

Class Counsellor

Liu Xinwu

Translated by Bennett Lee

1

Would you like to get to know a delinquent and live with him at close quarters everyday? I think not. In fact, you would probably be offended and wonder why I would make such an outrageous suggestion.

However, when Lao Cao, the Party Branch Secretary, looking tanned and fit, posed this same question in the Party Branch office of the Guangming Middle School to the class counsellor for the third year class, Zhang Junshi, all the while looking him straight in the eye, Zhang did not find it the least bit outrageous. He only paused for a moment of studied reflection before answering flatly: "Fine. I'd like to get to know him."

It was like this: A few days before, the Public Security Bureau had released Song Baogui from detention after he had been held for involvement in criminal gang activities. In the course of interrogation, he came face to face with the power and the inspired policy of the dictatorship of the proletariat. His body drenched in sweat and his lips trembling uncontrollably, Song Baogui made a fairly complete confession and revealed the key crimes committed by the gangleader. Because these crimes were not too serious and his confession had been relatively complete, and because he

wasn't yet sixteen years old, the Public Security Bureau released him for re-education. His parents felt that it would be hard for him to show his face in the same neighbourhood again so they arranged to move to another place. This new neighbourhood happened to be close to the Guangming Middle School, and, as the regulations were that students attend the school nearest to their residence, his parents requested that he be allowed to transfer there. Song Baoqi was supposed to be ready for third year and the third year class had places open. Zhang Junshi, moreover, was a class counsellor with over ten years experience and the only Party member among the class counsellors for this year. For all these reasons, after the Party Branch had looked into the matter and accepted Song Baoqi's request for transfer, Lao Cao, the Branch Secretary, sought out Zhang Junshi directly, filled him in on the background, and asked: "How about it? You'll take him?"

And as you already know, Zhang Junshi's thoughtful eyes met Lao Cao's inquiring look, saw encouragement in it, and gave his reply.

2

What kind of a man was this Zhang Junshi? While he is fronting the dusty wind of a spring day and riding to the Public Security Bureau to find out about Song Baoqi, we can consider him in some detail.

Zhang Junshi is actually quite undistinguished. He is thirty-six years old this year, of medium build and a little overweight. His clothes are well-worn but neat, and all the buttons are done up immaculately, even on his outer jacket. His face is oval-shaped, his forehead creased and his eyes, though not large, can flash when he is angry — students who tell lies are most afraid of that look. What the students respect the most, however, is Zhang Junshi's mouth. It is popularly held that people with thin lips are very

knowledgeable, but Zhang Junshi's lips were thick, and in spring and winter were usually dried and chapped from the wind. But what issued from between these lips was always full of passion and verve, sharp and fluent like a seeding machine that never got rusty and constantly planted in the minds of the students seeds of revolutionary thinking and knowledge. It was also like a broom, tirelessly and mercilessly sweeping out the dust that collected in their minds.

On the road, Zhang Junshi looked very uninterested. It was only after he had heard the report from the comrade at the Public Security and looked over the case file that his face grew animated. It is difficult to describe: there was not only indignation, but some loathing and hatred as well. These feelings soon gave way to obvious concern and solemnity.

By the time he got back to the school it was already three o'clock in the afternoon. He pulled out his carefully folded handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his forehead as he walked into the teacher's staffroom. He could see at a glance that his fellow teachers already knew Song Baoqi was to start classes the next day. The math teacher, Yin Dalei, was the first to come up to him and, in doing so, initiated the first skirmish of the Song Baoqi affair.

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Yin Dalei and Zhang Junshi were the same age, graduated from the same Teacher's College, were both sent to Guangming Middle School to work and often taught the same year students. They always showed the greatest respect for each other and even when quarrelling they never made indirect personal attacks, but spoke their mind without reservation.

Yin Dalei was tall and slender but his facial features were closely squashed together, so that he could never escape the description of "baby-face". It was only by virtue of the thick glasses perched on his nose that he could maintain the

outward decorum of an adult in front of his students.

Now, in the spring of 1977, Yin Dalei was in high spirits. He was full of the brightest hopes and expectations for education, for his school and for his courses and classes. He felt confident that anything that wasn't fair or rational should be and could be quickly set right. He thought now that the Gang of Four had been removed, it wouldn't take very long before their bad influence on education could be cleared away and an ideal environment created. In the past few days, however, he had been a little exasperated. He wanted everything to be smooth sailing and didn't want to think about or confront some complex problems.

As soon as the news of Song Baoqi's transfer reached Yin Dalei, he was furious. He unleashed all the "incomprehension" in his mind at his old friend the moment that he stepped into the staffroom: "Why did you agree to it? The major task facing our year is the improvement of quality in education and you let this punk come here and get yourself bogged down in giving him individual counselling. Where are you going to have the energy to improve the quality of education? And if this doesn't work out, then one rotten apple is going to spoil the whole barrel! Why didn't you think it over more carefully before agreeing to this? I just don't understand ..."

Some of the teachers in the room shared Yin Dalei's opinions but they didn't like the harsh attitude that he took. Others didn't agree with him, but thought that his intentions were well-meant. Still others didn't know really how they should react but sympathized with Zhang Junshi for needlessly taking on such a heavy responsibility. Everyone sitting or standing looked in Zhang Junshi's direction. No one said a word. Even the teaching aids for the health and hygiene course lying on the specimen table, including a plaster cast model of an ear, lay as if waiting anxiously for Zhang Junshi's reply.

Although Zhang Junshi felt that Yin Dalei's outburst was

a little overdone, he didn't think that it made no sense whatsoever. After pondering for a moment he replied, as if in rebuttal: "There's no reason now to send Song Baoqi back to the Public Security, nor is it necessary to make him go back to his old school. Since I'm a school counsellor and he wants to come here, I'm just doing my job."

