder. Her family members came out. They shouted, A debt of blood must be paid by blood.

My father said we must move. We must escape. He

wrote little notes describing our house and what he would like in exchange. He stuck the notes on the tree trunks by the streets. The next day a truck arrived by our door loaded full with furniture. Five men got out of the truck and said they came to exchange their house with ours. My father said we hadn't looked around for our choice yet. The men said, Our house is a perfect one for you and it's ready for you to move in. My father said we didn't know what it looked like. The men said, Go and take a look at it now, you will like it. My father asked how many rooms. They said three, very nice, Shanghai standard. My mother said, Do you know that our downstairs neighbor's second daughter is mentally ill? The men said it would not be a problem. They said that they had just beaten the second daughter, and she confessed that she was normal and that her family just wanted to have more rooms. She had promised to cause no trouble in the future. The men said they were a father and sons, all workers at a Shanghai steel factory. The sons needed rooms to get married. They wanted the rooms in a hurry. My father said, Please let us think about it. The men said, We'll wait outside your door while you make up your mind. My father said, You can't do that. The men said, No problem. My parents decided to take a look at the men's house on Shanxi Road.

I was asked to guard the house while my parents were gone. I was doing my homework when I saw the men start to unload their furniture. After that they began to move our furniture. I went up to them and said, My parents aren't back yet. The men said they would like to help us while they still had the truck. There's nowhere you can borrow such a truck by the time you think you're ready to

move, they said. Are you going to move all this stuff with your bare little hands?

When my parents got back, most of our furniture was packed on their truck. My mother said, This is not what I want, you can't force us to move. The men said, We're workers, we don't play mind games. You advertised, we came with a good offer. It's Sunday, our only day off. We don't like to be fooled. We beat the second daughter downstairs because she fooled us.

My father took my mother and the children aside. He said, We must get away. Let's move, forget about fairness. So we did. We moved to Shanxi Road in the Xu-Hui district. It was a row of townhouses. Our floor was a two-room apartment shared by three families. The apartment was owned by the government. The three families had to share one toilet. We occupied the front of the floor. Besides a drawing room, we had a porch and a kitchen. The family who occupied the back of the floor had five members. They lived in one room and their stove was right next to the toilet. I did not like it because it often happened that when I took a shit they would be cooking. The third family on the floor lived in a back-porch-converted space. They were very quiet people.

My father said, Let's settle down. Think of it this way, things could be worse, we could have been killed. At least it's safe here. We all agreed and felt better. Upstairs was a big family with six children. Their third daughter was my age. Her official name was Sun Flower but she was called Little Coffin at home, because she was as thin as a skeleton. She came down and asked me if I would like to join her family's Mao study seminar every evening after dinner.

I said I had to ask my father. My father said no. He said he did not want to have a revolution at home. It surprised me. I spent a night thinking whether my father was a hidden counterrevolutionary and whether or not I should report him.

Little Coffin was disappointed when she heard that I would not attend their family's Mao study seminar. She went back upstairs and I heard her family begin singing "Red in the East rises the sun, China has brought forth a Mao Tse-tung . . ." I admired her family. I wished we could do the same thing.

We girls were arranged to sleep on the porch while my brother slept in the kitchen. My mother missed our old house terribly. She missed having a toilet of our own.

The morning after we had moved, Monday, I remember, I was waked by a loud electric bell. I leaned out the window and looked down. Our downstairs apartment was a cable and wire hardware workshop. When the loud electric bell rang at seven-thirty, a crowd of women would rush in. Heads were moving like bees crowding into a nest. There were about two hundred women working downstairs and in the back lane under a roof shed that covered one-third of the back lane. The women used to be housewives. They had no education but were good at working with their hands. Here they wired and welded all day. They brought their own lunches and ate them in the yard. From my window I could see what they ate, mostly preserved salty fish and tofu. Some of them were given milk coupons because the wires they were welding carried poisonous chemicals. The smell of these chemicals came upstairs when they laid the wires out in the yard.

