

# The Games

**Escaping a web of corruption, espionage  
and deceit in China**



**A novel by Geoffrey Crothall**

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*Cover photograph: Sunset on Suzhou Creek. Author photo*

## PROLOGUE

In September 1992, I was commissioned to write a profile of a prominent Shanghai businessman who ran one of the most prestigious Sino-American joint venture companies in China. The commission specified that the profile should be upbeat and highlight the positive aspects of the troubled US-China relationship. And since the remuneration for the job was substantial, that is precisely what they got.

The subject of the article was so pleased with the result that he invited me back to Shanghai the following month to attend a lavish company function, where I was introduced to the city's political and business elite, as well as his wife and daughter. It seemed then that the businessman and his family were the toast of the town, but in less than a year, their whole world had come crashing down.

What happened in the months following the publication of my article is mired in speculation but the family's personal story has never been told—until now. We begin with the newspaper article, which in retrospect offers some clues as to what transpired later. It was published in *The California Chronicle* on October 10, 1992.

### **A new Chinese dynasty in the making**

When Li Heng was appointed general manager of the Shanghai United Automotive Company in May 1990, many observers believed that he had been handed a poisoned chalice.

The high-profile joint venture had been hard hit by Beijing's economic austerity program and was forced to suspend production for several months as stockpiles of unsold vehicles mounted. There seemed to be no way forward, and the American partner, Detroit's United Auto, was considering pulling the plug entirely.

Just over two years later, Mr. Li is now head of one of the most successful automobile companies in China. Hailed as a miracle worker, he is tipped to play a leading role in Shanghai's future economic development, or even attain high political office in Beijing.

At 57 years of age, Mr. Li is still relatively young by the standards of Chinese politics, and could end up playing a pivotal role in spearheading the country's renewed push for accelerated growth in the wake of elder statesman Deng Xiaoping's inspirational Southern Tour earlier this year.

For the time being however, Mr. Li prefers to focus on the day-to-day business of running a car plant.

In an exclusive interview with *The Chronicle*, Mr. Li described how, following a major restructuring last year, the company was now ideally placed to take advantage of China's growing demand for automobiles. Shanghai United will introduce a range of

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new models over the next decade, he says, each tailored to the specific demands of the market.

Mr. Li predicts that rapid economic growth will create a new middle class which will want a wide range of personalized transport. More vehicles on the roads will spur greater infrastructure development, which in turn will encourage greater automotive production capacity. Mr. Li grins broadly as he outlines his bold vision for the future, which features a state-of-the-art road network across China, and innovative automobile design with hi-tech electric vehicles taking a major market share in the decades to come.

Mr. Li is a relatively diminutive figure but he bristles with energy, a pocket dynamo, always on the move. And judging from the deference shown to him by colleagues as he tours this vast factory complex at high pace, there is little doubt who is the boss. In many ways, he is not that different from successful American entrepreneurs like Lee Iacocca, a visionary with a unique understanding of the automotive industry, and the will and determination to effect change.

Mr. Li told The Chronicle that he views foreign investment not as a threat to Chinese interests but as an opportunity to be welcomed and embraced. "There is a lot we can learn from America, and not just in terms of running a successful company," he said. "To get ahead in this world you need a winning mentality. Just look at your basketball Dream Team at the Olympics. How did they achieve such dominance? Hard work, dedication, and unshakable self-belief."

True to his word, Mr. Li has set up his own "China Dream Team" fund, designed to elevate the currently unknown sport of basketball to a major force that can take on the world. And what is Mr. Li's favorite NBA team? The Detroit Pistons, of course. He has been a fan, he says, ever since his first visit to the Motor City in the early 1980s.

Mr. Li is not alone in his vision for a future based on hard work and open competition. His son graduated with an MBA from the University of Southern California and has established a technology transfer company in Los Angeles. His daughter runs a Hong Kong-based trading company, while his wife, a medical doctor, is a pillar of the local community, serving on the board of several charitable institutions.

If American politicians and business leaders had any doubts about the direction China was heading after the Tiananmen crackdown on June 4, 1989, they should take heart from the entrepreneurial spirit and civic responsibility of the Li family. A dynasty in the making.

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## PART ONE

*O mighty Caesar! dost thou lie so low?  
Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,  
Shrunk to this little measure? Fare thee well.  
I know not, gentlemen, what you intend,  
Who else must be let blood, who else is rank:*

“Julius Caesar” Act Three. Scene 1. William Shakespeare.

### Monday, March 8, 1993 – International Women’s Day

Chen Lan was attending a function with her colleagues from the Shanghai Municipal Women’s Federation honouring the outstanding achievements of women in science, education and culture that year, when a bespectacled young man who she vaguely recognized approached and hovered nervously a few paces away. After staring at the carpet and adjusting his spectacles for about a minute, the young man eventually summoned enough courage to speak:

“Excuse me Madam,” he stuttered. “My name is Wang. I’m from the Shanghai United Automotive Company Limited. There has been an incident... It concerns General Manager Li, your husband. The leaders said you should come to the company as quickly as possible. A car is waiting outside.”

“What are you talking about? What kind of incident?” Chen snapped. “Can’t you see that we are in a very important meeting now. I am due to make a speech in half an hour. Why this is so urgent?”

“I, I don’t know. I’m not in a position of responsibility. A car is waiting outside.”

Chen was vice-chair of the Women’s Federation and the department head at a major Shanghai hospital but all that, it seemed, counted for nothing against the interests of her husband’s all powerful car company, even on International Women’s Day.

Chen apologized profusely to her colleagues, who told her not to worry and assured her they would take care of her speech. She walked to the cloakroom to collect her coat and briefcase, and followed the young man through the lobby to the waiting car outside.

She had been summoned unexpectedly to the car company before, so this kind of cavalier treatment was not unusual, but on those occasions, it was usually her husband’s secretary who would call apologetically to see if she was free. This abrupt interruption was worrying. And what did he mean by an “incident”? Chen quickly ran through all the possible scenarios. Had her husband been injured on the factory floor? Had he gotten involved in some kind of altercation? He did have a quick temper. Were the police or security forces involved? That seemed unlikely, but it would not be the first time. She knew, however, that there was no

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point interrogating her young escort for more information; even if he did know anything, he was obviously not authorized to divulge that information.

Chen climbed into the back of the waiting black sedan - one of the company's latest so-called executive models which included seat belts, air-conditioning and radio-cassette controls for the backseat passengers. As the car made its way through the gridlock along Huaihai Road, Chen looked through her papers but could not concentrate on work. She ended up just staring out the window as they passed into Jiading County. Just a decade earlier, Jiading had been a picturesque network of rice fields criss-crossed by canals and dykes and dotted with cypress and willow trees. It had been one of Chen's favourite escapes from the claustrophobic crush of downtown Shanghai but, in the last few years, huge tracts of farmland had been given over to industry and real estate developments, and Jiading County was rapidly becoming indistinguishable from the suburbs of Shanghai. Every month, it seemed, a new factory or housing complex would spring up. Sooner or later, Chen thought, there would be no countryside left at all. A glance at a satellite image of Jiading today on Baidu Maps shows that she was not far off the mark.

Back in 1993, most of the new industry was fairly small-scale. The car plant dominated the industrial landscape. It was not just the Shanghai United joint-venture; there was the original Shanghai Automotive Works and about a dozen components manufacturers dotted over the whole county. You couldn't miss it—there were huge billboards with the United Auto Company's logo all over the county pointing the way to the plant.

After an hour's drive, they finally reached the factory. They approached the main building along the broad tree-lined avenue that Chen's husband had built in order to impress visiting dignitaries, negotiated the maze-like one-way system he also devised, and drew to a halt right outside the executive office building. The young man, who had remained silent throughout the trip, immediately jumped out of the car, opened Chen's door and hurriedly guided her inside to the elevator. He stared straight ahead as they rode up to the fifth floor, where Chen was told the leaders were waiting for her in the conference room.

The young man took Chen's coat, opened the conference room door and led her inside. She was immediately struck by the room's frigid, almost funereal atmosphere. The blinds were drawn, blocking out what little light there was outside, and the dull sepia tones of the walls, carpets and furnishings seemed to drain away what little life there was in the room. The leaders, all dressed in dull tunics or western suits, could have been mannequins for all the animation they displayed. The only splash of life and colour in the whole room in fact came from Chen's vibrant red ochre velvet jacket, a birthday present from her daughter, bought on a recent trip to Hong Kong, and much admired by her colleagues in the Women's Federation.

Everyone was there. The party secretary, the company president, the chairman of the board, plus the head of the Jiading County government and a couple of people Chen did not recognize but instinctively knew were important. The only person not there was her husband. Now she began to worry. No one at first could look her directly in the eye. They examined their hands or stared off into the distance, trying to blend in with the anonymous grey and beige furnishings.

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It was the party secretary who eventually rose to his feet and spoke:

“Director Chen. I’m so glad you could get here at such short notice. Please take a seat. Have some tea, you must be thirsty after the ride here.”

Chen sat down by the conference table and sipped the bitter green tea that was waiting for her. The party secretary remained standing, shuffling uneasily from one foot to the other.

“It is my sad duty to inform you that our beloved General Manager, Comrade Li Heng, unfortunately died of illness whilst working in his office this morning. On behalf of the party committee, the management and all the workers at the Shanghai United Automotive Company Limited, I wish to express our deepest condolences to you and your family.”

Chen gazed around the room at the old men in their ill-fitting suits, trying to make sense of what she had just been told. Her throat felt dry and she took another sip of tea.

“This has come as a complete shock to all of us,” the party secretary continued. “It is a tragedy for our company and the whole of Shanghai in its drive to open up to the outside world. Comrade Li Heng was a great manager and a pioneer in economic reform. We will spare no effort to ensure his work is carried on and enhanced in the future...”

“What do you mean he died of illness,” Chen said quietly. The party secretary was suddenly at a loss for words. “He was in perfect health, he never had so much as a cold.”

The party secretary retreated to his armchair as one of the men Chen did not recognize, a balding middle-aged official dressed in a dark well-tailored suit, got to his feet.

“Director Chen. We are not sure but we think it was a heart attack. The company doctor examined Comrade Li Heng after his body was discovered in his office and his initial diagnosis is that Comrade Li Heng suffered a sudden and massive heart attack. That is all we can tell you at the moment.”

“I don’t understand. My husband had no history of heart trouble. As I just said, he was in perfect health.”

“Director Chen. I am not a medical expert. All I can tell is what the company doctor said and that is that his initial findings indicate a heart attack,” the anonymous official said, evidently surprised that she should question his authority.

Still struggling to make sense of this barrage of information, Chen asked to see her husband’s body. She needed to see him with her own eyes and touch him again if she was to resolve the questions, both emotional and forensic, that were rapidly multiplying in her mind.

There was a long silence as the old men looked at each other, trying to determine who should respond to her request. It was the official in the dark suit who eventually spoke.

“I am afraid that will not be possible, Director Chen. The body has already been taken to the mortuary.”

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The party secretary was on his feet again. "I apologize, Director Chen. We thought it was best to remove the body to avoid causing you any further distress. I realize that such a sudden loss must come as a great shock to you, as it did to all of us here, and let me assure you that we at Shanghai United will do everything we can to help you overcome this terrible tragedy."

Before she could respond, or even think of anything to say, another of the officials, this time the company president, was getting to his feet to deliver his prepared speech.

"Our company will take care of all the funeral arrangements for Comrade Li Heng. Comrade Li Heng was a great manager and we are duty-bound to make sure he is given a funeral which is consistent with that status. I will personally supervise the arrangements and will of course keep you informed on a regular basis."

Chen was now too overwhelmed to say anything. She was feeling a little dizzy and found it hard to focus. Perhaps sensing he had gained the upper hand, the party secretary walked over and placed his hand gently on her shoulder.

"This has been a terrible shock. You should be at home with your family now. Our driver will take you back. If there is anything I or President Liang can do to help, do not hesitate to ask. There is nothing more important to us at the moment than honouring your late husband's memory."

With that, the door opened and the young man who had escorted her to the car plant came in and silently walked her to the car. At this point, Chen was developing a headache and felt faint. She only just made it into the car without stumbling.

As they were about to drive off, the balding middle-aged official suddenly materialized and motioned for the young man to open Chen's window. He leaned forward, and with a thin smile said, "Of course, it would be best if you did not discuss this tragic incident with anyone except your immediate family. Have a safe trip back."

The journey home was a blur, but by the time she returned to her apartment on Kangping Road in the old French Concession, Chen had collected her thoughts sufficiently to call her daughter, Hong. She had recently married and lived with her husband just a few blocks away on Anfu Road. She immediately rushed over after her mother called. Hong was just as distraught and confused by the news as her mother. She had a million questions but could see her mother was in no state to answer them. Instead, she tried her best to comfort her mother and told her she would call her brothers to tell them the news.

Contacting her brothers, however, was not straightforward. The eldest, Dajun, lived in Los Angeles, while her younger brother, Xiaojun, was in Sydney, pursuing his career as an artist. He lived in the North Shore suburbs with a wealthy gallery owner he had met while at the Shanghai Fine Arts Academy.

Early evening in Shanghai was the middle of the night in Los Angeles, so they chose first to call Xiaojun, who was just two hours ahead. He took the news very calmly, betraying little emotion. Xiaojun was not close to his father. They were not exactly estranged but they had followed very different paths and rarely talked, even while Xiaojun was still living at home. It

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was no accident that Li had not bothered to tell the reporter from the *California Chronicle* who interviewed him six months earlier about the existence of his second son in Australia.

Xiaojun told his sister that he wanted to fly back to Shanghai to be with his family but that it would be difficult because his immigration status required him to stay in Australia for another year. Hong thought her brother was being selfish but his mother knew there was no point pressuring him to come back. Besides, she was sure her eldest son would be on the first plane back.

Dajun was in almost daily contact with his father, even from half a world away. He was also an early riser, so at ten o'clock that evening (six in the morning in LA) Hong called his home number. There was no reply. Ten minutes later, she called again. There was still no reply, so she left a message on his answering machine. An hour later, Dajun had still not called back. Hong took a deep breath and dialled a number that under any other circumstances she would avoid like the plague. She had never liked Dajun's wife and the feeling was mutual. Now that Dajun had left his wife, apparently for a blonde American woman, the antagonism was amplified. His wife had been his high school sweetheart, and she was understandably resentful at having relocated to LA, only to be dumped a few years later. As expected, she had not spoken to Dajun and had no idea where he might be. She had last seen him three weeks earlier, when he'd come over to visit his infant son, and that, she said, had not been a pleasant encounter. Nevertheless, she promised to tell him about his father's passing if he did get in touch. She asked Hong to convey her condolences to her former mother-in-law.

Around midnight, there was still no word from Dajun, so Hong told her mother to go to bed and try to get some sleep. She continued to call all the possible numbers in LA, and eventually got hold of Dajun's office secretary. The secretary was strangely evasive. She said her boss had gone away on business but she didn't know where, when he would be back, or how to contact him.



**Tuesday, March 9, 1993 - The Rumour Mill Begins to Turn**

It had taken a long time for Chen to get any sleep, even after taking painkillers for her persistent headache. She still could not fathom how her husband could have suffered a heart attack with no warning signs. He was not overweight, did not smoke and, unlike most business executives, was not a heavy drinker. Sure, he never really exercised, but nor did he just sit at his desk all day; he had made a point of walking around the factory complex on regular inspection tours.