These were cool and objective words. If Zhang Junshi had dismissed what Yin Dalei had said with a sharp comeback, then perhaps it would have led to a violent argument, but this unexpectedly mild reply caught Yin Dalei off-guard. The other teachers were agitated as well, and some couldn't help but wonder to themselves: What if Song Baoqi winds up in my class, how will I handle it?

And indeed, Zhang Junshi had to start his job right away, as at this precise moment the Youth League Branch Secretary, Xie Huimin, came in to look for him.

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Xie Huimin was a head taller than most men. Her posture was very good and she looked very healthy. Once, the coach for the basketball team saw her as she walked by the sports gymnasium and invited her in, beside himself with excitement in thinking that he had found the ideal player to train. Little did he know that after this angular and wide-eyed girl had shot a few baskets he would be so disappointed. It turned out that she couldn't jump and that her movements and coordination were stiff and ungainly. He found out on asking that she wasn't interested in any kind of ball games.

Apart from seeing films with others and singing the current songs, Xie Huimin didn't have many outside interests. Her school work was average and sometimes she didn't complete her assignments, mainly because her extra-curricular service activities took up too much of her time and energy, so her teachers excused her for it.

The first summer that Zhang Junshi took over this class, Xie Huimin was already the Youth League Branch Secretary. Not long after he took over, it was his class's turn to go down to the countryside to learn from the peasants. On the day that they were heading back to the school, Xie Huimin suddenly discovered one student twirling a stalk of wheat in his hand after they had already walked more than two li from the village. She had rushed over and angrily criticized him: "How dare you take away wheat belonging to the poor and lower middle peasants? Give it to me! We've got to take it back!" The student was reluctant and had defended himself: "I want to give it to my parents to look at so they'd know how well the wheat grows here." This started a big argument, with few of the students siding with Xie Huimin. Some of the others said she was "too harsh" and some said she was "over-zealous". In the end it naturally came to Zhang Junshi's attention. Xie Huimin, grasping the stalk of wheat tightly in her hand, opened her lips slightly and looked hopefully at Zhang Junshi. Contrary to what most of the students expected, Zhang Junshi had sided with Xie Huimin. With the clamour of students' whispering and arguing all around him, Zhang Junshi watched the solitary figure of Xie Huimin hurrying back to the village along the muddy road and thought to himself: *The point isn't whether the stalk of wheat should or should not be sent back this way. It's that this Youth League Secretary of only three months had such pure and lofty intentions in "not letting the poor and lower middle peasants lose a single grain of wheat". This spirit of hers was a valuable quality that should be encouraged.*

But from this time on until the Gang of Four were removed, a dark and ominous cloud hung over our country, the shadow of which also fell on the third year class at Guangming Middle School. The black witch who controlled the Youth League Municipal Committee for the Gang of Four had already sent accomplices to Guangming Middle School, ostensibly to raise it up as a "model". As they were

considering whether it would be an appropriate place for creating a "model", they often sought out Xie Huimin to talk to her. Xie Huimin for her part couldn't understand what they were hinting at in their "teachings" as she had no eye for political opportunism and was quite naive and sincere. From this point on, however, a contradiction emerged between Zhang Junshi and herself which is difficult to explain clearly. For example, when Xie Huimin came to complain that, during organized activities, two out of five League members were falling asleep, Zhang Junshi not only didn't go to discipline them, but instead said to her: "Why do organized activities always consist of reading the newspapers? Why don't you have a mountain-climbing competition next time? That way nobody will fall asleep." Xie Huimin had blinked at him in astonishment, scarcely believing her ears. Finally she had collected herself and offered in protest: "Mountain-climbing? What kind of activity is that? We're reading articles criticizing Song Jiang ..." Another example: One day as class was dismissed and it was so hot that it was like being shut inside a bamboo steamer, the girl students all ran to the window to get a breath of air. Zhang Junshi called Xie Huimin to one side, looked her over and asked: "Why are you still wearing a long-sleeved blouse? You should set an example by changing to short-sleeves, and all of the girls would be cooler off wearing skirts!" But even though Xie Huimin was so hot that she could hardly catch her breath, she flushed in embarrassment. She just couldn't understand what he was really getting at. Of the whole class, only the girl on the Propaganda Committee, Shi Hong, wore a flowered short-sleeve blouse and a pleated short skirt. When Xie Huimin saw this, she had immediately regarded it as "the contamination of a bourgeois style"!

After the Gang of Four were removed, the contradiction between Zhang Junshi and Xie Huimin was, of course, more easily explained, but it wasn't entirely resolved.

Now Xie Huimin found Zhang Junshi in the staffroom and

reported: "The students in our class all know Song Baoqi is coming. Some say that he used to be a leader of the Cai Shi Kou block gang and was a real terror. Some of the girls are afraid and say that if he really comes tomorrow, they won't be coming to class!"

This was a blow that Zhang Junshi hadn't prepared for and it took him by surprise. He decided that he would enlist the help of the Youth League Branch. "Are you afraid? What do you think we should do?" he asked.

Xie Huimin tossed back her short braids. "Afraid? This is class struggle! If he tries to start trouble, we'll deal with him."

Zhang Junshi felt his heartbeat quicken. For a fleeting moment, that figure which had hurried back to the village along the muddy road flashed through his mind. Finally, he said: "Assemble the Youth League Branch and Class Committees and we'll have a meeting."

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The meeting finished about 4:20 in the afternoon. All of the others had left, leaving only Zhang Junshi, Xie Huimin and Shi Hong.

Shi Hong sat facing the window. The late afternoon sun fell on her round face and made her cheeks look even rosier. Her chin rested in the palm of her hand and the pupils of eyes danced slowly as she lightly tilted her head. This was the look that her math teacher was so used to seeing and grew to like whenever she was pondering over an ingenious way to solve a math problem. But at this moment it wasn't a math problem that was going through her but how to improve and polish what she was going to write, along with everybody else, including Song Baoqi: a poem as a 'call to action'.