The women downstairs liked to chat, quarrel and sing Comrade Jiang Ching, Madam Mao's operas. The neighbor described the women as Big Fight Mondays Wednesdays and Fridays, Small Quarrel Tuesdays Thursdays and Saturdays. They had loudspeakers in each room. In the afternoon there was a voice reading from Mao's works, from articles in the *People's Daily* and *Red Flag* magazine. By three-thirty when we got back from school, we would hear an exercise-music tape being played. The women would get out, rank themselves and occupy the whole lane doing ten minutes of stretching. I often leaned on the windowsill with my sisters and brother watching them. We started to know the women's nicknames, such as Chow-Di—Draw a Brother; Lai-Di—Gain a Boy, Shuang-Di—Double Boy; Yin-Di—Win a Boy; and Bao-Di—Guarantee a Boy. The names disturbed me. Though I could not link myself to those names, the idea began to sink into my mind that to be born as a girl was a sad thing. The workshop ran three shifts. The wiring machine was on day and night. My father had a hard time bearing the noise. He could not sleep. He went down to complain but it was useless. The women needed to work, the boss said. It was a revolutionary task.

The children of the lane often went to watch the women wiring. The women sanded the wires before molding them. They gave us sandpaper and we sanded the wires. We had fun. The women told us that the wires would be shipped to Vietnam. What we were doing was a national secret. The women won award certificates from the government. They framed the biggest certificate on

the wall. It said, "Honor and Glory to Wu-Lee Hardware Workshop."

I went to Long Happiness Elementary School. The school was six blocks away from where we lived. My new classmates laughed at me because I always wore the same jacket with holes everywhere. I wore it all seasons. It was my cousin's old clothes. Blooming usually wore the clothes after I grew out of them. With patches at the collars and elbows, Coral took over. More patches. The clothes melted, though she was careful. She knew Space Conqueror was waiting for his turn. Space Conqueror always wore rags. It made me feel very guilty.

The kids in the new neighborhood were unfriendly. They attacked us often. We were called "Rags" and "Fleas." My father said to us, I can't afford to buy you new clothes to make you look respectable, but if you do well in school you will be respected. The bad kids can take away your school bag but they can't take away your intelligence. I followed my father's teaching and it worked. I was soon accepted as a member of the Little Red Guard and was appointed as a head of the Little Red Guard because of my good grades. I was a natural leader. I had early practice at home. In those years, learning to be a revolutionary was everything. The Red Guards showed us how to destroy, how to worship. They jumped off buildings to show their loyalty to Mao. It was said that physical death was nothing. It was light as a feather. Only when one died for the people would one's death be heavier than a mountain.

My parents never talked about politics at home. They never complained about the labor they were assigned to do. By 1971 my father was no longer a college instructor: he was sent to work in a printing shop as an assistant clerk. Although my mother had a university degree, she was sent to work in a shoe factory. It was a political demand for one to be a member of the working class, said her boss. The Party called it a reeducation program. My parents were unhappy about their jobs, but they behaved correctly for us. If they were ever criticized, it would affect our future.

My mother was not good at being someone she was not. Her colleagues said that she was politically clumsy. One day when she was ordered to write on wax paper the slogan "A long, long life to Chairman Mao":

敬祝毛主席万寿无疆!

A long, long life to Chairman Mao!

she wrote "A no, no life to Chairman Mao":

敬祝毛主席无寿无疆!

A no, no life to Chairman Mao!

In Chinese, "A long, long life" translates as "Ten thousand years of no ending," so there was a character "no" in it. Mother got the characters mixed up and it became "No years of no ending." It was an accident, my mother said.

She was having a severe headache when she was ordered to do the job. She was not allowed to rest when her blood pressure was high. She did not understand why she wrote it the way she did. She always loved Mao, she confessed. She was criticized at the weekly political meeting that everyone in the district had to attend. They said she had an evil intention. She should be treated as a criminal. My mother did not know how to explain herself. She did not know what to do.

I drafted a self-criticism speech for my mother. I was twelve years old. I wrote Mao's famous quotations. I said Chairman Mao teaches us that we must allow people to correct their mistakes. That's the only way great Communism is learned. A mistake made by an innocent is not a crime. But when an innocent is not allowed to correct her mistake, it is a crime. To disobey Mao's teaching is a crime. My mother read my draft at her school meeting and she was forgiven. Mother came home and said to me that she was very lucky to have a smart child like me.