Nevertheless, his absence from her bed that night made it painfully and viscerally clear that the man she had been married to for 30 years was gone. What would her life be like without him? There had long ceased to be any romantic element in their relationship; even as a companion and confidant, he could be distant, even cold, at times. But they were both dedicated to their children and worked well as a team to give them a stable and healthy home life. Moreover, Chen was fiercely protective of her husband, ensuring that he had everything he needed to pursue his ambitious career, and steadfastly standing by him in public. She knew all of his faults, but she genuinely admired all that he had achieved both in business and in providing for the family. Besides, her husband's standing in the community largely dictated how others responded to her and the children. They all had their own lives, of course, but they were always under his shadow and it made sense to protect that shadow, even after his death.

There were more immediate concerns, however. Li had always been the breadwinner and Chen the homemaker. Suddenly, the financial security that she took for granted had vanished. Could she survive without him? What would happen to their apartment? It had been assigned to him by the city government when he took up his post at the foreign investment commission and had been formally acquired by the car company when he moved there. Would it now be reassigned to another family?

Chen was officially at retirement age, having turned 55 the previous November, but she had convinced the leaders at the Shanghai General Hospital to keep her on as director of the obstetrics and gynaecology department for another five years. Chen argued that men retire at 60 years of age, and she could do the job just as well as, if not better than, any man, so why should she be forced out earlier? However, in just a few years, she would be a single woman living on a small state pension. She knew her children would look after her but the uncertainty facing her was troubling.

It was late morning when she finally got up. Her daughter, who had spent the night in her old room at the apartment, had prepared her breakfast and was talking on the phone again. She hung up when she saw her mother enter the kitchen.

"Morning, Mom. How are you feeling? I've already called the hospital to tell them you will not be coming in today. They already knew about dad. The hospital president sends his condolences and said you should take as much time off as you need."

"You talked to President Yuan?"

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“Yeah, they put me straight through. It seems they were expecting the call. By the way, it looks like a lot of people know about it. You’ve got quite a few telegrams already this morning.”

On the kitchen table, next to the teapot, lay a stack of black-edged envelopes. Chen picked up one of the telegrams and held it gingerly for a while before opening it. It was from the Shanghai municipal party secretary. She almost dropped the paper. Her husband had met the party secretary on several occasions, but only in official settings, and never considered him a close personal friend. It was only after reading the text that she realized this was not a personal initiative but simply an official obligation.

*On behalf of the Shanghai Municipal Communist Party and the Shanghai Municipal Government, I wish to extend our deepest condolences to you and your family on the loss of Comrade Li Heng, General Manager of the Shanghai United Automotive Company Limited. Comrade Li Heng was a loyal party member and an outstanding entrepreneur. He will be greatly missed.*

They were all like that, formal messages of condolence and sympathy from party and government officials she hardly knew. There was nothing from her family or friends. It would be up to Chen to let them know.

“Take a look at these,” Chen said, pushing the telegrams over the table to her daughter. “Are we supposed to acknowledge them in some way?”

“I have no idea Mom. Why don’t you call the car company president? Didn’t he say he was taking charge of all the funeral arrangements.”

Chen dialled President Liang’s number. It took several minutes of being put on hold and transferred to half a dozen different people before the company president finally came on the line. He evidently had not been expecting to hear from Chen again so soon.

“Director Chen. I hope you are managing to cope with this unfortunate incident. Is there anything I can do to help you?”

Chen asked about the telegrams and explained that she wanted details of the funeral so that family friends could be informed. She added that she and her daughter would want to pay their last respects in private before the official ceremony.

The president tried to stall, saying the funeral committee had only just been created and that it could take several days before the final arrangements were made.

“Several high-ranking officials will have to be invited and, as I’m sure you will appreciate, this is a process which can take some time. If you would like to invite your personal friends, you could forward a list to my office and we will try to accommodate you. We will also place a notice in the newspapers at an appropriate time so that everyone will be aware of the situation.”

He was even more evasive when it came to the request to pay their respects privately before the ceremony.

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“I’m not sure if that would be considered appropriate, Director Chen. Protocol really should be observed in these situations but I will certainly pass on your request to the funeral committee.”

“I thought you said you were taking personal charge of the arrangements.”

“Oh, I am, but everything has to go through the committee. I’m sure you understand.”

With that, he conveniently scheduled an urgent appointment for himself and hung up.

Chen sighed and put it down to incompetence, the kind of bureaucratic mess she was all too familiar with at the hospital, but her daughter was more suspicious.

“What does he mean ‘protocol must be observed’?” Hong said. “There’s no protocol that prevents families from seeing the body before the ceremony. This is becoming very weird. Call him back tomorrow and see what this so-called committee has to say for itself.”

“I think I’ll leave it for a while. In a way, I’m glad they are taking care of the funeral. I really don’t think I could handle that responsibility by myself and you’ve got plenty of other things to worry about. If your elder brother were here it might be different, but, as it is, it’s probably a good thing we don’t have to do this by ourselves.”

“That’s another strange thing. I forgot to tell you. Not only has Dajun’s wife not seen him, his secretary says he is away on business and can’t be contacted. No one knows where he is.”

“That’s not like him at all. Can you call again?”

After several more unsuccessful attempts to track down her brother, Hong was interrupted by a call from her business partners. She had earlier cancelled a scheduled lunch meeting, but her colleagues now insisted that she attend. Chen told her daughter to go, as it would help take her mind off things for a while.

Chen was left alone in what was, by Shanghai standards, a huge apartment. It occupied the top two floors of a pre-war townhouse located at the western end of Kangping Road, just across the road from Jiaotong University, and adjacent to the homes of some of the most senior government and party officials in the city, including the municipal party general secretary.

Li always said the apartment was an expression of the family’s good fortune and that his ancestors would be amazed by its splendour. They probably would be. His ancestors were Qing Dynasty magistrates from Anhui, who by all accounts were more interested in boosting their personal power and fortune than with dispensing justice. His great-grandfather had reportedly passed the triennial national examination and taken full advantage of that position.

Everywhere Chen walked, there were reminders of her husband: his clothes in the bedroom closet, family photographs in the living room, his collection of jazz and blues tapes, and basketball paraphernalia from the United States arranged on the dining room cabinet, next

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to his family's Ming Dynasty pottery bowls, somehow saved from the chaos of the Cultural Revolution.

When she went into her husband's study, she noticed that a number of files had been left open on his desk. This was also odd because he never left any paperwork lying around. He was meticulously neat and tidy, everything had to be in its proper place, and Chen could see that those files were not where they should have been. There also appeared to be some books or folders missing from the bookshelf, but she couldn't be sure because she hardly ever ventured into the study. It was very much his private domain.

She stood looking at the photographs of her husband with state leaders and foreign dignitaries, carefully arranged on the wall. In the centre was his most valued picture, taken just one year previously when Deng Xiaoping had visited the car plant. It showed Li Heng guiding Deng along the production line, with the mayor and party secretary of Shanghai in the background. Everyone in the picture was smiling, with Li and Deng the centre of attention. Now, just a year later, it had all fallen apart.

When Hong returned to Kangping Road in the early afternoon, she was on the verge of tears. Soon after she had sat down for lunch with her business associates, it became clear that they wanted her there simply to get the inside scoop on her father's death. It was a story that the whole city seemed to be talking about.

At first, they were very solicitous, offering their sympathy and condolences, but before long the probing started. "Is it true that your father was in a big argument with the other board members before he died? I heard the argument was about inconsistencies in the company finances. Is that right?"

Hong tried to divert their inquiries, saying all she knew was what the company had told them, but that wasn't good enough for her gossip-hungry associates.

"After a while, it was as if I wasn't there at all," she told her mother. "They just started talking among themselves, throwing out these wild ideas and theories about dad and the car company. It was really upsetting."

Over the next few days, Hong's husband, an ambitious young businessman named Gao Haiqing, was also on the receiving end of polite interrogations from friends and colleagues, all peddling bizarre tales of intrigue and deception. With a growing sense of alarm, he relayed these rumours to his wife. He seemed primarily concerned, however, that his own reputation might have been tarnished by association with Li Heng.

Some early versions of the story alleged that Li had jumped or had been pushed out of his fifth-floor office window. Others said he had been poisoned or that a heart attack had in some other way been induced. After a few days, some amazingly intricate hypotheses had been created, involving allegations of corruption, payoffs, illegal cash transactions—not just limited to the car plant, but including the local government and party as well. There were rumours of investigations by the Party Commission for Discipline Inspection, the Shanghai State Security Bureau, the Public Security Bureau or the local procurator's office, depending

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on who one talked to. None of this speculation appeared in the local newspapers, of course, prompting more gossip about an official cover-up.

Some rumours were just recycled or updated versions of accusations that had dogged Li since his time as deputy head of the Shanghai Foreign Investment Commission in the 1980s. His success in that office had provoked jealousy and resentment, and when he was given the prime job of running the city's most prestigious joint venture company, rumours started to circulate that he had used bribes from foreign companies to purchase the top job at Shanghai United Auto Co. He was now being accused of using his powerful position to garner even larger bribes. He had finally overreached and was about to be arrested for corruption, or so the story went.

The gossip spread so quickly and so far, in fact, that the following week, Shanghai Mayor Huang Ju was forced to address the issue during a press conference at the National People's Congress taking place in Beijing. "There are many reports concerning the death of Li Heng that are inaccurate," Huang told reporters in the Great Hall of the People, before repeating the official line carried in the newspapers that Li had simply 'died of illness on March 8.' Huang went on to say:

"Li Heng was a diligent, responsible and very enterprising general manager at Shanghai United Auto. We feel great sorrow at his unfortunate passing because of illness. We will all make greater efforts at that joint venture in the future to honour his memory."

This was all very ironic because when Huang himself died from cancer in 2007, he was also under a dark cloud of suspicion, accused of corruption and of benefiting financially from the multi-billion-yuan Shanghai social security fund scandal engineered by his successor as party secretary, Chen Liangyu. The following year, Chen Liangyu was handed an 18-year prison term and is not due for release until 2025.

### Thursday, March 18, 1993 - The Funeral

Chen Lan was notified of her husband's funeral arrangements in a hand-delivered letter from the office of the car company president:

*The funeral ceremony for the late General Manager of the Shanghai United Automotive Company Limited, Senior Engineer, Comrade Li Heng, will take place at the Shanghai Longhua Funeral Hall on Thursday, March 18, 1993.*

*Transportation will be sent to your home at 1.30pm in order to convey you and your family to the funeral hall.*

*The ceremony will commence at 2.30pm. At 3.15pm, the remains will be conveyed to Jiading County Crematorium for burial.*

*Please inform this office of how many family members will be accompanying you during the ceremony.*

Chen was indignant. Not so much because of the cold official tone of the letter, but because of the burial location: an anonymous suburban cemetery next to one of the car plant's components factories. She had been willing to let the funeral committee handle the arrangements, but this was a step too far.

Throughout her life, Chen had more often than not been prepared to defer to authority—to her parents, her older sister, her husband, even to the Red Guards when it was clear she had no other choice. But she also had a strictly defined sense of right and wrong, of personal honour and social justice. If anybody crossed the line, they would encounter determined resistance; it did not matter who they were. As a result, people around her were often wary of saying or doing the wrong thing. The car company president, it seemed, had not got the message.

It had been a long-standing and well-known wish of her husband's to be buried alongside his father and grandfather at the family grave in Anhui. He had talked often and openly about how he had risked his job during the Cultural Revolution to get his father buried in that plot and he made no secret of his desire to be buried alongside his father. Li had kept his father's ashes hidden for nearly two years in the small apartment they lived in at the time before making a secret trip to his grandfather's grave, where he had arranged to meet his aged aunt and cousin. They hired a Buddhist priest from a nearby village who conducted a clandestine ceremony in the middle of the night. The conspirators were able to place the ashes in a small plot adjacent to Li's great-grandfather before stealing away without being detected by the local militia.

Chen distinctly remembered being at one company function where her husband told that story to the American joint venture partners, and both the company president and the party secretary were there. There was no way they could claim to be ignorant of his request. Of course, the version of the story Li told at such functions was carefully censored to exclude that fact that he had actually denounced his own father as a traitor and capitalist-roader during the Cultural Revolution. His father was imprisoned in 1967 and died five years later. It was true that Li risked his job to give his father a proper burial—at that time, traditional

burials were considered feudal superstition—but his actions were probably motivated more by guilt than by the filial duty he liked to portray in the revised version of events. Nevertheless, his wish to be buried in the family grave was genuine.

Chen called the car company and demanded to talk to President Liang. He was, of course, not available to take her call. His assistant was interested only in finding out how many people would be in Chen's family party, and he became very defensive when Li's wish to be buried in Anhui was mentioned.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not aware of such a request being made, Director Chen. However, I will pass your message on to President Liang. I'm sure he will be able to clarify the matter for you."

Chen continued to press the matter but only became more frustrated before abruptly hanging up. What could be achieved by stealth during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, she thought, was now impossible during the era of reform and openness when the corporation was king. Her daughter, who was not one to observe tradition, did not see what was the big deal and told her to forget about trying to get the burial moved and focus on who would be attending. Besides, Hong pointed out, her father had been born in Shanghai and had lived there his whole life, and it was more appropriate that he be buried in the city rather than in a town that she, for one, had never visited. She did agree, however, that Jiading County was hardly the most auspicious burial place available.

More than a week after Li's death, Chen had still not been able to contact her eldest son. With her younger son unable to return, that left just Chen, her daughter, and Hong's husband. Li's only brother had died in the civil war, and his mother, who had been living with the family at Kangping Road, had died a few years ago. His cousin and his family in Anhui had already said they could not make it to Shanghai, while his other cousins—the children of his younger aunt who had emigrated to the United States just before Liberation—had promised to send tributes, but they were unable to attend the funeral in person.

In the end, Chen's sister offered to accompany the family to the ceremony. She had never particularly liked her brother-in-law but felt obligated to be at her sister's side. She arrived with her husband at Kangping Road at precisely 11:30 on the morning of the funeral for what turned out to be a depressingly solemn lunch. Her husband, an editor at the *Liberation Daily*, was usually the life and soul of the party, but, on this occasion, he hardly said a word. He constantly looked at his watch throughout the meal and made no secret of his desire to be somewhere else.

The Longhua Funeral Hall was only half an hour's drive away and they arrived with time to spare before the ceremony was due to start. The company president and other members of the board, including the top American official, were waiting in the reception area to greet them. The president immediately pulled Chen aside and apologized for not returning her call. He claimed he was totally unaware of any request from Li to be buried with his ancestors. He then went on to explain what an auspicious plot had been reserved for him in the Jiading Cemetery. Chen was not in a mood to argue, and simply nodded politely to everything he said. After his little speech, Chen asked to be left alone with her husband for a

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while before the ceremony began and started walking towards the auditorium before anyone could voice any objections.

The room was lined with dark wood panelling, the curtains were drawn, and the only light came from two crystal chandeliers suspended from the high ceiling. At the far end of the room was the casket, surrounded by flowers and dozens of wreaths, and behind that on the far wall a huge portrait was lined with black silk. The photograph had been taken a couple of years ago but had been touched up to make his face appear younger. As Chen approached the casket she noticed it was closed; the lid had been nailed shut.

This was too much. All the grief, all the frustration, all the anger that she had kept inside since the day of Li's death when they had refused to let her see the body, suddenly welled up and she stormed out of the auditorium and marched up to the company president.

"What is the meaning of this," she yelled. "Why is my husband's body in a closed casket? How are we supposed to say goodbye when I can't even see his face?"

"Director Chen, please calm down. There is nothing to get upset about. This was a decision of the funeral committee. The ceremony is about to begin. We can discuss this later if you wish."

"No, I want an answer now. I want to see my husband."

Chen's sister and daughter were equally upset at this insulting arrangement, but the desire to maintain face overrode emotion. "Mom, calm down," Hong pleaded. "This is not the time to create a scene. There is nothing we can do about it now. Let's just get this over with."