Zhang Junshi and Xie Huimin were busy talking. The question of how to handle Song Baoqi coming into the class had already been decided on. The boys had gone off

separately to find the other male students and make it clear to them that Song Baoqi was no 'hero' menacing the whole of Cai Shi Kou block, but someone who had gone wrong and needed help. It wouldn't do to be curious or reverent, nor would it be right to discriminate against or attack him. Everyone had to wholeheartedly try to help him. The girls were sent had gone off to find those girls who, either from timidity or from fear of being harassed, said they weren't coming to class the next day, and tell both them and their families that the school would guarantee that they wouldn't be bullied by Song Baoqi. To be passive in avoiding a delinquent like Song Baoqi would only encourage and embolden him. Only by uniting and struggling with him and trying to educate him could they turn something harmful to something harmful into something harmless and even transform it into something useful. Zhang Junshi would go and make a visit to Song Baoqi's home, try to get an understanding of both him and his family and attempt to do some ideological work with them. Shi Hong's poem would emphasize the point that "our school administration has urged us to grasp the key link and restore order to the country".

Before Shi Hong had completed her poem, Zhang Junshi and Xie Huimin had finished talking. He gathered up the few items that he had spread on the table for the students to look at. These were what he had bought back from the local police station, all of them articles that were found after Song Baoqi was arrested: a bicycle chain, used for fighting; some well-worn playing cards; a stylish nickel-plated cigaret case with a lighter inside; and a novel with the cover missing. When the students saw these items, their noses twitched with disgust and their lips pursed in anger. Xie Huimin proposed that the Youth League Branch hold a meeting after class the next day in which all active members could take part, so that the articles could be put on show and denounced. Everyone agreed and Zhang Junshi nodded

assent, saying that it would be an opportunity to educate people about decadence.

It was completely unexpected that, just as Zhang Junshi was gathering together these items, an argument would suddenly flare up that would lead to an impasse.

All the articles except the novel were in the book bag. Zhang Junshi hadn't bothered to look at it carefully before, but now when he examined it, he let out a sudden exclamation of surprise. The book was a novel published before the Cultural Revolution by Chinese Youth Publishers, called "*The Gadfly*".

When Xie Huimin saw Zhang Junshi's reaction, she picked up the book and flipped through it. She never heard of the book, much less seen a copy of it. When she saw an illustration of a foreign man and woman talking of love, she started: "Aya! This is obscene! We'll have to denounce this tomorrow."

Zhang Junshi furrowed his brows in deep thought. He recalled what it was like when he was in middle school. At that time, the Youth League Branch had often recommended this very book to his class. With all the fervor and enthusiasm of adolescence, they had sat around a campfire and taken turns reciting from the story. Leaning against the parapets of the Great Wall, they had discussed the strengths and shortcomings of the '*gadfly*'. This English novel by Voynich had stirred the hearts and minds of so many of Zhang Junshi's generation, and so many of them had drawn inspiration from the protagonist of the novel. Could it be that they hadn't been critical enough of the book's shortcomings at that time? Was it possible that at that time they hadn't understood correctly the essence of the novel, or hadn't understood it deeply enough? Whatever the answer was to these questions, when Zhang Junshi reached this point he flatly disagreed with Xie Huimin: "No, you can't call *The Gadfly* obscene ..."

Xie Huimin levelled an incredulous look at Zhang Junshi:

"What? It's not obscene? If this isn't obscenity, then what is?"

An iron-like logic had already established itself in her mind: whatever was not sold in the bookstores or as available in the lending libraries was either subversive or obscene. You couldn't really blame her. The years in which she had started to become interested in reading was the time when the Gang of Four were riding highest with their fascist cultural tyranny. Poor Xie Huimin accepted with blind faith whatever came out in print during the time in which the Gang of Four controlled the media. She had conscientiously read newspapers and journals full of their essays and articles which had had a harmful influence on countless young people. If someone close to her at the time had questioned Zhang Qunchiao and Yao Wenyuan's so-called "important articles" on "the theory of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" and Liang Xiao's articles on the early Tang Dynasty as anti-Marxist, things might have been better. But because of several subjective and objective factors, no one had brought this up with her. Her mother had often told her and her brothers and sisters to listen to Chairman Mao, pay attention to the radio broad casts, read the papers, respect the teacher, adhere to discipline and study hard. Xie Huimin profited greatly from this family education which instilled in her a strong proletarian spirit and gave her character as a member of the new generation of working people. However, in the atmosphere of struggle created by the bourgeois revisionist 'white-bone demon' disguised as a beautiful woman, proletarian sentiments alone easily led to gullibility and to blind obedience. This was exactly what the 'white bone demon' and her co-conspirators were counting on to serve their ends. In these turbulent years, then, Xie Huimin, in trying to be a good revolutionary and struggle for the goal of communism, become narrow-minded and confused as to what was right and wrong. This was why she thought of "*The Gadfly*," as a poisonous weed.

By the time our story began, the novel *Song of Youth* had already been reprinted. Because her habit of thinking was so entrenched, Xie Huimin still regarded other students who were excited by the news of this and of old films being reshowed and songs performed as "addicted to bourgeois thinking". Only a few days before, she had confiscated a copy of *Song of Youth* published in 1959 that she had discovered Shi Hong reading after class. She had flipped through a few pages, was outraged by what she came across, and judged the book 'obscene'. She had wanted to hand it over to Zhang Junshi but Shi Hong had snatched it back with a laugh and, patting the cover, had said: "This book is really well-written! You should read it!" In the end the two of them had a heated argument. Later she had hurried off to the Youth League Meeting but forgot to report the incident to Zhang Junshi. Little did she know that Zhang Junshi would have supported Shi Hong and denied that this foreign 'obscene book' was obscene. In Xie Huimin's mind, foreign 'obscene books' were naturally worse than 'obscene books' which were Chinese. When she was faced with this reaction on Zhang Junshi's part, she began to recall many trivial incidents like this in the past. Her feeling of respect for him which had been dominant for so long, suddenly diminished. She pouted her lips and furrowed her brows stubbornly.