But the next week mother was caught again. She used a piece of newspaper that had Mao's picture on it to wipe her shit in the toilet room. We all did our wiping with newspapers in those days because very few people could afford toilet paper. Mother showed a doctor's letter at the masses' weekly meeting. It proved that her blood pressure was extremely high when the incident took place. She was not forgiven this time. She was sent to be reformed through hard labor in a shoe factory. The factory made rubber boots. Each pair weighed ten pounds. Her job was to take the boots off the molds. Eight hours a day. Every evening she came home and collapsed.

When Mother stepped through the door, she would slide right down on a chair. She sat there, motionless, as if passed out. I would have Blooming get a wet towel and a jar of water, Coral a bamboo fan, Space Conqueror a cup of water, and I myself would take off Mother's shoes. We then waited quietly until she woke up, and we would begin our service. Mother would smile happily and be served. I would do the wiping of her back, with Blooming fanning. Coral would resoak the towel and pass the towel back to me when Space Conqueror changed the water. By then we would hear our father's steps on the staircase. We would expect him to open the door and make a mock-face.

We often ran out of food by the end of the month. We would turn into starving animals. In hunger, Coral once dug out a drug bottle from the closet and chewed down pink-colored pills for constipation. She thought it was candy. Her intestine was damaged. Space Conqueror gorged fruit skins and cores he picked from the trash box in the street. Blooming and I drank water while longing for the day to end.

Mother received her salary on the fifth day of each month. We would wait for her on that day at the bus station. When the bus door opened, Mother popped down with her face glittering. We would jump on her like monkeys. She would take us to a nearby bakery to have a full meal. We would keep taking in food until our stomachs became as hard as melons. Mother was the happiest woman on earth at those moments. It was the only day she did not look ill.

My father did not know how to make shoes, but he

made shoes for all of us. The shoes he made looked like little boats, with two sides up—because the soles he bought were too small to match the top. He drilled and sewed them together anyway. He used a screwdriver. Every Sunday he repaired our shoes, his fingers wrapped in bandages. He did that until Blooming and I learned how to make shoes with rags.

One day mother came home with a lot of drug bottles. She came from the hospital. She had tuberculosis and was told to wear a surgical mask at home. Mother said that in a way she was pleased to have the disease because she finally got to spend time with her family.

I became a Mao activist in the district and won contests because I was able to recite the Little Red Book.

I became an opera fan. There were not many forms of entertainment. The word "entertainment" was considered a dirty bourgeois word. The opera was something else. It was a proletarian statement. The revolutionary operas created by Madam Mao, Comrade Jiang Ching. To love or not love the operas was a serious political attitude. It meant to be or not to be a revolutionary. The operas were taught on radio and in school, and were promoted by the neighborhood organizations. For ten years. The same operas. I listened to the operas when I ate, walked and slept. I grew up with the operas. They became my cells. I decorated the porch with posters of my favorite opera heroines. I sang the operas wherever I went. My mother heard me singing in my dreams; she said that I was preserved by the operas. It was true. I could not go on a day without lis-

tening to the operas. I pasted my ear close to the radio, figuring out the singer's breaths. I imitated her. The aria was called "I won't quit the battle until all the beasts are killed." It was sung by Iron Plum, a teenage character in an opera called *The Red Lantern*. I would not stop singing the aria until my vocal chords hurt. I went on pushing my voice to its highest pitch:

*My Dad is a pine tree, his will is strong.
A hero of indomitable spirit, he is a true Communist.
I follow you,
Walk up with you and never hesitate.
I raise the red lantern high,
The light guides me on.
I follow you to beat the beasts,
My generation and the next . . .*

I was able to recite all the librettos of the operas: *The Red Lantern*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *Sha-Jia Pond*, *The Harbor*, *Raid on White Tiger Regiment*, *Red Detachment of Women*, *Song of Dragon River*. My father could not bear my loud wailing with the radio; he always yelled, Are you hanging yourself in the kitchen?