She led her mother back into the auditorium and they took up their prescribed positions at the far end of the room. Soon the dignitaries, led by the vice-mayor, were filing in all dressed in dark suits with black arm bands. They bowed three times before the coffin and slowly circled around to greet the family. A few of them muttered platitudes about what a great loss Li's death was, but Chen was too distressed to pay attention. She stared straight ahead, fighting back the tears as the nearly 500 specially-invited mourners, many of whom she had never seen before, passed by. The vice-mayor read out a eulogy praising the virtues of an honest and hard-working official who was dedicated to the party and his country. Not one word of the eulogy reminded Chen of her husband.



**Friday, March 19, 1993 – Gu Lianhua**

The funeral ceremony had convinced Chen that the car company was not just keeping her husband's body from her, but that they wanted to conceal the truth about how he died as well. She had never believed that it was a heart attack, and the rumours that he had killed himself or was pushed were impossible to ignore. What's more, it was now clear to Chen that the government and official media were part of the cover-up as well.

There was a brief announcement about the funeral in the newspaper the following day. It gave a synopsis of Li's achievements at the car company, including his award as outstanding manager in 1991, and echoed almost word-for-word the vice-mayor's eulogy, describing him as, "fair minded, diligent and honest." There was no mention of the manner of his death, just fulsome praise of his life and work.

There was a persistent rumour going around that the government had ordered the Shanghai media to stick to the official script and not report any other theories about the manner or circumstances of Li's death.

Chen decided to call her brother-in-law at the *Liberation Daily*. If there was such an order, then he would certainly know about it. But, just as at lunch the previous day, he was extremely reluctant to say anything at all.

"Sister, there is bound to be a lot of gossip, most of it malicious, when famous and important people pass away. People love to gossip; it doesn't mean anything. As a newspaper, we have an obligation to report the truth, we can't just print any rumour that comes to our attention."

"So, you have heard these rumours that there might have been foul play?"

"Yes, I've heard them. But, as I just said, it is just gossip. You should not concern yourself with such talk. It will only upset you."

Her brother-in-law tried to assure her that there was no government order to suppress any news about her husband's death that did not conform to the official narrative, it was just editorial discretion, he said. However, he did confirm that the announcement in that day's paper had come directly from the municipal party's propaganda department.

"That is standard procedure when reporting news about prominent party members. The party is in the best position to know the truth, so of course we have to rely on the propaganda department for news in such matters. It is nothing to be concerned or surprised about."

"But why didn't you send one of your own reporters to write about the funeral, if as you say it was an important event?"

"As I just said, there was no need because we already had the text from the propaganda department. Sister, we know what we are doing, please don't listen to ignorant gossip. These rumour-mongers really do not know what they are talking about."

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Chen found her brother-in-law's wholesale dismissal of rumour-mongers rather out of character. After all, he was one of the biggest gossips in Shanghai. He was always the first to regale people with news of the latest intrigue in the local party and government—who was up, who was down, who was to be assigned to Beijing. Of course, none of this actually appeared in the newspaper until it was officially sanctioned, but that never stopped him talking about it privately. Now, all of a sudden, when it came to Chen's husband, all this gossip was completely unfounded and not worth discussing.

There was one other person who would know if there was any truth in the gossip surrounding Li's death, but Chen was not sure how to approach her. Gu Lianhua had been her husband's secretary for several years, and Chen had gotten to know her quite well. But some of the gossip around town concerned Gu as well, and, if possible, Chen wanted to avoid any awkwardness.

Gu had joined Li's staff at the foreign investment commission after graduating in 1985 and moved with him to the car company five years later. She was intelligent and capable—more capable, in fact, than many of the managers at the company. She ran Li's office with almost military efficiency. Moreover, she was not afraid to offend people who did not live up to her standards. Her tough manner and rapid rise in the company provoked jealousy and spurred malicious rumours. She was portrayed as a ruthless career woman who would stop at nothing to get her own way.

The fact that at age 30 she was still unmarried did not help. Unmarried women in their late twenties and thirties were always the subject of gossip, and Gu got more than her fair share. Chen was also aware of the rumours that Gu and her husband's relationship was not a purely professional one, but she chose to dismiss them. Her husband, she rationalized, was simply too busy with work to have an affair.

Gu lived in a small, company-provided apartment in the southern half of Gao'an Road. It was highly unusual for a single woman to be allocated an apartment in central Shanghai, where there was such a drastic shortage of housing, but Li had insisted that his most valued employees were given benefits not available to ordinary workers.

Chen did not want to talk to Gu over the phone. If this conversation was going to happen, it would have to be in person. She pulled on her coat and collected her bike from the hallway downstairs. She cycled briskly through the cold evening air down to the end of Kangping Road and turned south on to Gao'an Road. She dismounted at the gate to Gu's compound and walked the bike around to building No.3. Gu's light on the second floor was on. After locking the bike, she climbed the stairs to the apartment and stood for several minutes before pressing the doorbell.

Gu appeared startled when she opened the door. "Director Chen. It's you!"

"I was just passing so I thought I would stop by and see how you were."

"I'm alright. I'm sorry, won't you come in? It's cold out tonight."

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It was a cramped but tastefully furnished apartment with all the obligatory possessions for fashionable modern living: a large colour television, video-cassette recorder, stereo system and leather sofa. It even had fitted carpets, a rarity in a city where most families made do with concrete or wooden floors.

Looking around, Chen said, "It is nice and warm in here."

"I had electric heaters installed last year. I got fed up with having to put on five layers of clothing just to stay warm in the winter."

Gu was dressed in a wool sweater and jeans, yet her feet were bare. "Please sit down," she said. "Would you like some tea or something stronger perhaps?"

Chen said tea would be fine. She took off her coat and sat down gingerly on the sofa as Gu went to the kitchen. Gu had obviously spent a lot of time and effort getting her apartment just the way she wanted. It was unusual to find someone so house-proud, as most young people spent their money on clothes or eating out. But then, Chen noted, most young people did not have their own apartment.

"How are you feeling, Director Chen? This must be a very bad time for you and your family," Gu said as she returned with a teapot and two cups. "You looked very distraught at the funeral ceremony. I was quite concerned."

Chen explained that she was angry at the way the funeral had been organized by the company, how her husband's wishes had been ignored, and the way the officials had kept her in the dark about everything.

"I understand," Gu said, gazing into her tea cup. "They've been treating everyone like that. The higher-ups are really paranoid. They told everyone at the plant not to talk about General Manager Li's passing and if someone from outside asks you about it you are supposed to tell them he died of illness, nothing more."

"So, it was not a heart attack?"

A look of panic flashed across Gu's face. "Is that what they told you?"

"Yes, that is what they told me, but I never really believed them."

"Oh, my God! I just assumed you knew. I can't believe they fed you the official line as well. I mean you of all people. That's terrible. I am so sorry."

"Gu, please just tell me how he died, that is if you know for sure."

"Yes, I know, but you've got me really worried now. You must promise not to tell anyone that I told you this. I could lose my job. They are already preparing a hit list of people to get rid of in the upcoming reorganization."

"Of course, I promise. But I just need to know. I don't care how bad it is."

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“Okay. All I can tell you for sure is what I saw, you understand. The rest is just hearsay. General Manager Li came back from a board meeting that morning much earlier than scheduled. It must have been about nine o’clock. He looked very annoyed. He told me to hold all his calls and then slammed the door to his office. I thought about going in to see if there was anything I could do, but then I decided against it. You know, it’s better to leave him alone when he gets angry.”

Chen nodded. She was all too familiar with his moods.

“Anyway, nothing much happened for about half an hour or so until I heard a commotion outside the window. I looked down and there was a crowd gathering around on the pathway underneath my window. So, I ran downstairs to see what all the fuss was about, and there was Old Li. He was already dead; his skull had been smashed in by the impact. There was blood all over the place. I’m sorry, this must be very upsetting for you.”

Chen’s head was spinning. She felt faint but motioned for Gu to continue.

“Soon after that, President Liang and the other leaders arrived and tried to get everyone away. The security guards came and cordoned off the area, and then the head of security grabbed my arm and took me back to the fifth floor so that I could open the door to the office. They had already tried to get in, but it was locked. I gave them the key but they wouldn’t let me go in, so I don’t know what they found in there. I feel sorry for the old street cleaner who found the body. The security people interrogated him for hours. He looked shell-shocked when I saw him the next day. Refused to even acknowledge my greeting.”

“So, it was suicide,” Chen said quietly. “But why? I just don’t understand why he would take his own life.”

“I’ve been asking myself that same question. It doesn’t make any sense to me either. But I can’t imagine he could have accidentally fallen out. The windows are usually closed, and besides, they are nearly one metre from the floor. You can’t just lose your balance and fall.”

“And you are sure there was no one else in the room?”

“Absolutely. There is only one door and I would have noticed if anybody else had gone in there.”

“But why would they pretend it was a heart attack? Why would they not tell me it was a suicide?”

“It is absurd, I know, but they are obviously desperate to cover this whole thing up. They spent ages trying to make Old Li look presentable for the funeral, but his head was too badly damaged, so they decided to place him in a closed casket so that no one could see.”

**Saturday, March 20, 1993 – Searching for Reasons Why**

It was a lot to take in. Suddenly, a heart attack seemed preferable. Now, there were so many new questions for Chen to deal with. Had she, or one of the children, done something to provoke such an extreme action? Why would he leave her and the family without a word of explanation? According to Gu's account, it must have been a spur-of-the-moment decision triggered by an incident in the boardroom, but Li was not a spontaneous person; everything was carefully planned.

Li was an extraordinarily determined and strong-willed individual who knew what he wanted and how to get it. Even back in 1962, when the then 24-year-old Chen first met him during a visit of her public health propaganda team to his factory, it was obvious to her this was a young man who was going places. He had been one of the first people in Shanghai to join the Communist Youth League after Liberation, he had just been appointed as the youngest party committee member at the small spark plug factory where he worked, and he was instrumental in getting that factory's production up and running again after the Great Leap Forward.

Chen was not immediately taken with him. He was short and rather plain-looking, but he was kind, attentive, and generous. Chen, on the other hand, had film-star looks and no shortage of admirers. In fact, many people in the early 1960s described her as a young Qin Yi, the actor praised by Premier Zhou Enlai as the "most beautiful woman in China." Chen never saw the resemblance herself but she also never objected to the comparison.

Crucially for Li, Chen's family approved of him and encouraged the match. Her father, who had run a sizable textile company prior to Liberation, recognized a kindred spirit. The couple were married in the spring of 1963, and their eldest son was born the next year.

In party politics, Li aligned himself with the reformist policies of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, which served him well until 1966 when everything got turned upside down. The Cultural Revolution threatened to destroy everything. Both families were targeted, and Li's liberal politics soon got him into a lot of trouble. He was struggled against by the revolutionary red guard faction at his factory and forced to denounce his father, who had been a mid-ranking Nationalist government official in Nanjing and Shanghai.

Li declared himself reborn, having no family but the Communist Party with Chairman Mao at the helm. He even tried to persuade Chen to denounce her parents as capitalists and imperialist lackeys, but she refused. Chen was dismissed from her post in the public health department while still pregnant with their daughter, and she was reassigned as a worker in a suburban textile factory. Li, meanwhile, not only survived his struggle sessions, but—through a careful series of alliances, playing one faction off against another—actually prospered and was appointed in 1972 to his first government job at the Shanghai office of the Ministry of Machine Building.

This was the low point in their marriage. There were many times when she was stuck in that suburban hellhole that Chen contemplated divorcing her career-obsessed husband. But what would happen to her young family? Protecting her children was of paramount importance and it was clear to her that she could not do that without the help of her

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scheming husband. He had, after all, ensured that his politically suspect wife could stay in Shanghai with her children. At that time, thousands of people from Shanghai were being sent to remote towns and villages in Sichuan, Yunnan and Gansu, and some of them never returned.

Li's primary concern may have been his own career advancement, but he clearly recognized his obligation to his wife and children. After the fall of the Gang of Four, he used all his influence to get Chen rehabilitated, and, in 1978, she was reassigned to the obstetrics and gynaecology department of Shanghai General Hospital. The one-child policy had just been introduced, and Li argued that Shanghai, with its huge population, needed all the public health specialists it could get so as to ensure the policy was implemented correctly.

Later, he made sure his three children received the best education available, getting his eldest son into his *alma mater*, Jiaotong University. He even agreed to use his influence to get his second son into the Fine Arts Academy, even though he strongly disagreed with his son's choice of school. Painting, Li said, was something those losers from Suzhou did. Shanghai people were business people, he insisted. Their daughter needed no help getting into the Shanghai Foreign Languages Institute. She sailed through her English degree and went straight into international trade, much to the delight of her father, who spared no effort to see that she got every break she needed. Li doted on his daughter. And the feeling was mutual. She loved and admired her father and was prepared to overlook many of his faults. She would not take the news of his suicide well.

After her meeting with Gu, Chen decided against calling Hong straight away. She needed time to process this new information before passing it on to Hong. She had already arranged to meet Hong for lunch the following day at a newly opened western-style restaurant on Urumqi Road. She would tell her then. Besides, Hong would be less likely to fly off the handle in a public place than at home.

Hong's first reaction was denial: "Dad would never kill himself. That makes no sense at all. He was at the pinnacle of his career. He loved his job, he loved his family. He would not just throw it all away."

Then suspicion: "Why would Gu tell you that it was suicide if the company had instructed her to just repeat the official version. Why not just keep her mouth shut?"

"I'm not sure," Chen said. "Perhaps I caught her by surprise, and she just assumed I knew the truth. Or maybe she just felt sorry for me."

"Oh, I doubt that. I've never trusted that woman. She's a real schemer, you never know what she is really up to. She could be inventing a story to suit her own purposes."

Like many others, Hong was aware of the stories concerning Gu and her father, and she was more inclined to believe them than her mother. Hong also resented—or rather envied—the fact that Gu was still free and single, while she had agreed to a marriage at a relatively young age that she very quickly regretted. Her husband had been very solicitous during their courtship, but, after they tied the knot, it became evident he was only interested in his career advancement and in using his new relationship with Hong's father to get ahead.

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The truth, however, was that Hong and Gu were actually quite alike. Hong had a ruthless streak (inherited from her father) that enabled her rapid rise to become the chief representative of a Hong Kong company's office in Shanghai. She was first appointed office administrator on the strength of phony references provided by two of her elder brother's dummy companies in Los Angeles, and then gradually plotted to have the resident Hong Kong manager removed on the grounds that he was out of touch with the reality of doing business on in mainland China. After just a couple of trips to the head office in Hong Kong, she had convinced her bosses that she was the best person for the job, and so she was duly instated as chief representative. The Hong Kong bosses were happy; soon after her take over, the company's turnover and profitability shot up.

Despite her lingering mistrust and animosity towards Gu, Hong did eventually concede that, as things stood, suicide was the most likely explanation. It was also the most commonly heard line on the Shanghai gossip circuit. But there would have to have been a very powerful imperative for her father to take his own life.

Chen remembered that Li had been very tense and short-tempered in the weeks leading up to his death, but she'd put that down to pressure of work. In fact, his mood had improved just a few days before he died. He was decidedly more cheerful, talking noisily and at length about a proposed trip to Detroit for talks with the joint venture partner about the introduction of a new model to the Shanghai plant.

The most persistent rumour going around town was that Li had killed himself because he was about to be investigated on charges of corruption or embezzlement. This was and still is quite a common departure method for corrupt officials—a search of the Chinese internet today for “official jumps from building” will produce hundreds of cases—but in Li's case it did not really add up.

China was in the midst of yet another anti-corruption campaign, and all the talk was that the authorities were looking for some high-profile corruption cases to make an example of. It was said that the time-honoured practice of “killing the chicken to scare the monkey”—punishing low-level officials in an attempt to frighten higher ranking officials into abandoning their corrupt ways—simply wasn't working. It had been decided that the time was now ripe to start killing a few monkeys.