Shi Hong had finished her poem and was about to recite it for Zhang Junshi and Xie Huimin when she heard him say: "No, you can't call *The Gadfly* obscene ..." When she realized that the book was *The Gadfly*, she moved quickly over next to Xie Huimin to have a look. When Xie Huimin questioned Zhang Junshi's opinion, Shi Hong pulled excitedly on her arm and interjected: "Don't say that. I've heard my parents say that *The Gadfly* deserves to be read. I've been reading *How The Steel is Tempered* these past two days, and the proletarian hero in the novel really admires 'the gadfly'." Shi Hong had wanted to read it for a long time but hadn't been able to borrow it so that when she took it from

Xie Huimin, her mind was teeming with questions: "What historical period does this book cover? Where does it take place? What is this 'gadfly' character really like? Are there parts that really deserve close reading?" When she returned the book to Zhang Junshi, she wanted to know: "What should look out for in this book? What should we learn from?" Xie Huimin bit her lip and looked resentfully at Shi Hong. Her heart pounded.

Zhang Junshi thumbed through the pages of the weather-beaten book. He was going to patiently explain to Xie Huimin why it wasn't right to call it an 'obscene book', but it had been confiscated from Song Baoqi and wherever there was a picture of a woman, a moustache had been drawn on it. And how was one to know that Song Baoqi didn't regard it as an 'obscene' book? It was very complicated. The fact that the book had been labelled was grotesque enough. But to explain to someone as naive as Xie Huimin how to analyze the complex phenomena of life and the good and bad that coexisted in a work of art required a lot of time and a more favourable context.

Zhang Junshi took the battered book, put it in his bag and said amiably to Xie Huimin: "We can talk about this book at another time. It's almost five o'clock. Let's listen to Shi Hong's poem, then go on with our plans."

When Shi Hong read her poem, Xie Huimin didn't hear a single word. She stared bitterly and uneasily at the flecked shadow of the trees reflecting on the table. She wholeheartedly wanted to respect Zhang Junshi, but his strange attitude toward this book made her think to herself: "*He's a teacher. How could he take such an attitude?!*"

Just after five o'clock, Zhang Junshi arrived at Song Baoqi's new home on his bicycle. As the new occupants hadn't had time to tidy things up before he got there, the

two eastern rooms in the small courtyard were still in slight disarray. A bowl of lotuses about to bloom sat incongruously on the plastic sheet covering the sewing machine table.

Song Baoqi's mother was a sales clerk in a shop. In order to move house she had taken the day off and hurriedly tidied up the room. When she saw Zhang Junshi had come, she was both relieved and a little embarrassed and immediately called Song Baoqi to come out and pay his respects and pour some tea. As Zhang Junshi sat down to chat with Song Baoqi's mother, let's delve a little into the general family situation.

Song Baoqi's father worked a regular shift at the Landscaping Bureau seedling nursery. That is, after six o'clock he was off work and could head home. As things turned out, however, he didn't get home usually until eight or nine o'clock. Why? As Song Baoqi's mother related with a sigh, these few years he had fallen into a bad habit: after work he would pass through the Lunar Temple, stop to park his bicycle, then go into a small grove of trees to spend the time playing cards and relax. Sometimes they would play on after nightfall and still not break up, but would move to under a street lamp and continue on until someone stood up to go the nightshift. Only then would break up and go home.

Since such a father found nothing inspiring or meaningful in his own life, it is not so difficult to understand the lack of educational guidance or supervision for Song Baoqi. And judging from the barely suppressed anger with which his mother described the situation, Zhang Junshi could see that her pampering and indulgence of her only son had only led to bitter disappointment.

It would be wrong to regard this family as exceptional. Zhang Junshi noticed that even though they had a lot to put to order and move into place to make the room look presentable, two inlaid framed portraits of Chairman Mao and Chairman Hua were already hanging up on the northern wall. Moreover, a smaller picture of Premier Zhou Enlai in a hand-made frame of silver plum flower design was hung

prominently on the center of the clothes cabinet. The thoughts of this middle-aged couple were at one with hundreds of millions of other Chinese people. Aside from their own personal shortcomings, then, who should bear responsibility for the spiritual impoverishment of their lives?

At a quarter to six, Zhang Junshi urged her to tend to her pressing work and took Song Baoqi into the next room to talk to him for the first time.

Now we can examine in more detail the kind of person Song Baoqi is. He was wearing a nylon vest. His healthy colouring and sturdy build were evidence that he had had a comfortable life in a society where food and clothing were guaranteed. But the look on his face made Zhang Junshi, who had had such long experience with students, feel chilled all over. Although there was nothing physically wrong with it, the look on his face made the heart grow cold. From the stitched up upper lip, from the nervous quiver of his nostrils and especially from that pair of vacant and dull eyes that took in everything at a glance, Zhang Junshi could see that he had been deformed by his experiences and was standing as if naked under the light bulb.

After some dozens of questions and answers, Zhang Junshi had come to the following conclusions about Song Baoqi: Lacking in the minimum of political consciousness; intellectual level approximately on a par with first year middle school; not in very good physical shape despite a healthy appearance. People who liked to put labels on others would probably criticize Song Baoqi for being full of "bourgeois thinking", thought Zhang Junshi, but in fact this was not only inaccurate, but was useless in trying to help him reform.