Grandma from the countryside brought us a young hen. The Old Tailor next door was impressed by a mass of dark brown feathers by her mouth when he first

saw her. He said, She has Karl Marx's beard! The hen was then named Big Beard. Big Beard was Grandma and Grandpa's pet. They had her since she was two days old. When Grandma was too poor to afford her, she had a hard time killing her for a meal. She brought her to Shanghai and told us to eat Big Beard for her. Big Beard is too young to produce eggs, said Grandma. A hen is worthless if she cannot produce eggs. Big Beard made a go-go-go sound and inclined its head when it heard the comments. Its crown was very, very red, like a piece of burning coal. Steam it with sorghum wine, said Grandma. You won't find any taste like that. We asked Grandma to have Big Beard with us, but she shook her head quickly and said, You eat it. I am allergic to chicken meat. She took up her luggage and walked, almost ran, away. Her small feet could hardly catch her steps.

So who was going to kill Big Beard? Not me, said my father. I am not even interested in eating it since you let me see it . . . Father stared at Big Beard. Big Beard inclined her head from side to side and made a go-go-go sound, then soothed her feathers with her mouth. Father went back to his desk. Big Beard flapped her wings toward Mother. Oh, no, not me, said Mother, I can't kill anything, you know. She looked at me; so did the children. I knew what they were saying: You are the bravest. You should be the butcher.

I said, I will. No big deal. I've made good dishes out of live pigeons, crabs and frogs. A hen, in ten minutes, I could have its feathers pulled off, just like the way I always watched those ducks get sliced by the neck in the

food market. The butchers hung them by the feet, let their blood drip clean, sunk them in boiling water, took them out and mopped off the feathers.

My sisters and brother nodded at me. They never doubted my determination. Mother said, Take it to the yard, just don't let me hear anything. Wait—she pulled my sleeve. Maybe we should give it to the people upstairs. Why? We all asked. I just hate to see my children kill. This was Mother. She made us miss a lot of fun. She made us free the birds we caught, the kitten we found. I said, We'll do it in the yard. There won't be any noise. This hen was worth at least five yuan in the market. A person's five-day salary, just think about it. Mother went quiet as I took Big Beard by the wings. Big Beard made more go-go-go sounds as she struggled in my hands. Space Conqueror said, Don't cry, it's not that bad, we're sending you to Karl Marx where you can compare beards together. I said, Shut up, Space Conqueror, go and get me the big scissors. Before Space Conqueror took off, I was suddenly bitten. Big Beard, the hen, bit me. Her mouth was like a pair of scissors. I loosened my grip. She flew up and down by the staircase. After she hit the ceiling a few times, she crashed onto the cement yard.

She lay there, the hen, Big Beard, on her stomach, on the cement yard, with one of her wings dangling on the side, limp. Go . . . go . . . go . . . she shivered trying to stand up again. She fell, dragging the wing around. We looked at each other, then at Big Beard. Her wing is broken, said Coral. Space Conqueror passed me the big scissors. I said, No, I can't kill her now. She is wounded. Not me, said Blooming. Nor me, said Coral. No way it would

be me, Space Conqueror said, and began to cry. You always take advantage of me. He ran toward the window. Raising his head, he yelled, Mom, they are taking advantage of me again!

We decided to postpone the killing. We wouldn't do it until Big Beard's broken wing was healed. We made a home for Big Beard in the kitchen by the sink. We went out to find her dry straws. We made a nestlike wreath. She sat on it quietly. We watched her for hours on end. She sat there, her head under her wing, her little body hot. The heat came from under her feathers. She's having a fever, said Mother. She's infected. What, what should we do? We all became nervous. I have my antibiotic pills, but I don't know if . . . It will be good for Big Beard if it's for a human, said Blooming. Big Beard acts almost like a human. She really does, said Coral, smoothing the hen's feathers. Look, she knew she would be killed so she went to crush herself and broke her wing.

We were all tapping the hen carefully with our fingers. Big Beard looked at us gently. Go-go-go-go. Go-go-go-go. She's in pain, Mom, we all said. Please give her the antibiotic pills.