Li would certainly qualify as a monkey, but there were plenty of other people of his rank in Shanghai who could have been singled out for investigation. Even at the car company, the party secretary was notorious for accepting bribes from people hoping to get a piece of the Shanghai United Auto action but then failing to deliver. Li used to joke to his family that at least when people bribed him they got something for their money, while with the party secretary, it was money down the drain.

The kind of corruption Li was involved in, at least the stuff his wife and daughter knew about, was fairly mild by comparison with others at his level. He would, for example, accept gifts and money from state-run enterprise directors who wanted vehicles but did not want to go through the laborious bureaucratic formalities of acquiring them legally. Although he was not directly involved in sales, Li could use his influence to earmark certain vehicles for delivery to certain enterprises without going through the normal channels. He could also

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arrange for the private sale of cars at a reasonable commission, but he only did this as a very special favour to the buyer concerned.

It was certainly not the regular practice some of the gossip mongers alleged. One of the stories circulating was that he sold off at least 20 vehicles a month to friends and cronies. This was a bit far-fetched. Even with production at 5,000 units a month, it would be difficult to conceal the disappearance of 20 vehicles.

The only other irregular practice that Chen and Hong knew about was the diversion of company funds to Dajun in the United States. This was achieved through a complex series of transactions involving state-run trading companies, mainland companies in Hong Kong and Dajun's network of shelf companies in the United States, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Because of the inbuilt inefficiency of the industrial supply chain in China, there was nearly always money floating around that hadn't been accounted for, so it was fairly easy for Li to arrange with his old friends at the components factories around Shanghai to charge for a shipment of, say, ten thousand radios but only deliver nine thousand. The resulting bonus would then be used by the radio supplier to buy fictitious goods from a mainland trading company that would then transfer the funds to its Hong Kong office, which would then overpay by the requisite amount for some vague goods or services provided by one of Dajun's companies. Li assured his wife that by the time anyone noticed anything missing, it would be too late and it would just be put down as a clerical error.

It was all fairly innocuous stuff, even by the standards of the time. Today, in the era of Xi Jinping's "tiger hunts" of corrupt high-ranking officials involved in multi-million dollar scandals, it would hardly be worth mentioning. Former party strongman Zhou Yongkang, for example, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2015 after his family was found to have accepted bribes totalling 129 million yuan.

Of course, corruption investigations are never just about corruption; they are about someone or some faction using the evidence of corruption to get their political or personal enemies out of the way. Li had made several enemies during his lifetime, but they were usually fairly junior people whom he had passed over for promotions or whom he had sidelined, such as the disgruntled employee at the Foreign Investment Commission who filed charges of misconduct against him some seven years ago. The local discipline inspection committee looked into the allegations and dismissed them outright. Since then, it had all been smooth sailing.

Chen and Hong could not think of anyone who was powerful enough or who had the right connections needed to engineer a high-level plot against him. They knew that President Liang and some others at the car company were jealous of his success, and they did have a lot of political influence, but surely, Chen thought, not even they would be so stupid as to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.

### **The American Connection**

Another school of thought, equally popular on the rumour mill, was that the Americans had something to do with Li's death. No one could say with any certainty what that connection might be, but Chen knew the suspicions were not entirely groundless. Contrary to the



official picture that portrayed Shanghai United Auto as a model joint venture—a shining example of what could be achieved through the cooperation of Chinese and American partners on the basis of mutual equality and respect—the venture had always been fraught with conflict, even before the company got off the ground, and Li Heng had a front row seat from the get-go. And as time went by, he was dragged deeper and deeper into the quagmire. Perhaps, Chen thought, Li had become trapped in something that he could not escape from.

Back in 1982, when they first started talking seriously about setting up a joint venture, it was clear that the road to Sino-American cooperation was going to be a rocky one. Shanghai Automotive Co. was anxious to get some kind of foreign investment to upgrade its outdated and hopelessly inefficient Soviet-built production line. The plant manufactured heavy, slow-moving and very expensive sedans whose design had basically not changed since the 1950s. Although the plant had a guaranteed market through the state distribution system, it was losing millions of yuan a year and had to be kept afloat by massive government subsidies.

Other car plants in Beijing and Guangzhou were also on the lookout for foreign investment, and the leaders in Shanghai did not want to be left behind. However, no one really knew what kind of foreign investment would be right for Shanghai. They just had a vague idea of installing new technology, but they did not know what kind of technology or where to get it from. In the end, they decided to make discreet inquiries through the trade sections of the foreign consulates in Shanghai. The first to respond were the Japanese, who appeared keen to set up a vehicle manufacturing base in China but were reluctant to go into a joint venture. The most they would consider was a licensing agreement whereby Japanese cars would be assembled in Shanghai under strict Japanese control.

Then the US United Automobile Company made a surprise appearance. No one had ever heard of United Auto at that time. It was based in Detroit, but it was not one of the Big Three auto makers. However, they did have something concrete to offer and they appeared to be more flexible than the Japanese.

It was at this point that the 37-year-old Li Heng, recently promoted to head the automotive design section of the machine building ministry's Shanghai office, was called into the newly-established working group on foreign investment in the automotive industry. He was supposed to serve only in a junior advisory capacity, but he quickly made his mark. He was, after all, just about the only one in the working group who knew anything about building cars.

The leaders of the working group were generally in favour of the Japanese bid and decided that the American offer was only useful as leverage to force more concessions out of the Japanese negotiators. They did not pursue the US offer very seriously.

Li, on the other hand, took the time to look at the US proposal in more detail and saw that Shanghai stood to gain far more from an alliance with the Americans than with the Japanese. He pointed out to the leaders that the Japanese were interested only in setting up a cheap overseas production base and could not be relied upon to transfer the technology and know-how that Shanghai Automotive Co. needed. The Americans, though, had shown a willingness—almost an eagerness—to set up a joint venture, which would not only provide

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new technology and more efficient management, but would almost certainly lead to substantial profits in the future. Shanghai, he argued, needed to get the best technology on the market, not second-hand assembly lines from Japan.

Li also played the anti-Japanese imperialism card, a very potent weapon in Shanghai, which was occupied during the Second World War. Eventually, the leaders were won over, but nothing could be done until the relevant ministries in Beijing gave their approval for substantive negotiations to begin.

There was silence for more than a year, and then, out of the blue, Li was notified that he was to travel to Detroit as part of the team from Shanghai Auto and the local government for talks with the American company.

It was the first time that Li had ever been abroad, and he was totally unprepared. He hadn't even looked at the US company's initial proposal for the last year, assuming it was going nowhere. Chen recalled that he was so anxious about the trip that he spent the entire week prior to departure engrossed in all the relevant files and documents, and he forced his teenage children to speak only English at home so that he could get more familiar with the language.

The trip was something of a disappointment. The delegation leaders were expecting to be treated like honoured guests when they arrived, but they were very surprised to discover that China did not rank very high on the United Auto agenda after all. Mexico, it seemed, was far more important. They did not meet the company president, something protocol would normally require, and in fact had only a brief encounter with the head of the international division. The talks were held with fairly junior managers and nothing of real substance was discussed. They just managed to agree on a general outline for future negotiations that would be held consecutively in Shanghai and Detroit.

The only highlight of the trip for Li was a visit, arranged by United Auto, to a basketball game between the Detroit Pistons and the Chicago Bulls, who had just signed a young shooting guard from the University of North Carolina named Michael Jordan. It was the first basketball game he had ever been to and he fell instantly in love with the sport. He was enthralled at the speed and power of the players, who would have towered over him if he'd ever stood next to them, but most of all it was their incredible will to win that captured his imagination.

The negotiations that followed that less-than-auspicious meeting in Detroit did not bode well for the future of Sino-US automotive cooperation. The talks were characterized by suspicion, mistrust and misunderstanding. Both sides thought the other side was trying to cheat or mislead them, and, as it turned out, they were both right. Many of the Chinese negotiators were convinced the Americans were lying about how much money they could afford to invest in the proposed joint venture. On one occasion the Chinese delegation was taken to the annual Detroit Auto Show where United Auto had a huge display of new concept vehicles. The delegates could not believe that a company that was willing to pay millions and millions of dollars on a glitzy publicity stunt could be so stingy when it came to investing in China.

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As a result, the Chinese delegates vowed to extract as much money out of United Auto as they could. During the discussions on pricing schedules for the spare parts that would initially have to be shipped from the United Auto factories in America, the Americans wanted to allow for inflation but the chief Shanghai negotiator managed to stop that with one simple question: “What is inflation?” He claimed China’s superior socialist economy did not have inflation, and, therefore, it was unfair to punish China for deficiencies in the U.S. capitalist system. It is doubtful the Americans believed this bullshit, but they agreed to the stipulation anyway, in order to keep the talks moving.

After two years of tortuous negotiations, the two sides finally reached an agreement and the new joint venture—50 percent owned by the Americans and 50 percent by a consortium of Chinese interests, including Shanghai Auto Co., a major state bank, and one of the country’s biggest trading companies—was finally signed into life in the winter of 1986. The student demonstrations taking place in Shanghai at the time threatened to spoil the signing ceremony, which featured state leaders from both countries, so the municipal government sent in the police to break up the protests.

Li Heng had earlier been rewarded for his role in the joint venture negotiations by being appointed deputy head of the new Foreign Investment Commission in Shanghai. The job was seen as a major promotion, not so much in terms of pay since government officials were never paid very much—on paper, at least—but in terms of status and prestige.

It elevated him to a position from which he could write his own meal ticket. He was responsible for overseeing all foreign investment already in the city and for devising a streamlined system for getting new companies to set up operations there. He was instrumental in setting up the famous “one stop chop shop,” which did away with all the labyrinthine bureaucracy foreign companies used to have to deal with. He also oversaw the development of three economic and technical development zones in the west of the city, purposely designed to lure direct foreign investment. Li rapidly gained a reputation among foreign investors as a man they could do business with, and he gained plaudits from the local leaders for his ability to bring foreign investors in.

Although he was not directly involved in the car venture during this period, he always kept an eye on its progress, or rather the lack of it, and he was occasionally called in to mediate between the warring factions.

One of the biggest disputes he had to settle occurred soon after the venture was established. The Chinese partners had always assumed they would be building an entirely new car, but it soon became apparent that what the Americans were offering was nothing more than a five-year-old model that was being phased out of production in the U.S., to be assembled from kits shipped from Detroit to Shanghai.

Li managed to persuade the Americans to compromise a little and modify the model just enough for them to say that it was a specially-designed car for Chinese conditions. A lot of his suggestions, such as a tougher suspension to cope with China’s poor roads, made perfect sense, and the Americans agreed without too much fuss.

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Then there were the problems with a lack of foreign exchange, restricted import licenses and the refusal of the Shanghai Auto Co. to pay for the accommodation of the American managers. There were usually about 40 Americans at the plant, all of them managers, technicians or engineers. They were paid 20 to 30 times the salary of their Chinese counterparts and lived in a high-walled villa and apartment complex on the western edge of the city near the airport. Apart from the long commute to work, just about the only time these Americans left the complex was to get drunk and cause trouble at one of the numerous small, privately-run bars cropping up all over the city.

Several of them were involved in car crashes on their way home late at night, but, because they worked at the car plant, the police never arrested them. A financial arrangement between the plant, the police and whoever else was involved in the accident was always worked out, with the police usually getting the lion's share.

In late 1988, the Americans sent over a new Deputy General Manager. The first two had been glorified technicians, but Peter Shelomov was a genuine manager, and one who threatened to stir things up a bit. The announcement of his appointment immediately set off alarm bells in the boardroom. President Liang, who was general manager at the time, called Li at the Foreign Investment Commission to voice his concern.

"Why are they sending us a Russian? I thought the whole point of setting up this joint venture was to upgrade the plant with American technology and get rid of the old Russian stuff. This is a step backwards. I want to know all about this guy. Why is he working for an American company? For all we know, he could be a KGB spy."

Li had done his research and explained that Shelomov was actually a true-born son of the USA, as was his father before him. Shelomov's grandfather, Li explained, had emigrated from Russia in the early 1900s, well before the 1917 Revolution, and settled in Chicago, where he set up a successful leather factory. Li went on to describe in great detail to Liang how millions of people from Europe had emigrated to the U.S. at that time and how many of them had gone on to be highly successful businessmen.

Shelomov sought to establish his authority at the plant as soon as he arrived. He ruled the American staff with a rod of iron. He was pushy and impatient, and he would frequently shout and hurl insults when he couldn't get what he wanted. He was a short, balding man in his mid-forties, and many thought his tough guy act was some kind of compensation for his lack of physical stature. Whatever the reason, it did not get the desired response, and before long the Chinese board members, led by Liang, were plotting to get rid of him.

When Li got wind of this plot, he quickly intervened, going directly to the mayor to point out that, although Shelomov had some personality problems, he was a very effective manager who had done a lot to raise the international profile of the company. If Shelomov was forced out, it could jeopardize the joint venture at a time when it was beginning to show some potential for growth. The mayor took Li's side and ordered the Chinese board members to set aside their differences and work with Shelomov for the common benefit of all.

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All of these problems paled by comparison with the crisis that hit the company in 1990. The central government's post-1989 austerity program was hurting just about every enterprise in the city, and the car plant was hit more than most. Hardly anyone could afford to buy a car, and even if they could, it was highly unlikely they would get permission to do so. As a result, there were massive stockpiles at the plant, and production eventually had to be shut down for a couple of months before the company finally managed to shift most of the vehicles in a big state buy-off.

It was at this point that Li Heng was appointed general manager in a last gasp effort by the government to sort out the mess. He was understandably reluctant to accept the job. He knew all too well what he would be letting himself in for. But it was a highly prestigious position and it would give him a chance to work miracles if luck was on his side. Besides, he knew his time at the Foreign Investment Commission was limited. The Pudong Foreign Investment Office had just been set up, and all government resources were now being channelled into moving investment to the east of the city rather than the west where Li had devoted much of his time and energy.

Li's appointment was guardedly welcomed by both sides. The Americans liked him because he was seen as one of the few government officials in Shanghai who understood and sympathized with them, and who also really knew the car business. The Chinese partners liked him because he was a loyal party member and government official who could deal effectively with foreigners, and he understood their quirks and eccentricities. Just about the only person who did not welcome the appointment was the then-general manager. Liang had been hopelessly ineffective in running the company during the austerity program and he had constantly been fighting with Shelomov. However, Liang was also a highly influential party member with powerful backing, so he couldn't just be sacked. Instead, he was appointed company president, a grand-sounding title with lots of prestige and material benefits but with few or no actual responsibilities.

Although Li joined Shanghai United at a time of crisis, he knew the situation would quickly improve if he could just keep the venture together. It was clear from the noises coming out of Beijing that under the new, more pragmatic and growth-orientated leadership being put in place, the austerity program which had wreaked such havoc in the car industry would be reversed and a new emphasis would be placed on highly efficient, productive industries.

Li embarked on an ambitious plan to merge the old Shanghai Auto plant, which was still cranking out 1950s sedans, with the joint venture. The two plants were adjacent to each other, so it would represent a significant economy of scale if they could combine their resources. A merger would lead to a doubling of capacity, making Shanghai United the biggest car plant in China.

While both sides agreed in principle, the details of how the merger would take place were a source of considerable friction. One of the biggest problems was what to do with the more than two thousand employees at the old plant. The Americans wanted to get rid of at least half of them, claiming they were surplus to requirement, but the company could not just throw people out of work without finding alternative employment for them.