Song Baoqi did have bourgeois thinking, but what kind of bourgeois thinking was it? The bourgeoisie boasted of "freedom, equality, universal love", paid attention to "individual struggle" and "pursuit of personal fame and career", used the hypocrisy of "theory of human nature" to

cover up their crimes of exploitation and oppression. And Song Baoqi? Since he fell in with that gang of delinquents, he was bound to strict rules and was beaten around by other gang members who had had lighted cigarettes jabbed against the back of his head. Did he get angry or protest? No, he never went after "personal liberation" and called for "freedom and equality". He had faith in "gang loyalty" and willingly did the dirty work for the gang leader and took the greatest pleasure in beating up others smaller than he was. He never thought much about "personal fame and career" because from the time he was very young, all the experts he knew — including scientists, engineers, writers and teachers — were all labelled "the stinking lower ninth" by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. What was the point of striving for anything? Another typical bourgeois concept is that "knowledge is power", but this meant nothing either to Song Baoqi. What was the use of knowledge? The best thing was to continue to "rebel". Zhang Tiesheng's exam paper was worth a "big duck's egg", but didn't he become a high official?

So ... it isn't accurate to give Song Baoqi the indiscriminate label of "bourgeois thinking" and stop there: one had to prescribe suitable treatment. The ideology of the bourgeoisie during its period of rising development was completely alien to Song Baoqi. What he did have was the "gang loyalty" of feudal times and the influence of the reactionary hedonism of the decadent bourgeois period. Don't close your eyes and ears to this evaluation that Zhang Junshi makes of Song Baoqi: these are the facts. What is even more regrettable, if you truly love your country and have any concern for its future, then you will have to admit that the kinds of problems reflected in the case of Song Baoqi are fairly prevalent. You will have to take an attitude of wanting to deal seriously with actual problems and curing these abscesses in our country's body politic, work together with Zhang Junshi to consider how to re-educate and transform young people like Song Baoqi.

Zhang Junshi took that tattered novel out of his bag and asked Song Baoqi: "What's the title of this book? Do you still remember?"

The questions that Zhang Junshi asked were a far cry from the harsh interrogation and stern going over he received from the Public Security only recently, so he was quick to give a respectful reply: "It's called *Niu Mang (The Gadfly)*." He didn't know Chinese characters very well, so he only read half of it correctly.

"It's not *Niu Mang*, it's *Niu Meng*. Do you know what these two words mean?"

Song Baoqi's face was expressionless as he stared blankly at a butterfly fluttering past and said frankly: "No."

"Then did you read this book?"

"I flipped through it, that's all. I couldn't understand it."

"You couldn't understand it. Then why did you take it?"

"We stole it."

"Where did you steal it from? Why did you steal it?"

"We took it from the book storage room. We heard that the books there were ones you weren't allowed to borrow or read, that they were all bad books. So we pried open the lock and took two boxes to try and sell them."

"Why didn't you sell this one?"

"We didn't sell any of them in the end. We heard that if we tried to sell books with the library's seal on it, we would get caught."

"What other books did you steal? Do you still remember any titles?"

"Yeah." Given this opportunity to prove he wasn't completely ignorant, Song Baoqi became animated for the first time, blinked a few times and concentrated. "There was one called *Red Crag* and another called *Peace and War*, no, it was *War and Peace*. Right. And there was one with a weird title, something like *The Poetry of Xin Jiache* ..."

Zhang Junshi gave a start. He thought carefully for a moment before pulling out his pen and writing on his the

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characters for "The Selected Poetry of Xing Jiakuan" and showed it to Song Baoqi. Song Baoqi nodded. "Right. That's the one."

Zhang Junshi felt disheartened. It wasn't just a matter of a few delinquents stealing books, but the fact that some worthwhile books, none of which were poisonous weeds and some of which were even fragrant flowers, had been locked up in storage and forbidden to be read. One reason why Song Baoqi and the others had degenerated was not because they had been influenced by reading 'poisonous' books, but rather because they thought they could get what they wanted by stirring up trouble. It was through not reading books that they had degenerated into an abyss of ignorance.

Zhang Junshi flipped through *The Gadfly* and asked Song Baoqi: "What was the point of drawing moustaches on all the women in the illustrations? What were you thinking?"

Song Baoqi lowered his eyes. "It was a game. Everyone took a book and had to draw on the women. Whoever did the most would have good luck ..."

Zhang Junshi stared speechlessly at Song Baoqi, who lifted his head to steal a glance at him and, thinking that perhaps he hadn't been honest enough, added: "We were wrong ... we shouldn't have looked at this 'obscene' book. We were trying to figure out our fortunes, to see who would be first in getting a girlfriend ... I won't do it again." He remembered when the Public Security investigated him and his mother when she came to get him. Her eyes were red, full of pain and hatred.

"We shouldn't have looked at this 'obscene' book." This sentence was like a hammer blow to Zhang Junshi, making his heart thump at the sound. Strange? Not so strange: there was a big difference between a good person like Xie Huimin and a bad one like Song Baoqi, but when it came to judging *The Gadfly* as an obscene book, their thoughts coincided. It was this phenomenon that was so shocking. Who was responsible?



Zhao Dapeng

Of course, it was the Gang of Four.

A smouldering fury erupted like a volcano inside Zhang Junshi when he thought of the Gang of Four. Where in the history of civilization could one find an example of such revolutionary 'logic' and slogans covering up a most reactionary policy of fooling the people?

When he looked at Song Baoqi, this person who had refused to take in the crystallization of all that was most beautiful, sitting on the bed, his arms limply at his side, eyes staring vacantly at his white running shoes as they brushed nervously together, Zhang Junshi felt his heart pounding and an invisible force gathering at his throat as if he had to cry out:

Save the children who suffered at the hands of the Gang of Four!"

7

In springtime the days are short. When the sound of the seven o'clock chimes from the Telegraph Building drifted in from across the city, the colours of the sunset had already were hovering over the streets and alleys nearby Guangming Middle School.

Zhang Junshi, pushing his bicycle, walked through the gates of the public park which was open at all hours. He found a quiet bench, parked his bicycle, sat down and lit up a cigarette. His eyebrows quivered as he deliberately gave his turbulent feelings free play before concentrating on the best action to take in doing his job as the class counsellor.