Mother put a spoonful of antibiotics into Big Beard's mouth as we held her body. Coral and Space Conqueror held the feet, Blooming and I the wings. Big Beard was cooperative. After that she shit around the kitchen, then went to sleep when we began our dinner. We couldn't eat the dinner. The hen made our small kitchen smell of shit. Big Beard occupied the whole corner of the kitchen; we

could only crowd into our seats. We were all thinking about the sick hen as we ate. I would like to see you keep the kitchen clean, I mean keep the smell away, said Mother. Do you hear me? She looked at us. We raked the rice into our mouths. Do you hear your mother? said Father. Or I will give the hen away tonight.

We begged and promised that we would keep the kitchen clean. We went out to our neighbors to get stove ashes. We covered Big Beard's shit with ashes and shoveled it into the garbage can. We fed Big Beard with worms, chopped bones, rice and all kinds of vegetables. She gained weight. Her crown became redder. We talked to her, sang songs to her, hoping she would produce eggs soon. But she disappointed us. She grew prettier, her feathers shining and claws strong, but still no eggs. We lost interest in serving her. You clean! I pointed at Blooming. You clean! Blooming pointed to Coral. You! Coral to Space Conqueror. Space Conqueror pointed us to Mother: Mom, they are taking advantage of me again!

Kill the hen! ordered my father. I said I needed to study for an examination this weekend. We do too, said the children. Then do it Monday, said Father. All right, Monday, I promised.

I sharpened the scissors Monday at noon. There was no one home. I stared at Big Beard. She stared back. She looked nervous. She was searching around and was unusually anxious. Her face was so red. She went to sit on the wreath and stood up and walked around, back and forth, back and forth. I got curious. I moved closer to observe her. She did not like it. She went to hide herself under a chair near a drainage pipe. I sensed that she

wanted privacy. I did not want to leave. I stood up trying to think of a way to watch her without being seen. There was a mirror hung above the sink. I had an idea. I climbed on top of the kitchen table and lay on my back. I turned the mirror to an angle where I could see Big Beard and she would not see me.

After about five minutes Big Beard got up from the wreath. She looked around as if to make sure there was not anyone in the kitchen. She used her mouth to arrange the straw in the wreath and began to spread her legs. She was in a funny pose, not kneeling and not standing; her tail began to bend down to cover her anus. She stayed in that pose. Her body swelled. She was pushing inside. Was she producing an egg? I held my breath and stared at the mirror. Big Beard disappeared in the mirror; she moved to an angle where I could not see her. I did not want to scare her; I waited patiently. A few minutes later Big Beard got into the scene again and turned toward me at a perfect angle. I saw her anus was enlarged, and a white pinkish thing was coming out. It's an egg! Big Beard spread her legs farther; her face was turning purple. She went back to the funny pose, pushed and pushed. Finally, she stood up. I saw an egg in the wreath.

I jumped down from the table and carefully picked the egg from the wreath. It was warm. The shell was thin, almost transparent. There were blood dots on the shell. I looked at Big Beard. She looked back at me modestly. I hugged her as she began to sing. Go-go-go La! Go-go-go La! Her cackle was so loud, so proud.

Coral carried Big Beard to the bed. She thought this would provide her with a good rest after such a hard labor.

We all kneeled in front of the bed and talked to Big Beard. We passed the egg around. Space Conqueror got a pen and I wrote the date on the egg. Blooming went to find a shoe box and carefully put the egg in with soft papers and stored it under her bed.

When our parents got in, we told them the big news. We said since Big Beard started to produce eggs, there was no reason to kill her anymore. Eggs were the most expensive thing in the market. My parents agreed but said they would not eat Big Beard's eggs. We said we would save the eggs for houseguests.

Big Beard became the center of our attention. Each day after school we went to dig worms. Space Conqueror climbed the trees for bigger worms. Big Beard became picky in taste. She began to only take live worms. She produced one egg every two days and soon the shoe box was full.