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Li eventually persuaded the Americans to take on all of the old plant's workers and provide them with the housing and welfare benefits they had previously enjoyed. In return, he assured the Americans that the old workers would be retrained and assigned work which would bring out their best potential. Then there was the Jiading County government, which partly owned the old Shanghai Auto works. They did not have the political clout to stop the merger, but they tried their best to get as much money out of the joint venture as possible. They inflated the value of their assets and threatened to withhold infrastructure support unless they got what they wanted. In the end, the company just bought them off.

The merger went through at the end of 1991, and then came Li Heng's crowning glory, the visit in early 1992 of China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. The preparations for the visit took months and were conducted in utmost secrecy. Even on the morning of his visit, no one was sure if he would actually show up: he was 88 years old and obviously not in the best of health, so everything was always left to the last minute just in case he suddenly took a turn for the worse. He arrived with his daughter, all the Shanghai party leaders, and a massive phalanx of security guards. No one got anywhere near him unless they had high-level security clearance. President Liang secured himself the honour of greeting the Chief Architect of Reform in the reception hall, but it was Li who gave him the guided tour of the plant. Li had spent weeks rehearsing what he would say. He knew he had to keep the description of the plant simple because Deng was not overly familiar with the finer points of industrial technology, but it soon became apparent that he was not even interested in the very basic introduction Li had settled on. His eyes kept wandering and he did not appear to be listening to anyone except his daughter. After walking slowly along the production line for about ten minutes, Deng suddenly stopped by one of the nearly completed vehicles and mumbled something in his daughter's ear.

"My father would like to know, Comrade, if this is a capitalist thing or a socialist thing," Ms Deng asked Li.

Everyone held their breath.

"I believe, Comrade Xiaoping," Li replied in a clear slow voice so that his guest would understand, "that originally it was a capitalist thing but now as part of our socialist market economy it is a socialist thing."

There was a long silence. The old man looked bemused but then his daughter repeated the answer in a dialect more familiar to him, and Deng broke out into a toothy smile and chuckled to himself before mumbling something in his daughter's ear again.

"My father says you are a very intelligent man, General Manager Li," she said.

Li let out a huge sigh of relief and broke into a broad smile. Very soon, the whole party was engulfed in a wave of sycophantic laughter.

With such a huge personal triumph behind him, one might think that Li was untouchable. But the day-to-day reality of running a huge car plant soon caught up with him again. There were more disputes with the Americans, arguments over the new model to be introduced in 1994, income distribution and—the problem that refused to go away—the proportion of

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locally produced parts to be used in the cars. This was a constant source of tension between the two sides. The Americans wanted to keep a high proportion of imported parts, while Li wanted to dramatically increase local content.

Li would routinely curse the foreign managers and technicians at the plant for their insensitivity and lack of understanding of doing business in China. On several occasions, he considered resigning altogether because of the frustration of having to deal with bunch of ignorant foreigners who refused to compromise their own values or adapt to the reality of running a large-scale enterprise in China. He also had to deal with the old managers at the Shanghai Automotive Company who were equally resistant to change and wanted to run the joint venture in the same way they had been running the old car plant. The Americans would complain to him about the Chinese managers, and the Chinese would always expect him to do their dirty work if there was a problem with the Americans.

Had Li been trapped in the middle of this never-ending game between the Chinese and American partners? Had the pressure just got so bad that he snapped? Chen was still struggling to make sense of it all. Perhaps she would never know for sure what had been going through her husband's mind on the morning that he took his own life. She could not spend all her time obsessing over the unknowable. Besides, she had work commitments and her eldest son had still not contacted her. What on earth, she wondered, was going on with that boy?

**Monday, March 22, 1993 – Prosecutor Ma**

The hospital president had insisted that Chen Lan take as much time off work as she needed, but, following the funeral, she was ready to head back. She needed to find some semblance of normality and routine in her life again. But it soon became apparent that nothing would be normal again.

Ma Guoqiang was the deputy head of the Shanghai Prosecutors Office and an old college friend of Li Heng. He had been admitted to Shanghai General for an inguinal hernia repair operation, and he had been placed in one of the private rooms reserved for high officials.

Chen wanted to check on him as a matter of courtesy, but there was something else. She recalled a meeting between Ma and her husband in the week after the Lantern Festival in February. It was obvious that Li had been troubled by that encounter, but he had resolutely refused to discuss it.

The only reason Chen knew the meeting took place at all is because she took the call when Ma phoned their home to arrange it. Normally, he would spend a while chatting with Chen when he called, but on this occasion he made no attempt at small talk and abruptly asked to speak to her husband. A hushed conversation ensued, after which Li jotted something down in his diary and returned to his seat in front of the television. When Chen got the chance, she stole a glance at his diary and saw he had pencilled in a meeting the following Sunday morning with Ma at the prosecutor's office building downtown at 9.00.am.

On the day of the meeting, Li seemed agitated as he searched through his study for various files and documents. He told his wife that he had to go out on business but he wouldn't say where or with whom. Chen reminded him to come back by midday because Hong and her husband were coming over for lunch. But Li did not return until the meal was nearly finished. He looked very pale, and hardly acknowledged their existence as he came in.

"What's the matter, Dad, is something bothering you?" Hong said as he sat down at the table.

"No, it's nothing, just a lot of work that keeps piling up. Really, it's nothing."

And nothing more was said.

Chen was not sure if she really wanted to know what had happened at that meeting. Her husband had many secrets. Was this one secret that was best kept buried?

Ma Guoqiang was sitting up in his hospital bed watching television when Chen entered. "Doctor Chen, what a pleasant surprise. I didn't expect you to be back at work so soon."

"I just got back today, actually, and when I heard you were here I thought I must come and visit you. I'm so glad you finally decided to go ahead with the surgery. You know it would have only got worse if you'd left it alone."

Ma had been scheduled for surgery early the next morning and was clearly very nervous. Dressed in his blue and white striped pyjamas, he suddenly looked a lot older and more



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vulnerable. His hair seemed greyer, his forehead was deeply furrowed and his hand was shaking as he removed the thick eye glasses he needed for watching television. It was all a far cry from the stern, tough-minded prosecutor who had put hundreds of criminals behind bars, and who had demanded and got the death penalty for dozens of others.

“There is nothing to worry about,” she told him. “I’ve personally checked the schedule for tomorrow and you will be in our most modern operating theatre, and the doctor who will be performing the operation, Doctor Zhang, is one of our most experienced surgeons. He worked for several years at Beijing 301 before being transferred here, so you can be sure you are in very good hands.”

“Thank you for everything you have done, especially at this difficult time,” he said. “I must apologize for not attending Old Li’s funeral. It really was inexcusable, but, on that day, I was in a great deal of pain. I hope our wreath arrived in time.”

“Yes, it did, thank you very much. I understand perfectly and I’m sure he would not have wished you to attend in person if you were in pain. It is quite alright. There is absolutely no need to apologize.”

“You’re too kind,” he said. “This has been a terrible tragedy for all of us. I only wish there was something I could do to help.”

Chen took a deep breath. This was the perfect opportunity to find out what had transpired at that meeting, but she hesitated. It seemed unfair to take advantage of an old friend who was about to undergo surgery and who was clearly in a very vulnerable state. At that point, Doctor Zhang and his anaesthetist entered the room to check on their patient. The conversation would have to wait. She told Old Ma that she would see him again after the operation and quietly left the room.

Chen went back to her office and tried to think of how to broach what was probably a very sensitive subject with Ma, but nothing came to mind. She decided to call it a day and go home. As she approached the main hospital entrance on Tibet Road, there was a sudden squealing of brakes, followed by a loud thud and the sound of glass shattering. A yellow mini-van taxi crammed with passengers had driven straight into the side of an ambulance as it was pulling out of the hospital.

China’s ubiquitous mini-vans, known as “bread cars” because of their resemblance to a loaf of bread on wheels, were cheaply constructed and lacked any kind of safety features. In a collision with a sturdy ambulance it stood no chance. The front of the mini-van had collapsed into the ambulance and there was nothing left of the cabin. The taxi driver had been killed on impact. There were six passengers. Several had been badly injured after being thrown forward, and some of them were unconscious as they were dragged from the wreckage. There were no patients in the ambulance at the time, and the driver was not seriously injured. A large crowd had gathered around the accident scene, making it difficult for the emergency room staff to attend to the injured.

Chen noticed a young girl, perhaps not even 20 years old, whose head had been badly gashed as she was thrown from the vehicle. She was conscious but highly disoriented and suffering from shock. Chen knelt down next to her, held her head steady and tried to calm

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her down before the orderlies arrived with a stretcher and carried her into the building. By this time, a mob scene had developed, stopping traffic in both directions. The police had still not arrived, but there was little more Chen could do, so she pushed her way through the crowd and walked along Tibet Road for several blocks before hailing a cab and going home.

The next day, Chen went to check on the girl who, she discovered, was named Qionghua after the young heroine in *The Red Detachment of Women*, the popular ballet performed for President Richard Nixon during his state visit to China in 1972. Qionghua had severe cuts and bruises and was trying to come to terms with the death of her best friend, who had been sitting beside her in the mini-van taxi the day before. Chen sat at her bedside for nearly an hour, trying to calm her fears. Qionghua was worried about how her life at university would be affected by her injuries, how would her boyfriend react, how could she catch up with her studies if she had to spend a long time in recovery. Chen reassured her that everything would be fine, she would make a full recovery and, if she needed more time to catch up her studies, Chen knew the dean of her department and would have a word with her. Chen told Qionghua to think about the character she was named after, how she overcame terrible adversity to rise through the ranks of the Communist Party. She gave Qionghua her name card and held her hand briefly before letting her get back to sleep.

Talking with Qionghua and watching her fears gradually dissipate helped embolden Chen to confront her own fears and, regardless of the consequences, find out what had happened at that meeting with her husband and Ma.

She waited until Ma's wife, family, and all other visitors had gone before going up to his room.

"How are you feeling?" Chen said. "I talked to Doctor Zhang. He was very satisfied with the operation and is confident you will make a quick recovery."

"Thank you, Chen. I feel fine. A little sore, but the doctors have given me some pain killers."

She looked at the chart at the end of his bed. They had prescribed sodium pentothal for the pain.

It was now or never. She told him she was concerned about Li's behaviour prior to his death, that something was clearly bothering him but he had not said anything about it. Perhaps Li had mentioned something to his old college friend? She reminded him of their meeting after New Year. Had anything happened during that meeting to alarm him?

Old Ma looked at her. His eyes were tired and glazed over, but suddenly he appeared much more alert.

"What do you know about this, Chen?" he asked in a low voice.

"I heard that my husband was under some kind of investigation, maybe for corruption, but I don't know for sure."

"It wasn't corruption, not exactly," he said, his voice trailing off almost to a whisper. "It was much more serious than that. It was a very high-level investigation initiated by the Ministry

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of State Security in Beijing, so I couldn't find out the details, but it was concerned with allegations that Li was collaborating with the Americans. They said he was providing them with sensitive information. I never believed it, but I felt it was my duty to let your husband know about it.”

Chen was astounded. She couldn't believe what he was saying. Perhaps the drugs were getting to him.

“What do you mean, ‘providing the Americans with sensitive information’? All he did was manage a car plant.”

“I don't know for sure. All I ever heard were second-hand reports from the higher-ups in the Party. It's a highly-classified matter, so you must promise not to repeat this to anyone. Please, Chen, don't breathe a word about this, it could cause a lot of trouble for all of us.”

He was becoming quite agitated by now, so Chen let him rest. She assured him that what he had told her would remain confidential and that she would come and see him again in the morning. She helped adjust his pillows and bedclothes, and, by the time she closed the door, he was already sound asleep.

**Wednesday, March 24, 1993 – Celebrating the East Asian Games**

Chen could understand why some people might think her husband was overly fond of the American people and American culture—he made no secret of his love of basketball, jazz and blues, etc.—but no one who knew him well would seriously suggest he was collaborating with the Americans against his own country.

His outwardly friendly disposition towards his foreign business partners did raise some eyebrows. Doing business with foreigners was acceptable and encouraged, but business leaders and party members, in particular, were not supposed to get too close to the other side. Officials were always told to keep a respectable distance from foreign business executives, and their relationship should be strictly professional and above board. Fraternization outside of the work environment was discouraged unless it was in some way related to business affairs.

Li ignored this new political convention and adopted the traditional Chinese way of doing business, forging personal relationships as the basis of a long-lasting business partnership. He had always gotten on well with the foreign business executives he dealt with at the Foreign Investment Commission, and he had gone out of his way to try to understand their needs and expectations. This was not, as some rival officials claimed, an example of his tendency to acquiesce to foreign demands. On the contrary, it was a calculated attempt to maximize the benefits offered by foreign investors. If you treat people well, he argued, the dividend you accrue in the long term will always be greater than if you try to screw as much out of them as possible in the short term. His maxim was, "Build the nest, and birds will come," rather than, "Entice the birds to build the nest," which was the viewpoint held by the majority of officials. But, importantly, he had the backing of the mayor at the time, and no one could deny his success in bringing in foreign investment.

What the critics of his liberal treatment of foreigners did not realize was that, privately, he despised many aspects of life in the West and the behaviour of Americans, in particular. With a few exceptions, he considered Americans to be brash, unsophisticated, narrow-minded and lacking personal dignity. The dire state of American society and the disintegration of the family also caused him considerable concern and disquiet. The homelessness, poverty, crime and drug abuse he saw on his trips to Detroit only served to convince him further that China would have to be very careful about what it absorbed from America. While it was important to gain as much useful knowledge as possible, it was even more important to guard against recreating American culture wholesale in China.

His views on the West, and on the United States, in particular, were basically the same as Late Qing scholars such as Kang Youwei, who stressed that Chinese learning should remain the essence of society, while western learning should be used for practical development. Li's grandfather, like many other scholars, supported the reforms proposed at the end of the 19th century, which advocated equipping the army with the most advanced Western firearms, recruiting Chinese living abroad to help build a national industrial base, and encouraging the spirit of innovation, creativity and invention, which was so prevalent in the United States at the time. Incidentally, Li's *alma mater*, Jiaotong University, was established as Nanyang College in 1898, with the specific aim of studying and incorporating useful Western ideas.

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Although Kang Youwei's ideas gradually fell out of favour, Li's grandfather always held the core of Kang's teaching in high regard and passed that teaching on to his son and later to his grandson. That teaching, albeit in modified form, was eventually drummed into Li's eldest son before he went to the University of Southern California to study for his MBA. Dajun was a good student. After earning his degree, he worked briefly at an electronics company before setting up his own business consultancy and trading company specializing in bringing American engineering and electronics firms together with enterprises in China, either in the form of joint ventures or through technology transfer and licensing deals.

The economic sanctions imposed by the United States after June 4, 1989, did not adversely affect Dajun's business activities. Most companies in California, and the rest of the United States, for that matter, only paid lip service to their government's concerns over human rights violations and were anxious to do business with such a capable and enterprising young man. He used his profits from brokering deals to expand his trading operations, setting up companies in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, and through them expanding his network of contacts inside China. He had a spacious office in downtown LA and had recently bought a condominium in Brentwood, while all the time paying the rent on his old apartment where his ex-wife and young son still lived.

At times, Li thought his son was getting too comfortable in the US. The breakdown of Dajun's marriage was particularly distressing for him. Li often urged his son to spend more time at home in China so that he would not lose touch with traditional values.

But now, it seemed that Dajun had simply vanished off the face of earth. Chen had continued to call Dajun's ex-wife and his office for updates, but no one knew anything. They just assumed he must have some highly confidential business deal on the go. At one point, Chen considered hiring a private detective to track him down but was persuaded against it. If he had been involved in an accident, his ex-wife said, the authorities would have notified her by now, as she was still listed as his next of kin.

The morning after her talk with Prosecutor Ma, Chen was hurrying out the door when the phone rang. She was late for work and was tempted to ignore it, but something told her to answer it.