A night breeze lifted a few strands of willow branches behind the bench and sent a few elm seeds twirling through the air. Somewhere lilacs were blossoming and infused the air with its fragrant aroma.

The first meeting with Song Baoqi and his family had stirred up contradictory feelings of love and hate that Zhang Junshi found hard to control. He wished that he could call all

of the students together now and have a meeting in front of the bench. He had so many profound and moving thoughts, so many sincere and stern opinions, so many passionate suggestions and criticisms to express that he felt he could convey them all now in such a vivid and fruitful way that the students would be understand through examples and comparisons ...

He felt that he loved his country now more than at any other time. When he thought of its future and its bright prospects, and of the vision of the initial stage of the four modernizations at the end of this century and the beginning of the next, he was confident that noone would ever humiliate or make fun of his country again. He thought of his own occupation — a teacher of the people, a class counsellor. What he trained were not only students, a cluster of young plants, but the future of the country so that this nine hundred sixty thousand square kilometres of land of the Chinese people could continue to develop prosperously and take its place among the nations of the world.

Now, more than ever, he hated the Gang of Four, these enemies who wrecked the country and brought ruin to the people, not only for the harm that they had done to the economy, but also for the filth that they had inflicted on the masses. It wasn't just that they produced criminals like Zhang Tiesheng, with 'a head of horns and a body of thorns', but that they also caused 'deformities' like Song Baoqi to emerge. What was more, someone like Xie Huimin with her honest, upright qualities had also suffered from their black influence. They had not only ravaged the present but also damaged the future.

His hatred of these scum added to his love for the people and this feeling of love further fuelled his hatred for the Gang of Four. With love and hate together at the same time, people have the inexhaustible courage to fight for truth and the unlimited strength to not fear sacrifices in gaining victory.

Zhang Junshi suddenly stood up and looked at his watch.

It was 7:15. He thought about dinner. If it wasn't for the fact that he was hungry and therefore thought about going home, dinner would have completely slipped his mind. He had completely forgotten that he still had not eaten. He had planned to make some personal visits to some students homes to sound them out on what they thought about Song Baoqi entering the third year class, but since most of them would be at home eating dinner it wouldn't really be the proper time to drop in. He thought it over, then, hands behind his back, began to stroll around the small park. At the same time he decided that he would leave around 7:30.

The smell of the lilacs grew more and more fragrant. The aroma led his mind to wander once again. He thought of how the Gang of Four had already been swept into the garbage heap, how the Central Committee headed by Chairman Hua in the short period of a half a year, had changed the situation, and how his beloved motherland now had its present assured and also had greater hope for the future. Then he felt confident that Song Baoqi was not a hopeless case, and that Xie Huimin's confused thinking and misunderstanding with himself, when measured up against her good qualities and enthusiasm for socialism, would eventually be cleared up.

8

When Zhang Junshi walked out of the park pushing his bicycle, he happened to meet Yin Dalei passing by the gate with a bulging plastic bag. Yin Dalei looked at him in surprise: "Junshi, you're still fond of strolling through the park."

Zhang Junshi laughed, but didn't try to explain himself. Nor did he ask Yin Dalei where he was coming from or going to. He knew that for the past month Yin Dalei was giving certain students individual tutoring as well as organizing remedial classes at the school. He knew Yin Dalei's

temperament. During the period that the Gang of Four controlled culture and education, Yin Dalei was always complaining about the Ministry of Education, the School Administration, the students and their parents. If an outsider had heard him grumbling, he would probably have thought that Yin Dalei was a shirker and quitter, but in fact he complained when it was time to complain and worked when it was time to work. In spite of all attacks, obstacles, difficulties and setbacks, he never relaxed for a moment his grip on teaching work. Even when the anarchism incited amongst the students by the Gang of Four was at its worst and the classrooms were in a turmoil, he would threaten in the staffroom "to go on strike" but would rush out to give his lesson as soon as the bell went, and devote his attention to rapping with a piece of chalk on the blackboard, and exhort, cajole and persuade the students to listen to his introduction of equations and polyhedrons.

Zhang Junshi knew that he had already finished with his individual tutoring and was heading for the local bus stop to catch the bus home. Since he was finished with his work, it was inevitably time for complaining. But it wasn't to be the case at all, as he tapped Zhang Junshi's bicycle seat and, without waiting for him to reply, said: "The kind of students the Gang of Four left us with! I'm supposed to teaching third year, but I just gave two students a lesson on the Pythagorean Theorem! You're luckier than I am with your 'new illiterate', Song Baoqi! I honestly don't understand you. There are a thousand things waiting to be done, yet you spend the whole afternoon running yourself ragged for some hoodlum. Is it worth it? Let him go to Hell! If the Public Security doesn't want him, let him go back to his old school! If they don't want him, then let him rot at home!"

Zhang Junshi was cordial in his reply: "After this afternoon, I'm more and more convinced that the point isn't whether or not we should take in Song Baoqi. It's probably better to have a special school for students like him, or else

arrange a special class. Otherwise, according to his level, send him back to first year middle school to start over. But this isn't the main thing. Today a series of incidents have occurred relating to Song Baoqi. It's like a mirror reflecting the Gang of Four's crimes against our younger generations. I had never even dreamed of some of the repercussions until I ran into them today. I've seen a lot. Dalei, it's the spring of 1977 now, a beautiful and happy spring, but it beckons us on to an even more profound struggle in which we'll have to work even harder. Let's look ahead, Dalei!"

Yin Dalei couldn't, from these simple words, absorb everything that Zhang Junshi had seen that day, but when he looked into Junshi's eyes and saw the confidence, awareness and strength in them, his own complaints and frustrations evaporated. These two ordinary and unknown public school teachers stood for a few moments silently in the evening breeze while their thoughts raced onwards.