But Big Beard's good life did not last. That summer the neighborhood Party committee launched a Patriotic Public Health Campaign and all the dogs, ducks, and chickens had to be killed in three days. We tried to hide Big Beard, but we could not shut her up every time after she dropped an egg. She had to pronounce her mother's pride. The committee, a group of retired old people, came to our door to shout slogans to mobilize us. We pretended not to hear them at first. When they came nearer, waving their little paper flags in their hands, we got nervous. We held Big Beard under the window and covered her with blankets. The old people shouted their voices hoarse and their breaths broken. The slogan was "Do not raise duck and hen in the city!" It later on became "Do not raise

duck . . ."—the old man who was leading the shout lost his breath here, he stopped, catching his breath, he went—"raise hen in the city!" The slogan shouters **did not** care what they shouted, they just repeated where the **old** man had stopped, so they went "Do not raise duck!" After the old man regained his voice, they followed: "Raise hen in the city!"

The head of the neighborhood Party committee came to talk with me. He asked why I was not behaving as a head of the Little Red Guards should. He asked if I still wanted to be voted as a Mao's Loyalist in the coming year. I understood what I had to do. I promised to kill Big Beard the next morning. He said that he and his committee would come and check on me by seven-thirty. He wanted to have Big Beard's head.

I had a bad sleep as I had expected. I got up at dawn. Big Beard was already up eating her breakfast in the dark. Hearing me come in, she made her go-go-go sound. I took a pair of scissors and picked up Big Beard by the wings. I went down to the yard. Upstairs Little Coffin had already come back from the food market. I asked her what time it was. She replied that it was five to seven. I kept telling myself, No big deal. Big Beard is only a hen, an animal, an enemy of public health. I raised up the scissors and put the scissors back down. I went back upstairs to fetch a bowl to collect Big Beard's blood. It was seven-fifteen. I came back down to the yard and realized I had forgotten another thing. I went back upstairs to boil water. I let Big Beard free in the yard. She seemed glad. Shaking her feathers, she used her mouth to chop open my fist. She was playing with me. I went back up and the water was

boiling. I took the hot-water container down and placed it next to the bowl. I grabbed Big Beard, but she struggled away as if she sensed some danger. I chased her. She kneeled down in front of me. I picked her up and folded her head under her wing. I was using my full strength. I began to pull her beard off. My hands were weak. I made myself ignore it. I kept pulling until Big Beard's neck showed. I picked up the scissors. My arms were stiff. It was seven twenty-five. Big Beard pulled her head out from under her wing. She looked at me, her face was red. She kept struggling. I heard the neighborhood committee's drum beating in the next lane. I folded Big Beard's head back under her wing. I raised my scissors and aimed at her neck. She struggled violently. It was seven-thirty. The bell of the Wu-Lee Hardware Workshop rang; the women poured in. The committee people arrived at the door; the slogan shouting was like waves raising and falling. I clapped the scissors. Big Beard pulled her head out and made a go-go-go sound. She pushed an egg out of her body.

I could not look. I brought the scissors down. When I could look again I saw Big Beard flying over everybody's head, dripping blood on her way. My sisters and brother were looking down from the window. Big Beard was on a tree, almost as high as our window, then she dropped down on the white cement ground.

I ran upstairs. I said I could not touch the hen again. No one in my family would. Big Beard lay dead on the cement yard, next to the bowl and a container of boiled water. The egg was stepped on. When the water got cold, Little Coffin came to me and asked what I was going to

do with the hen. It's going to spoil, she said. I begged her to take it. I said it would make a good dish to go with wine. I knew her father and grandfather were alcoholics. She took it.

I went upstairs after dinner. Little Coffin's family was in a Mao seminar section. Big Beard had become a handful of bones lying in a garbage can in the corner. Little Coffin told me that Big Beard tasted excellent.

In school Mao's books were our texts. I was the head of the class on the history of the Communist Party of China. To me, history meant how proletarians won over the reactionaries. Western history was a history of capitalist exploitation. We hung portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin next to Mao in our classrooms. Each morning we bowed to them as well as bowing to Mao, praying for a long, long life for him. My sisters copied my compositions. My compositions were collected slogans. I always began with this: "The East wind is blowing, the fighting drum is beating. Who is afraid in the world today? It is not the people who are afraid of American imperialists. It is the American imperialists who are afraid of the people." Those phrases won me prizes. Space Conqueror looked up to me as if I were a magician. For me, compositions were nothing; it was abacus competitions that were difficult. I wrote compositions for my brother and sisters, but I felt I had not much in common with the children. I felt