"Mom? It's me." Chen almost dropped the phone in surprise at hearing her eldest son's voice. "I am really sorry Mom. I was unavoidably detained. I'll tell you all about it when I get home. There is a flight arriving in Shanghai tomorrow afternoon. Tell me about Dad. What happened? I couldn't believe it when I got your message."

Chen tried to explain all that had happened in the last two weeks, but there was just too much to process.

"It's OK Mom, don't worry. I think I know what's going on. I'll tell you when I get to Shanghai. The flight is scheduled to arrive at about 2.30 in the afternoon, can you meet me at the airport?"

"Yes, of course, but what's happening? Can't you tell me now?"

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“No, it’s best not to talk on the phone. Someone may be listening. I’ll see you at the airport, OK?”

Chen was overjoyed to know that her son was coming home but, at the same time, alarmed that he could not talk on the phone. Maybe there was something going on with the Americans after all.

Chen was now even more anxious to continue her conversation with Prosecutor Ma when she got to the hospital. She spotted him at the far end of the courtyard, where patients were sitting around with their families, enjoying the sunshine and the first flowers of spring. He was sitting in a wheelchair, wearing a cloth cap and a woollen dressing gown over his pyjamas. His wife was slowly pushing him back towards the high officials’ wing. Chen caught up with them just as they reached the main doors and were stopped by a young security guard who did not recognize the patient in front of him.

“It’s alright,” she told the young man as she approached the doors. “This is Prosecutor General Ma. He is one of our honoured guests.”

“Director Chen!” the young man bowed. “I humbly apologize. Please go in.”

“Thank you, Chen Lan,” Ma’s wife said. “It’s good to see you. My husband tells me that you have been looking after him very well.”

“I’m very happy to see he is strong enough to go outside. He must have made a remarkable recovery.”

“Yes, but he still very weak so I’m going to take him back now so he can get some rest before lunch.”

“That’s a good idea, but if I were you I would buy some food from outside. The food at the hospital canteen is not very appetizing. There is a good dumpling place just on the corner of Fuxing Road. Why don’t you get him something there? I’ll take him back to his room.”

Ma's wife took the hint and set off to the dumpling restaurant.

Chen waited until they were safely in his room before telling Ma about her son’s sudden reappearance after two weeks of silence. The old prosecutor was intrigued. “Perhaps this investigation has now been extended to the United States. It is possible that some agents contacted your son in Los Angeles. That could explain why you could not contact him for so long. I am sure they would want to talk to him after Li’s passing.”

Ma looked around to see if anyone was at the door. “It is reassuring that Dajun is free to return, but I would still advise him to be very careful when he comes back. I’m sure state security will continue to watch him very closely to see where he goes and who he talks to in Shanghai.”

“He said he could not talk on the phone because someone might be listening. Do you think he meant state security?”

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“Quite possibly. They can bug anyone they like. You know, I heard they even bugged Mikhail Gorbachev when he was here in 1989.”

When Ma’s wife returned with her box of dumplings, Chen excused herself and went back to her office to call her daughter. Hong was thrilled to hear that her brother was safe and heading home, but she was just as perplexed as her mother at the news of the state security investigation.

Chen asked her to meet up at home after work so that they could discuss the situation further, but Hong said she had to attend an event that evening at the Garden Hotel to promote the East Asian Games. The Games, which were scheduled to be held in Shanghai in early May, would be the last chance China had to impress the International Olympic Committee with its sporting facilities and organizing abilities before the decision on the 2000 Olympics was finalized in September. Even though China’s Olympic bid was for the city of Beijing, everyone who was anyone in Shanghai was obliged to attend the event at the Garden Hotel, and, of course, make a sizable donation to the cause.

“In that case,” Chen said, “you can pick me up at the hospital and we can go together. There is a good chance that the car company leaders will be there, and I want to get some answers.”

“OK. But I hope you know what you are doing, Mom,” her daughter said.

Hong picked her mother up as instructed at around six o’clock. She had just gotten her driver’s license and was still a very nervous driver. She spent most of the journey crawling along in first gear in the rush hour traffic of Huaihai Road.

“Promise me you will not create a scene in there,” Hong said, staring intently at the long line of taillights ahead. “If the leaders don’t want to talk, just leave it alone, OK? We can talk about it more with my brother when he arrives.”

When they finally reached the Garden Hotel, all the parking spaces had been taken up and Hong had to park on the pavement on Maoming Road by the Cathay Cinema, narrowly avoiding an elderly man on a bicycle in the process.

It was the first time that Chen had visited the newly-opened, Japanese-managed Garden Hotel. She remembered visiting the old French Concession mansion and park on the site as a small child with her parents, just after the Japanese occupation ended, and she was interested to see what the new owners had done with the place.

The original structure had been restored and a huge, modern high rise had been grafted on to the back. They walked through the spotless lobby, past the immaculately dressed staff and up the escalator to the function rooms on the second floor. The reception was well underway with many old friends, colleagues and business associates in attendance. A lot of people Chen had not seen for a long time came up to offer their sympathies, including Jacob Heller, the young official from the Australian consulate who had helped get her younger son an Australian visa. Chen recognized his very attractive new wife Wang Yunxia. She was the daughter of a well-known Jiaotong University professor. Chen had last seen her when she

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was in high school. Everyone was very polite and engaging—everybody, that was, except the car company’s American boss, Shelomov, who was obviously trying to avoid eye contact.

Chen was more convinced than ever now that he had something to hide. She marched right up to him and stood in front of him, blocking his escape. They were about the same height, 1.68 metres to be exact, making her fierce glare particularly penetrating. Shelomov had made a big show of learning Chinese when he first arrived in Shanghai, but Chen knew his language ability was still limited. She spoke slowly and very clearly.

“Mr Shelomov. There is something I have to discuss with you.”

His annoyance was obvious. “I’m very busy right now, Mrs Chen. Can’t this wait?”

“I’m afraid it can’t. You see, I know that the company managers have been lying to me. My husband did not die of a heart attack, and you have been trying to cover up his suicide. I would like to know why.”

He looked stunned, almost panic-stricken.

“I don’t know what you have been told, Mrs Chen, but I can assure you...”

“Please stop, Mr Shelomov. I’m fed up with being lied to. I just want to hear the truth about why my husband killed himself. I think I have that right, don’t you?”

He was momentarily speechless, looking around the room in a desperate search for someone to rescue him.

“This is neither the time nor place for such a discussion. Listen, I’ll talk to President Liang. He is just over there, and maybe we can arrange a time and place to talk.”

“I don’t trust Liang. If you can’t talk now, I can come to your office the day after tomorrow, if that is convenient.”

He looked around the room again, but there was no escape. “Alright, Mrs Chen. Friday afternoon. My secretary will call to confirm.”

“I hope she does. I will be most upset if I don't hear from you.”

“You will. Now, will you please excuse me? Thank you.”

He scuttled across the room to his wife, a tall, blonde Texan whose voice could be heard across the room, and within minutes they had left the building.

“What the hell did you say to him Mom?” Hong said when she joined her mother again. “It looked like you scared the shit out of the little bastard. I have never seen him move that fast before.”



**Thursday, March 26, 1993 – Li Dajun returns**

Dajun's flight was already over an hour late. Like everyone else at Hongqiao Airport that afternoon, Chen had no clue as to when the flight would arrive or whether its passengers would disembark through the new international terminal that was still under construction, or through the old building that used to handle international flights but was now officially designated as the domestic terminal. People were anxiously shuttling back and forth between the two terminals, trying to find their friends and relatives.

Chen opted to sit on a small bench by the window in the old building and hope that sooner or later someone would announce the arrival of the flight from Los Angeles. Just before four o'clock, there was a brief announcement over the intercom to say the flight had touched down. There was no apology or explanation, and, more importantly, no details on which terminal it had arrived at. After a mad scramble, the increasingly fractious crowd collectively determined that the passengers would be leaving through the domestic terminal and rushed to the arrivals gate. By the time Chen reached the gate, the crowd was already five rows deep, so she elected to step back and wait for Dajun to emerge from the throng.

He had flown business class and he was one the first to disembark. When Chen spotted him wearily pushing his luggage cart through the crowd, she could not hold back, ran up to him and embraced him tightly. He rather stiffly put his arm around her shoulders.

"It's OK, Mom, I'm home now. Were you waiting long? The flight was late leaving LA and then we got held up in Tokyo. It was a real disaster."

"It doesn't matter. I am just glad that you are back home."

It was surprisingly easy to get a cab. Chen told the driver to go to Kangping Road but Dajun had other plans. He had already booked a room at the Hilton nearby.

"I've got a lot of business affairs to attend to while I'm here, so it's more convenient if I stay at the Hilton so I won't bother you," he said. "They have a very good business centre there and it's a better place to meet clients. Besides, it's only about ten minutes from home."

"How can even you think of business at a time like this? Your family is far more important. You have to visit your father's grave, and we have to try to sort out this mess with the car company."

"Of course, the family is my most important priority. Don't worry, Mom, I'm not going to ignore you. It's just that these business affairs are rather delicate, and I don't want it to intrude on your home life."

"Do these business affairs have something to do with what you mentioned on the phone?"

"Yes, in a way. Listen, I'll explain everything later. Right now, I'm really tired. I just want to check in to the hotel, take a shower and get some rest."

Dajun was clearly now accustomed to more comfortable living arrangements than those his mother could provide. When they pulled up at the Hilton, a uniformed door man

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immediately opened the cab door, took his bags, and escorted them up to his “executive suite” on the 37th floor, bypassing the reception desk for regular guests in the lobby.

For Chen, it was a real eye-opener. For one thing, she had never before seen such a panoramic view of Shanghai, the city she had lived in all her life. It was a clear day, and she could see all the way over the low-rise sprawl of downtown to the new Nanpu Bridge linking the city centre to Pudong. In 1993, the Hilton was one of only a handful of high-rises in the city. Today, you would hardly notice the rather tired looking building on Huashan Road among the forest of skyscrapers.

Dajun was not interested in the view. Without unpacking his bags, he slumped down on the sofa and stared at the floor. He looked quite pitiful.

“I’ll let you get some rest, but you will come over to the house for dinner, won’t you? Your sister will be there, and she is very anxious to see you.”

“Sure, Mom. I’ll be there about six or six thirty. I don’t suppose my brother is here?”

“No, he couldn’t make it back. But he is safe and well. Get some rest. I’ll see you in a while.”

Chen left her son alone to his thoughts and headed to the elevator. As she was walking through the expansive marble lobby, she noticed the vice-mayor—the one who had read the eulogy at her husband’s funeral—leaving the hotel with a young woman, not his wife, and getting into his chauffeur-driven car. Clearly the virtues he praised during that eulogy did not apply to himself.

Dajun arrived at his mother’s home on time and was immediately assailed by his sister, who demanded to know what he had been doing for the last two weeks. “How could you possibly go on a business trip at a time like this? Why did you turn your phone off? Do you know how many times I had to call your wife? She is worried sick as well.”

“And another thing. Why are you staying at the Hilton when you are needed here? Is our home no longer good enough for Mr Big Shot?”

A still-weary Dajun tolerated this barrage for a while, but then he suddenly snapped and banged his fist on the table.

“Do you want to know the real reason I couldn't come back until now? If I tell you, you might regret asking.”

Hong was too shocked to reply. She had never seen her brother really lose his temper before. Chen quietly instructed her son to tell them what had really happened.

He took a deep breath. “It wasn’t a business trip, obviously. I was in LA all the time, but I couldn’t leave or contact anyone. Two days before dad died, two men from the Federal Bureau of Investigation came to my condo and said they wanted to talk to me. If I had known what they really wanted, I would have contacted my lawyer straight away, but all they said was that they wanted my help with an investigation into some Chinese companies, so I agreed to go along.

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“They took me to an office building downtown, and, almost immediately, their attitude changed. They started to interrogate me about all my business activities in the US, right from the time I arrived at USC. They wanted details of all contacts with US companies I had and demanded to know my links with dozens of Chinese companies operating in America. They were particularly interested in what dad was doing in the US and his contacts with the United Auto company. They were constantly checking and rechecking what I told them against information they had already gathered. They raided my office and told my secretary to cooperate, keep quiet and tell anyone who called that I was unavailable.

“They held me for over two weeks. The building wasn’t a FBI station, it was some kind of offsite facility like a black jail. I told them that was illegal, but they said I would be deported if I did not cooperate. Even after they eventually let me go, they said that I had to stay in LA because I might be called in again. It was only after I got home that I found out about dad.

“So, you see, I’m really not supposed to be here at all. I could get in a lot of trouble when I go back, but I had to come.”

After a long silence Chen said, “Then you should just stay here. You will be safer with your family.”

“I will have to go back at some point Mom. I can’t just leave everything behind. My lawyer is already negotiating my return with the FBI. I just need to get everything in writing and it should be okay.”

“I’m sorry I yelled at you Brother,” Hong said quietly. “It has been a stressful time for all of us.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“But I have to ask, what have you and Dad been up to? Why would the State Security Ministry as well as the FBI be investigating you both? What is the connection?”

“I don’t know but I intend to find out. Don’t worry Mom, I will be careful. We just need to make some discrete inquiries. We can start with Shelomov tomorrow and see where that leads. He probably won’t say anything but it is worth a shot.”

Over dinner, Dajun gave them more details of the FBI investigation. They were particularly interested, he said, in his father’s links with United Dynamics, a subsidiary of United Auto, based in California’s Silicon Valley. United Dynamics was a major defence contractor specializing in missile guidance and propulsion technology. They wanted to know details of every visit Li and Dajun made to the company, the people they talked to, what they saw and what they discussed.

Dajun told them the visits had been purely educational. United Auto simply wanted to demonstrate to their Chinese guests the vast array of cutting-edge technology available to it. No business was discussed, but the FBI seemed convinced that Li and/or Dajun were somehow directly involved with the company. They demanded detailed records of all Dajun’s business activities in California, trying to determine links between the companies he might have done business with and United Dynamics.

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The agents also wanted to know the details of Li's party and government record going right back to his time at Jiaotong University. They wanted to know his contacts with senior officials and other leading industrialists in China and those based in the United States. When Dajun protested that this line of questioning was irrelevant to their stated line of investigation, they again threatened to take away his green card and deport him.

During this part of the interrogation, there were other agents present as well. They did not appear to be with the FBI, and Dajun concluded that they must have been from the Central Intelligence Agency or some other counter-intelligence unit, because they were solely concerned with events inside China, something the FBI would not have jurisdiction over.

At no point did the agents divulge the true purpose of the investigation. All they would say was that it concerned matters of national security and that Dajun was not to talk about it with anyone. The only conclusion he could come to at the time was that they suspected Li of spying or of trying to obtain sensitive information from United Dynamics and passing it on to the Chinese government.

"So," he said, "it seems that both sides suspect Dad of spying for the other side. It is ridiculous, I know, but there it is. I guess one investigation could have triggered the other, but I have no idea which way around that would be, or it could just be a big coincidence."

**Friday, March 27, 1993 – Déjà Vu All Over Again**

Nineteen days after she had been informed of her husband's death, Chen Lan was back in the same anaemic conference room at Shanghai United Auto with the same group of men who had been lying to her face from day one.

Peter Shelomov had obviously run straight to President Liang and told him of Chen's ambush at the Garden Hotel. But Liang was expecting to deal only with Chen, and he was not happy to see her son.

"Young Li. This is a surprise. We all thought you were still in the United States. I'm happy that you are back, but I must ask you to leave this meeting. It is a matter between our company and your mother alone."

Dajun was jetlagged but not a pushover. "The matter concerns me directly. We are here to discuss my father. Do you really think that has nothing to do with me?"

"Of course, we appreciate your concern, but this meeting was initiated by your mother and we wish to discuss these matters with her alone."