In a few days time he would have to deal more directly with Yin Dalei's shortcomings of impetuosity and over-simplification, thought Zhang Junshi. Feelings were no replacement for a correct policy. Even if one subjectively wants the revolutionary cause to move forward quickly, it didn't help to be over-anxious. One had to be both persistent in struggle and patient in waiting for things to develop. A dislike for delinquents like Song Baoqi could be transformed into sympathy and love for the tender shoots which had come under the influence of the Gang of Four. When he finally talked to Yin Dalei, they would have to discuss philosophy, dialectics, present and future, love and hate, life and work, and, finally, *Red Crag* and *The Gadfly*.

The sound of the seven thirty chimes came from far off. Zhang Junshi collected himself, patted Yin Dalei on the back and said: "We'll have to find some time to have a good talk. I still have to go and visit a few students at their homes."

"Go to Shi Hong's place first" said Yin Dalei suddenly. "I just came from their building and heard from a classmate of

theirs that Xie Huimin and Shi Hong had an argument. You'd better go and find out what happened."

Zhang Junshi showed a look of concern, then quickly climbed on his bicycle and headed in the direction of the apartment block where Shi Hong's family lived.

9

Shi Hong's father was a district cadre and her mother a primary school teacher. They had both joined the Party during the stirring 'Four Clean' movement. Even before they joined the Party, and especially having gone through the Cultural Revolution, they had developed and persisted in the habit of studying the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao Zedong. Their shelves held the four volumes of Marx, Engels and Lenin's Selected Works and the four volumes of Mao's Selected Works, along with many thinner pamphlets of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao. The covers were almost all well-thumbed and many of the pages were creased or underlined and had marks on the margin. Shi Hong had absorbed the beneficial influence of this passion for reading and had also become a lover of books.

Shi Hong was fortunate. After dinner was a time especially set aside for sitting around the big table and encouraging each other to study the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Chairman Mao as well as attending to one's own interests in an atmosphere of mutual concern. Sometimes her father would read his beloved history books, her mother would correct her students' assignments while Shi Hong, lips pursed, would think hard over a physics problem or solve a mathematical inequality. Sometimes the whole family would analyse current events or talk about literary works and there would be pleasant and passionate exchanges between father and mother and children. Even when the fascist cultural tyranny of the Gang of Four was at its worst, this family still had books like *Storm, Red Crag, The Selected Works of Mao*

Dun, The Selected Works of Goethe, Eugenie Grandet and Three Hundred Poems from the Tang Dynasty on their shelf.

Zhang Junshi had often taken Shi Hong's copies of *The Communist Manifesto, The Three Sources and the Three Components of Marxism* and the four volumes of *Selected Works of Mao* as well as her two notebooks to the Class Meetings and Parent-Teacher meetings for others to see, but what he was most delighted with was how this student could use the principles of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought to analyse problems and how her thoughts and analyses were usually correct and showed themselves in her own conduct.

When Zhang Junshi knocked at Shi Hong's family's residence and the unit door opened, he discovered that the room he was ushered into was full of people. Shi Hong sat in the middle of the room at the dinner table and was reading aloud. There were five other girls, all of whom were Zhang Junshi's students, were seated around. A couple of them sat with their chins propped on their hands and looked raptly at Shi Hong. Others rested their elbows on the back of the chair as they propped their heads on their hands. Still others played absently with their braids. They all listened attentively. According to what Xie Huimin had said, these were just those students who had spread the word that they wouldn't attend class the following day, either out of spite or because they were afraid of Song Baoqi going to their school.

Shi Hong was so absorbed in reading that she didn't even know that Zhang Junshi had arrived. When three of the students looked up and saw him, they didn't call out "Zhang Laoshi", but only smiled awkwardly. It wasn't that they had forgotten how to be polite, but that they were too wrapped up in the story.

Shi Hong's mother, who had opened the door and ushered Zhang Junshi into the next room, asked him to sit down, and explained to him in a low voice: "The children are reading Lu Xun's translation of *"The Watch."*

The Watch was a children's story written by the Russian Pantaleyev shortly after the October Revolution. He described the gradual transformation of a drifter in the Soviet training academies. Lu Xun had translated it with great enthusiasm. Zhang Junshi hadn't looked at this book for many years but as soon as Shi Hong's mother mentioned it, the characters and parts of the plot immediately came to his mind. Within a few moments, he already had an idea of what had happened. Sure enough, Shi Hong's mother told him: "As soon as Shi Hong got home she told me about the whole affair concerning Song Baoqi. She was pensive throughout the meal and when we washing the dishes she talked it over with me. How about if I asked Xie Huimin and those other students over and read the story *The Watch*?' I agreed and said to her 'with the Party's leadership and a socialist system, a correct line, teachers and students pooling resources, even a delinquent can change!' Afterwards she went to meet the other students. I don't know where Xie Huimin is though ..."

Just as she said this, Shi Hong finished reading a paragraph and noticed that her teacher had arrived. She took her book, came into the room and said: "Zhang Laoshi, you've come at the right time! Tell us about this book."

She pulled Zhang Junshi into the other room. A couple of the girls stood up to greet him and without waiting for him to speak, asked him a flurry of questions:

"Zhang Laoshi, are we allowed to read this book?"

"Zhang Laoshi, why is it that the main character in this book can make you angry and yet get your sympathy at the same time?"

"Zhang Laoshi, Xie Huimin says we're reading a poisonous weed. Should this book be called a poisonous weed?"

"Zhang Laoshi, have you met Song Baoqi? Is he better or worse than the character in this book?"

Zhang Junshi didn't answer right away, but instead asked them: "Why didn't Xie Huimin come? Was it because she had

an argument with Shi Hong? You should do your best to include her in."

All of the girls answered at once, heatedly, so that noone could be heard clearly. Finally, Shi Hong asked them all to quiet down and explained: "She wouldn't come! Not unless the paper was to specially publish an editorial recommending *The Watch* as a good book ..."

It turned out that when Shi Hong got in touch with Xie Huimin, Huimin was pleased that Shi Hong was so enthusiastic in her work. But when she heard that the purpose was to get people together read a foreign story, she backed off. Shi Hong had tried to explain that this book was quite good and might help to solve the problem concerning Song Baoqi, but Xie Huimin had cut her off and wanted to know whether the newspapers had approved it or not. Shi Hong was surprised and had answered "no".

"Reading a book that hasn't been approved -- isn't that playing with fire?" Xie Huimin had said, "Right we are trying to criticize decadence. We cadres mustn't take the lead in being corrupted ourselves!" Her face had been full of righteous fervour as she told Shi Hong that not only would she not take part but also warned Shi Hong not to "make a mistake". This had infuriated Shi Hong and they had exchanged angry words, but when it was time to go she still took Xie Huimin's hand and pleaded with her to give it a chance. Xie Huimin had pulled her hand away and flatly refused. Even after Shi Hong had left, Xie Huimin continued to feel very bitter and upset and had bit her lower lip until it left teeth marks there ...

At Shi Hong's home, the scene was like this: Zhang Junshi sat by the table with Shi Hong and the others surrounding him, talking endlessly about the story *The Watch* and the change that had taken place in the Soviet Union, about the character of *The Watch* and the case of Song Baoqi, about how the majority of delinquents could be re-educated and finally about the new situations that they would all have to

face in the following days. Zhang Junshi finally smiled and asked the girls: "How about it, are you still going to skip classes tomorrow?"

They all looked at each other, then at Zhang Junshi and chorused: "No!"

When Zhang Junshi left Shi Hong's home, the stars and constellations sparkled in the vast dark blue of the sky.

Without really thinking what he was doing, he jumped on his bicycle and headed toward Xie Huimin's home. When he had been talking with Shi Hong and others, he had had her on his mind. His fond concern for her revived, as a doctor would be concerned about a healthy child who had unfortunately caught an infectious disease. Still, he had faith that with her good character and sincerity, it was only necessary to concentrate on treatment and the germs that she had caught from the Gang of Four could be exterminated.

The closer he got to Xie Huimin's home, the more he felt the pangs of conscience. Previously, he hadn't felt any responsibility for Xie Huimin becoming this way. Not long after he took over the post he had told her not to study quotations out context or to blindly believe articles interpreting the thoughts of Chairman Mao, but to learn how they originated and develop her own independent thinking. But Xie Huimin hadn't really paid any heed. Today Zhang Junshi had second thoughts. The situation before last October had been bleak, but it should have him more courageous and determined to struggle against what was ludicrous and reactionary. Why hadn't he put a stop to it then and concentrated his attention on talking it over with Xie Huimin so that she could have seen things more clearly and been able to distinguish what was true and what false?

When Zhang Junshi was almost at Xie Huimin's door, a plan had already formed in mind. He would give the copy of *The Gadfly* in his book bag to her and persuade her to go and read it, then urge her to give her opinions of book. From her analysis of this book, he would encourage her to use the

class stand, world-view and methods of Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought to answer a series of mutually related questions, such as: How should we understand life and history? How should we approach the fruits of civilizations created by human society? How should we criticize the dross of our cultural heritage and absorb its essence? How can we view problems in a complete and dialectical way? How should we distinguish between fragrant flowers and poisonous weeds, true and false Marxism? What kind of person should we strive to become? How should we undertake the struggle for the four modernizations of our motherland and for the glorious future of communism?

Zhang Junshi's feelings were in a turmoil. By the time he had parked his bicycle and stood in front of Xie Huimin's home, the plan in his mind was even clearer than before. He would not only use this occasion to help Xie Huimin rid herself of the poisonous influence of the Gang of Four, but also use the criticism and exposure of the Gang of Four as the key to give guidance to the reading activities of the whole class, including Song Baoqi. He decided that early tomorrow he would go and ask the Party Branch for approval. Would they support? He could see Lao Cao's face as he spoke at the Party Branch meeting: "Now we will really implement Mao Zedong Thought in education!" He was all for "really" doing it right this time, so his support was certain. Zhang Junshi could also imagine the skepticism of the other teachers, so he planned to outline his thinking at the Teacher's meeting thus: "We must not only improve our teaching of course work so that the students can master the scientific and cultural knowledge in the course material and lectures, and develop morally, intellectually and physically; not only lead them in continuing to learn from the workers and peasants and link theory with practice, but also encourage them to broaden their view of the world and take an active interest in the fruits of human civilization, be able to better analyse things and become worthy successors to the socialist revolution and

reconstruction ...

The flowers of spring and the sky full of stars seemed to glow for Zhang Junshi, as if offering encouragement and inspiration for the beauty of his vision ...

“Awake, my brother!”

Liu Xinwu

Translated by Geremie Barmé

1

My brother and I were standing in the passageway wringing out the sheets that we had just washed. We were facing each other holding the end of the sheets as the water dripped to the floor and flowed towards the drain hole in the kitchen.

It seemed this was the only chance I ever got to talk to him nowadays.

“You really should read that article on the young hero who struggled with the Gang of Four that was in the paper yesterday.”

He gave a laugh, “Yeah, I’ve already had a look at it. There’s nothing that special in it.”

I stopped. My patience was at an end. Glaring at him I declared angrily, “Nothing impresses you. Don’t you have any heart at all, don’t you feel?”

He walked over to me and taking my end of the sheet went out to the balcony saying calmly, “Yes, I’ve got a heart, and it’s right here in my chest. Sure I respect that guy, but I don’t admire him. All he got for his troubles was a stint in jail. What the hell for?” His voice faded and was quickly replaced by the sound of sheets being put out to air.

I knew he’d had enough. If I wanted to follow the argument up I knew that he wouldn’t take issue and with a