Chen was determined not be pushed around either. "I initiated this meeting with Mr Shelomov. I do not remember inviting you or any of your other colleagues, but you just turn up and then have the nerve to tell my son that he can't be here. My son is here to provide me with support in my hour of need, something you people completely failed to do. He stays."

"Director Chen! I resent your suggestion..." Liang was waved silent by the party secretary.

"Director Chen, I apologize," said the party secretary. "You are still distressed by your loss. I see no reason why we cannot all sit down and discuss this in a calm and objective manner. Of course, Young Li is most welcome to stay."

They took their seats at the conference table and the party secretary launched into his prepared speech. This time, Chen refused the tea being offered and instructed her son to do the same.

"As you have evidently discovered, General Manager Li did in fact take his own life. Why he did so is unknown to us. The reason we did not tell you this immediately was simply to spare your feelings. General Manager Li's death was obviously upsetting enough without the burden of shame that a suicide would bring to your family. We were only trying to protect you and we did everything in our power to ensure that your husband was remembered for his positive contributions during his life, rather than the unhappy way his life ended. It is indeed most unfortunate that some reckless people decided to denigrate your husband's name after his death by spreading the news that he took his own life. If we discover that people in this company have been engaging in such irresponsible and destructive behaviour, they will be severely punished.

"Secondly, it was also important to prevent news of General Manager Li's suicide from leaking out so as to stabilize the foreign investment environment in China, and in Shanghai,

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in particular. It could have done enormous damage to our reputation as a trading and business partner. It is fortunate that the news has not been widely disseminated yet, and we intend to ensure it does not spread any further. That is why, Director Chen, I must ask you not to discuss this matter with anyone in case the events surrounding your husband's death be misunderstood."

"It is rather too late for that now," Chen said. "The whole town has been talking about this incident for weeks. I don't think there is one person in Shanghai who does not know my husband killed himself. Your attempts to prevent the news of his suicide from leaking out have obviously been a total failure, so I don't see why I should have to restrain myself."

The party secretary was evidently not expecting to have his instructions contradicted. He pondered this outburst for a second and then said, "What the common people are talking about is just idle gossip. No one really believes these kinds of rumours. It just gives them something to talk about, something to amuse them. However, if you as General Manager Li's widow were to talk about such things, people might be inclined to give these rumours more credit than they deserve."

"So, you are saying I should lie to everybody who asks about my husband?"

"No, not lie exactly. Just bend the truth a little to accentuate the positive aspects of his life."

"I see. Just for my own benefit then. Is there any truth to the rumour that my husband was involved in a big argument with the board just prior to his death?"

Chen scanned the room intently, looking for clues in the faces of men around her. President Liang was quietly fuming. Shelomov was staring at his shoes.

The party secretary smiled. "No, Director Chen, the board meeting was perfectly amicable and quite productive. That is why we were all mystified by General Manager Li's actions. I wonder who could have told you that there was an argument?"

"That is not important, but if there was no problem perhaps you could let me see the minutes of the meeting to confirm your assertion?"

The party secretary was no longer smiling. "That would not be appropriate. We have to maintain company confidentiality. I'm sure you understand."

"Of course. But what about all these stories that my husband killed himself because he was under investigation by the State Security Ministry? I suppose that is just gossip as well?"

There was a long, long silence as the leaders looked around helplessly at each other before one of them spoke. It was the balding middle-aged man Chen had first seen on the day of her husband's death. She still did not know his name.

"I don't know what you have been hearing, Director Chen, but I can assure you there was never any question of your husband being under investigation. What could we possibly want to investigate him for? General Manager Li was one of the finest managers ever to work at this company and he has been a loyal servant of the party and state for many years.

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He was a shining example to all of us. So, I can say quite categorically that any suggestion your husband was under investigation is pure fiction, lies spread around by irresponsible gossip mongers.”

Apart from his initial confrontation with Liang, Dajun had remained silent throughout the meeting, but now he spoke.

“I’m sorry. I don’t think we have been introduced. You are?”

“My name is Kang,” the middle-aged man said. “I am responsible for internal security. I’m very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr Li.”

“Likewise. Since you say you are responsible for security here, would it be fair to say that if there was any investigation into my father’s activities then you would be a part of that investigation or at the very least be aware of it?”

“Yes, Mr Li, it would be fair to say that.”

The atmosphere had been tense from the moment Chen and Dajun entered the room, but now the air was positively frigid.

“Perhaps we should return to the main issue here,” the party secretary quietly interjected. “Again, Director Chen, I must apologize if our actions in trying to protect your husband’s good name caused you distress, but I hope you understand it was for your own good and the good of the company.”

And they were off in circles again. As the party secretary droned on, Chen came to the conclusion that it was pointless to continue. She assured the leaders that she understood why they did what they did and that in future she would endeavour to be more circumspect.

As they were leaving the conference room, Chen asked the party secretary if she could take one last look at her husband’s office. He hesitated for a moment and turned to Kang, who was hovering behind him. Kang nodded his head and the party secretary escorted Chen down the corridor. The office had been completely refurbished. It was as if every trace of her husband’s presence had been deliberately and painstakingly obliterated.

“We have refurbished the office for the new general manager, so it looks rather different now,” the party secretary explained.

“I see. So, what has happened to my husband's personal effects? I would have expected they would have been delivered to our home by now.”

Kang stepped forward. “Your husband's effects are in storage here. If you wish, I will forward them to your home tomorrow.”

“That is very considerate of you, Mr Kang, but, since we are here, would it possible for us to pick them up now?”

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“The storage area is on the far side of the plant, and I’m afraid there are a number of formalities which have to be completed before they can be released. I will attend to the matter personally and get your husband’s effects delivered as soon as possible.”

It was pointless to argue. Chen thanked him for taking care of the necessary formalities and slowly walked over to the window that her husband allegedly jumped from. As Gu had pointed out, there was no way he could have accidentally fallen out, and Chen doubted her diminutive husband would even have the physical ability to climb out. She stood looking out of the window trying to imagine what had happened that day, until her son walked over.

“Mom. We should probably go now.”

The party secretary readily concurred and led them out of the office. As they were leaving, Chen noticed that there was another woman occupying Gu Lianhua's desk.

“There is just one more thing,” Chen said, as they were about to get in the taxi. “I didn’t see my husband’s secretary. Will she be working for the new general manager when he arrives?”

“Ah yes, Miss Gu. I believe she has taken a vacation. But I’m not sure when she is due to return.”

Following the meeting, they went directly to the equally desolate location of the graveyard where Li was entombed. Dajun went through the motions of making offerings to the dead but he was clearly immersed in his own thoughts. He was very quiet on the ride back home but by the time they returned to Kangping Road and met up with Hong, he had come to a startling conclusion.

“They probably killed him.”

Mother and daughter looked at him in stunned silence.

“Think about it. Liang and the other old board members have been insanely jealous of Dad’s success at the company. Turning the company around after the austerity program, the merger, the visit of Deng Xiaoping, all the accolades he has won. Meanwhile, they are completely ignored. They thought Dad was becoming too powerful.

“You know they have been trying to unseat him ever since he got there but Dad was always one step ahead. But maybe he did not see this state security investigation coming. Maybe that really did worry him, and they were able to leverage that in some way.”

“This is ridiculous,” Hong said. “Mom said Gu Lianhua was insistent that no one else was in the room at the time of his death.”

“I thought you said we could not trust Gu. For all we know, she could be in on the conspiracy.”

“My God! Have you been reading Shakespeare in your spare time? This is straight out of Julius Caesar.”



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“Huh?”

“It’s a play I had to study at the foreign languages institute. This guy, Julius Caesar, is a successful and popular general who is killed by a group of conspirators who think he will become a despot if he is elected emperor of Rome. They then try to spin the story to show what they did was for the good of the Empire. Actually, come to think of it, Liang is a bit like Cassius. Holy fuck! And you know what? Dad died exactly one week before the Ides of March!”

“I have no idea what you are talking about. Anyway, I did not mean they physically killed him. Not necessarily. They could have just hounded him to take his own life.”

“Stop it, the two of you!” Chen interjected. “I don’t want to hear any more of these crazy theories. It is just too distressing.”

Eventually, the talk of conspiracy did wind down and everyone agreed that they needed to get more reliable information, either from Prosecutor Ma or some other source, before moving forward.

“What about your husband?” Dajun asked Hong.

“What about him?”

“Well, he is always boasting about his connections in the municipal government. How about we ask him to snoop around a bit, see what he can find.”

“No way,” an incredulous Hong shot back. “He is bound to get caught. And that will just create more trouble for all of us.”

### Thursday, April 1, 1993 – The New Boss Arrives

The appointment of the new general manager was officially announced less than a week after Chen's visit to the car plant. His name was Shuang Yashan, a senior official from the State Planning Commission in Beijing who had absolutely no experience in running an automotive company. He was a typical government bureaucrat whose entire career had been spent taking orders from his superiors and then relaying those orders to the people who actually did the work.

Chen watched an interview with him on the Shanghai Television evening news bulletin. He was sitting in her husband's newly refurbished office reading directly from a prepared speech on his desk, just as he would have done during a party meeting. He clearly lacked his predecessor's flare for public relations. The speech focused entirely on the work ahead, the need to meet production targets and introduce a new model next year. At no point in the interview did he or the television station reporter mention Li or his contributions to the company.

Dajun had discovered through his network that Shuang was a political appointee sent in from Beijing to help re-establish central government authority over the car plant. He was a strict party disciplinarian and a conservative in economic policy. Like many in the State Planning Commission, he had reservations about the freewheeling reforms introduced in many companies (including Shanghai United Auto) over the last year. Shuang's brief, according to Dajun, was to bring Shanghai United back into the central planning fold so that Beijing could more effectively co-ordinate its national automotive industry development plan. He would not be responsible for the day-to-day management of the plant. Rather, he was there to ensure the company, and—perhaps more importantly—its personnel did not get out of line.

But the appointment of Shuang Yashan was not the only change at Shanghai United. Peter Shelomov had not been seen at the plant since Chen's visit, and it was rumoured that he had been recalled to Detroit. The technical manager, Mark Potomac, was now said to be the acting American representative at the plant until a permanent replacement could be found.

Although it was impossible to verify exactly what fate had befallen Shelomov, it was clear to Chen that he had been under a dark cloud ever since her husband's death. While he was still throwing his weight around with the other Americans, it was apparent he had little or no authority left with the Chinese side. Chen thought it was possible that he had simply decided to take a vacation in order to get away from it all for a while, but with the arrival of Shuang Yashan, and several board meetings on the agenda, it seemed a very strange time to be away from Shanghai.

According to Ma Guoqiang, who had been keeping a watching brief on events from his hospital bed, a thorough clean-out at Shanghai United was underway. Beijing had ordered complete background checks on all senior and middle management as well as dozens of others with question marks on their records. Ma suspected that Kang—no one seemed to know his given name—had been delegated to carry out the necessary security checks. All those who did not come up to Kang's rigorous standards would be removed. Beijing had decreed that all past problems at the plant be identified and all mistakes corrected. Kang

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was the main enforcer of the clean-out, while Shuang had been sent in to supervise the newly sanitized company.

Ma was making a good recovery but maintained he was still too weak to be discharged. Chen thought he quite enjoyed being in hospital. He did not have to work, but he could still use his connections to probe into the mysterious goings-on at his old friend's company. Each evening, when all the visitors had left, Chen and Ma would furtively discuss the latest information they had gleaned from their respective sources and attempt to analyse what it all meant. Once he overcame his initial reluctance to talk, Ma became positively animated and seemed fascinated by all the gossip flying around.

But then, just before the Qing Ming holiday, he suddenly clammed up. At first, he just pretended to be asleep whenever Chen entered the room or changed the subject when she pressed him for more information on the investigation, but eventually he came right out and said what was on his mind.

"I don't think we should talk about this incident anymore, at least not for a while. This is a very sensitive issue, as you know, and the situation could become dangerous for both of us. They know you and your family are asking questions, so I would advise you to keep a low profile for a while. That is all I can say. I'll be out of here in a couple of days, and it's best for us not to see each other again until this thing blows over."

It seemed that one of Ma's numerous visitors had warned him to keep quiet.

### Monday, April 5, 1993 – Remembering the Dead

During the Qing Ming holiday, families visit the graves of their ancestors and make offerings to the dead. But neither Chen nor her children could bear the thought of going out to that depressing suburban graveyard in Jiading once again. Instead, they visited the graves of Chen's parents with her sister in an equally anonymous but far less distressing graveyard closer to home, on the road to Hangzhou. As they went through the ritual observances, Chen felt almost relieved that her parents were no longer with them. They had suffered a great deal since 1949, so for them to witness her current troubles, just when it appeared that the family had finally come out on top again, would have been heart-breaking.

That evening, Chen prepared a meal at home for Dajun and Hong, as well as Hong's husband, Gao, who was supposed to join them later after visiting his own family graves. The three of them had just sat down to eat when Gao burst in. He was in a highly-agitated state, breathing heavily and looking nervously over his shoulder. He did not stop to greet anyone but ran through the corridor to the living room and stood pressed up against the side of the window frame, anxiously looking down at the street below.

"Damn it!" He peeled away from the window and started pacing around the living room. "They're still there. What am I going to do, this is terrible!"

Everyone followed him into the living room to see what all the commotion was about.

"Who is still there?" Hong said. "What are you talking about?"

"I don't know who they are. This car has been following me all day, and they are parked right outside now."

Hong started to move towards the window but Gao grabbed her arm. "Don't go near the window, they might see you."

"Get off me! What has gotten into you?" Hong shook her arm loose and glared angrily at her husband.

"Alright you two, calm down," Chen said. "I'll go and look from your father's study. There is a better view of the street from there, and I won't turn the light on, so no one will see me. Now, Gao, where exactly is this car that has been following you?"

"It's across the street, directly opposite the building."

Chen walked to the study and peered out of the window. Through the evening gloom and the dense foliage, she could see a black Audi across the road with its interior light switched on. There appeared to be two men sitting in the front. Li had kept a pair of binoculars in his study, and after some awkward rummaging around in the dark, Chen eventually located them.

Once focused on the car, she could see that there were three men inside, one of whom was holding a walkie-talkie. She trained the binoculars on the license plate. Because of the acute angle, it was difficult to make out, but it was definitely a white plate with black numbers and

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what appeared to be a red GA in the middle. She put the binoculars down and went back into the living room.

“Well, there is certainly a car parked there with three men inside, and it looks like a public security bureau vehicle.”

“The police! That’s all I need.” Gao was off pacing around the room again.

“Are you sure it is the public security bureau?” Dajun said as he edged toward the window. “I am going down to take a closer look.”

“I don’t think that is such a good idea,” Chen said. “What if they see you?”

“Don’t worry, Mom. I’ll be really careful.”

Gao was in a real state, mumbling to himself and slapping his forehead with the palm of his hand. Hong tried to calm him down.

“Why would the police be following you? You haven't done anything illegal, have you?”

“No, of course not. I think it could be something to do with this investigation into your Dad.”

After considerable discussion, Hong had finally agreed to tell Gao about the investigation, or rather a censored version of it. She told him they were concerned about the rumours going around town that Li was under some kind of investigation and that this might have driven him to suicide. She stressed they did believe these rumours, but wanted to get confirmation one way or another. Maybe Gao, with his connections to the higher echelons of the local government, was the best person to get that confirmation? She asked him to make some casual inquiries with his friends in the mayor’s office to see what he could find out. He was under strict instructions to back off if any of his contacts became suspicious. He was to say that he was simply curious; on no account was he to push the matter. It was now apparent that he had indeed overstepped.

Hong eventually managed to stop him pacing around. Without invitation, he took a seat in what had been Li’s favourite chair in front of the television and began to tell them what had happened:

“Well, I did like you said and asked my contacts in the mayor’s office about this rumour of the investigation. You know, just asking if it was true or not, and everybody I asked refused to talk about it. The only person who said anything was an old school friend who now works in the office of the Municipal People’s Congress Standing Committee. He said there was an investigation, but that it was still ongoing and I should stay out of it. It was a highly-classified matter, and it would be best for anyone connected not to attract attention to themselves. He told me it could be very dangerous.”

“Well, it looks like he was right, doesn’t it?” Hong said. “From now on, you don’t say anything about this and don’t do anything to make them suspicious.”

Dajun was now back in the room. “Gao, you say this car has been following you all day. When did you first notice it?”

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"I'm not sure. I think when I went to my parents' place about lunchtime."

"Uh huh, and you did not realize it was a public security bureau car?"

"No. It was just a normal black car. It didn't have any blue and white markings."

"Maybe not, but it has a big red GA in the middle of the license plate. You mean to tell me you never noticed that?"

"Stop giving him a hard time," Hong said. "Can't you see he is obviously distressed?"

"Gao thinks the police are following him because he was asking too many questions about the investigation," Chen said. "One of his friends warned him to back off."

"And that is just what he is going to do," Hong interjected. "In fact, I think we should all back off. This whole situation is getting out of hand. I don't want the cops following me, my husband, or anyone else in this family."

"I think you're overreacting, Sis," Dajun countered. "If the cops are involved, they are only acting as foot soldiers for the State Security Ministry. They are only there to report on our movements, so as long as we don't do anything suspicious, they won't bother us."

"How can you be so nonchalant about this? This not some game, you know. This is affecting our lives, right here, right now, at this very moment."

"Wait a minute!" Gao said. "Who said anything about the State Security Ministry? How did they get involved in all of this?"

Hong was starring daggers at her brother. Chen quickly intervened.

"Your brother-in-law has this theory that the State Security Ministry has been conducting the investigation. It's just a theory, that's all. We don't know for sure. That is why we needed your help to try to find out once and for all."

"Theory or not, I don't like the sound of it one little bit. If state security is involved, I'm definitely staying out of it. I would like to help, but I have my own position and reputation to consider."

"Nobody is asking you to do anything against your will," Dajun said. "We just thought you might be able to help us clear the air, that's all."

Hong continued to glare at her brother, silently imploring him to *just shut the fuck up!*

"Listen, everybody," Chen said. "The food is getting cold. I think we should continue this discussion over dinner, otherwise it will soon become inedible. And besides, Gao needs some food inside him after all he has been through today."

Dajun and Hong understood their mother's unspoken instructions, and the family ate the rest of the meal in relative calm, although Hong continued to press her view that now was the time to stop asking questions.

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After Hong and Gao left, Chen watched from the study window to see if the police car would follow them. It did, and it made no attempt to disguise the fact, either. It seemed that they were trying to intimidate Gao more than anything else.

“I still think my sister is overreacting,” Dajun said. “Since they are following Gao, then that might free us up to do more digging of our own. Gao only got caught because he is stupid and doesn’t know what he is doing. But if we are careful and don’t do anything to arouse suspicion, then there shouldn’t be any great problem.”

In the short time that he had been back, Dajun had sought to establish his traditional position as the new head of the family. His mother indulged him in this because he was, after all, far more familiar with the murky worlds of business and politics than she was, but she had misgivings. Dajun could be reckless, just like his father. Moreover, he lacked his father’s understanding of the big picture. She was beginning to think that her daughter was right and that they should just call the investigation off, at least until the situation calmed down a bit.

Nevertheless, there was still one thing that had been bothering her since her visit to the car plant with Dajun. Her mention of the boardroom argument might have implicated Gu Lianhua, and the party secretary’s claim that she had taken a “vacation” was worrying.

Chen told her son she was worried about Gu’s welfare and would check to see if she was still okay. If she really had gone away of her own volition then there was probably nothing to worry about.

Dajun thought it was a good idea but for different reasons. “If she is still there, it will be a good opportunity to get more information out of her. I’m sure she knows more than she is letting on,” he said.

“I am not going to interrogate her. You can get that idea out of your head. I know you all have your suspicions about her but in all these years she has been nothing but kind and considerate towards me. I just want to make sure that she alright.”

**Tuesday, April 6, 1993 – Return to Gao'an Road**

A burst water main meant there were roadworks blocking the junction of Gao'an Road and Hengshan Road, so to avoid getting her boots covered in mud, Chen took a detour down Wuxing Road to Jianguo West and back around to Gao'an Road to get to Gu's apartment. The detour also helped Chen determine if she was being followed or not. She did not see anyone but circled around by the gate to Gu's compound just to make sure. Apart from the unusually high number of cars parked inside, the coast seemed to be clear as she walked her bicycle through the gate towards Building No. 3.

All the lights in Gu's apartment were on. If she had been on vacation, then it appeared she was back now. Chen locked her bicycle and climbed halfway up the first flight of stairs and stopped. She could hear voices coming from one of the apartments—male voices. She peered around the corner and saw that the door to Gu's apartment was open, and the voices were coming from inside.

Something was wrong. Chen was torn between self-preservation and making sure Gu was alright. In the end, curiosity got the better of her. She edged slowly towards the open doorway, took a peek around the corner and came face to face with a startled uniformed police officer guarding the entrance.

She still might have had the chance to leave without incident, but another officer saw her at the door and was walking towards her.

“Who are you? What are you doing here?”

“My name is Chen. I'm here to visit Miss Gu. Has something happened to her?”

“Show me your identification card,” he demanded.

Chen did as she was told.

“Wait here,” he ordered and marched back into the apartment.

She could see at least two plainclothes as well as three uniformed officers inside the apartment. They were making a thorough search of the place. Drawers were open, papers were strewn all over the furniture. They had even taken up the carpet and one of the policemen was down on his hands and knees checking the concrete floor—for what, she had no idea. The officer who had taken her ID was talking into his radio, relaying her details to headquarters. Chen tried to ask the young officer at the door what was going on, but he just looked nervously back at his colleagues and said nothing. After about five minutes, the officer who had taken her ID came back to the doorway.

“You have to come with me,” he said and grabbed her elbow.

“Where are we going?”



“We have to ask you some questions.” He led her down the stairs and out of the building. It was only then that Chen noticed several of the cars parked outside were public security bureau vehicles.

“What about my bike?” she asked. “Shall I take it with me?”

This question seemed to perplex the policeman. He pondered this unexpected development for a while before telling her to leave the bicycle where it was. He led Chen through the compound to the gatehouse, which was occupied by an elderly man watching a small black and white television.

“Sit down,” the policeman said. The gate man completely ignored their presence and continued to gaze at the box. The policeman told her to wait until his leader arrived. The old man was watching the popular series *A Beijinger in New York*. Chen had seen a few episodes, so she positioned herself next to the old man. She thought the plot of how an impoverished musician from Beijing made and subsequently lost a fortune in New York was a little far-fetched, but the show starred her favourite actor, Jiang Wen, and was worth watching for that reason alone.

The show was just about coming to an end when another police car pulled into the compound. Two uniformed officers alighted and walked into the gatehouse as the officer who had taken Chen’s ID card snapped to attention. The more senior of the two newly arrived officers began to lecture him on the need to have men stationed at the gatehouse and the entrance to Building No. 3 at all times. Nobody was to be allowed into the building without proper identification. The officer who had been ordering Chen around stood with his head meekly bowed and accepted this tirade of criticism from his superior. The senior officer then took Chen’s ID card and examined it closely.

“Director Chen Lan. Why did you come here tonight?”

It had been a long time since Chen had anything to do with the police, but she knew instinctively that it was best to say as little as possible, try to determine what they wanted to hear and tell them, hopefully without incriminating herself too much.

“I was just passing, and I thought I would stop off and see Miss Gu because I had not seen her for a while.”

“What is your relationship to Gu Lianhua?”

“She was my late husband’s secretary. I only really know her through my husband. You could say she is an acquaintance.”

“Your husband is Li Heng, the former general manager of Shanghai United Auto?”

“That is correct.”

The senior officer suddenly noticed that the elderly gate man was now far more interested in the live entertainment than in the television, and he asked him to wait outside. The gate man looked very disappointed, he grumpily went outside and lit a cigarette.

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“Your husband died several weeks ago, I believe,” the senior officer said without the merest hint of compassion. “Why did you come to see Gu Lianhua this evening?”

Chen took a calculated risk and assumed the police were unaware of her previous visit to Gao’an Road.

“There was no particular reason. As I just said, I was passing by and thought I would see if she was in. I had not seen her for some time, and I wanted to see how she was coping after my husband’s death. She had been his secretary for several years and I could see at the funeral she was quite upset.”

“Why did you wait so long if you saw she was upset at the funeral?”

“Because I was very upset myself, can’t you understand that? I’ve only just begun to recover from the shock myself.”

Her interrogator was suddenly on the defensive. “Yes, I understand, Director Chen. We are all very sorry for your loss.”

He studied Chen’s ID card for a moment and then continued with his interrogation: “Would you describe yourself as a close friend of Gu Lianhua?”

“No. As I have said, she was just an acquaintance.”

“Did you ever discuss her business or personal activities?”

“Not really. We only really talked about inconsequential things. Why would I discuss business matters with her when I could ask my husband?”

The officer seemed to be running out of questions.

“Director Chen. I must ask you to write out a detailed explanation of how and why you came here this evening and the reasons why you decided to visit Gu Lianhua, as well as what you were planning to talk to her about.”

The senior officer’s assistant pulled out a sheaf of paper and a ballpoint pen from his case and placed them on the table by the television.

Everyone in China who had lived through the Cultural Revolution knew how to write a self-confession (it was almost second nature) so Chen was unfazed by this simple request. She wrote down in a clear, deliberate hand exactly what she had said to her interrogator and added that she did not realize her visit would interfere with police business, apologized for causing them any inconvenience and promised to be more careful in future. After clarifying a couple of minor details, she signed her name and wrote down the date and time. The senior officer read over it one more time and then placed it in his attaché case.

“Director Chen. I have to inform you that Gu Lianhua is a criminal currently under investigation by the Shanghai Public Security Bureau. You are not to visit her apartment again or attempt to make contact with her. If you do, you too will be investigated. Do you understand this?”

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“Yes, I understand,” Chen said, swallowing heavily.

“If the criminal Gu Lianhua makes contact with you, you are to report her immediately to the public security bureau. Do you understand this order?”

“I understand very clearly.”

“Good, you may go now,” he said, handing back Chen’s ID card.

### Friday, April 9, 1993 – The Day Before Departure

The news that Gu was under criminal investigation finally convinced everyone, including Dajun, that it was time to stop asking questions and lay low for the time being.

In fact, Dajun did not have any choice in the matter. He had been informed by his lawyer in LA that he had to return immediately and submit to further questioning from the authorities. They had assured him that he was no longer under investigation himself; however, if he delayed his return any longer, he was warned, the FBI could confiscate his assets and cancel his green card.

Chen and Hong were convinced it was a trap, but Dajun, as usual, was confident he had everything under control. "I have written guarantees from the FBI that I will not be arrested, and my lawyer has advised me that I should be in no danger. I can show you the faxes if you like. I have them all at the hotel."

No one knew for sure if these legal guarantees were worth the fax paper they were written on, but Dajun did at least have a piece of paper, whereas in Shanghai they had nothing. Dajun told them he had already booked a flight out of Hongqiao on Saturday.

The sombre mood was confirmed by an editorial in the *People's Daily* that week, warning party members to be on their guard against unhealthy social tendencies such as exploiting others for personal gain, putting profit above all, money worship and cheating. Unless these unhealthy tendencies were checked, the commentary said, China would never be prosperous. The commentary then went on to point out that although China had learnt a great many good things from Western countries, there were still many aspects of Western life that were totally incompatible with Chinese culture and society, and it stressed that party members should arm their minds with Marxism and Leninism in order to combat this threat.

It seemed that the political mood in Beijing was shifting yet again. Was China really heading back to the bad old days of economic planning and foreigner bashing? If that was the case, Chen concluded that they really had no alternative but to take cover and ride out the storm.

Nevertheless, the day before Dajun was due to return to the United States, Chen had an unexpected opportunity to probe just a little more, and without risking anything in the process. As she was passing through the hospital emergency room, she recognized the elderly gatekeeper from Gu Lianhua's apartment complex. He was there with a young boy buried in a comic book, who she presumed was his grandson. The emergency room was not too crowded, so she quietly sat down next to him.

"Hello, Grandfather. Do you remember me? I am a friend of Gu Lianhua. She lives in your building complex, Number 3-1-21."

He looked up and stared at her quizzically through his thick lenses.

"I remember. You were there on Tuesday evening with those policemen."

"Yes, that's right. Tell me, are those policemen still there?"

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“Yeah. They are still there guarding her apartment so no one can go into the building without being checked. It is a real hassle.”

“I see, thank you. Do you what happened to Young Gu?”

“Like I already told the cops, she left more than a week ago. She had three big suitcases, she said she was going on a vacation.”

“Really? Did she say where she was going or when she would back?”

“No, she didn’t say anything. She just told the cab driver to go to the airport.”

“Thank you, Grandfather. Sorry to bother you.”

He shrugged and looked back at the boy who was still engrossed in his comic book.

While Chen was relieved that Gu had got away, the manner of her departure concerned her. She made a note to mention it to Dajun at his farewell dinner that evening when they met at the Hilton’s second-floor Cantonese restaurant.

For Chen, it was a very pleasant change to eat in a place where not only was the food of the highest quality, but the waiters were polite, attentive and efficient. The service in many Shanghai restaurants had been improving, but still just about the only place you could be assured of really good service was in the joint venture hotels. Providing customers with courteous and helpful service was one Western social tendency Chen thought even the *Peoples’ Daily* could approve of.

During her one trip to the United States with her husband, Chen had noticed that waiters and those in other service industries, even shop assistants, were always willing to help and had a pride in their work that one just did not see in Shanghai. Li told her that waiters in the United States were attentive because they relied on tips for their income, whereas waiters in China were paid a flat rate no matter how they performed. You could not expect waiters to improve their service, he said, unless you gave them some financial incentive. Chen could see his point, but felt there had to be more to it than just money.

Dajun had asked Hong if she wanted to bring her husband along to the dinner, but Gao had decided he had a very important business engagement that night and declined the invitation. Even before the police incident, he had been spending less and less time at home, preferring to spend the evenings entertaining clients or going out drinking and singing karaoke with his business cronies. On those rare occasions when he was at home, Hong said, he would often ignore her entirely, or, if he did speak, it would be to launch another tirade of criticism against her and her family, blaming her for getting him into trouble with the authorities and damaging his career. Their marriage, it seemed, was at breaking point.

“That man is driving me crazy,” she said, lighting a cigarette and blowing out a long cloud of smoke over the table. “He is obsessed with the police. He thinks they are following him everywhere, even when there is obviously no one in sight. He still thinks they’re hiding

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somewhere behind a tree or something. This news about Gu Lianhua will send him completely over the edge.”

“Then we should definitely not tell him about Gu,” Chen said. “Let’s give him some time. He has had a shock, so it’s understandable that he should be a little distraught.”

“A little distraught? The man is paranoid, and it’s really starting to get to me. I don’t know if I can cope with this for much longer.”

“I don’t think I can offer you any advice,” Dajun said. “My marriage is a disaster.”

There was a long silence before Hong spoke: “I guess maybe we both married too early. At least Xiaojun seems happy enough with his partner.”

Chen had received a letter from her younger son in Australia earlier that week, which she had shared at dinner.

*Dear Mom.*

*I’m sorry that it has taken me so long to write, but you know I was never very good at writing letters. I think about you and Dad a lot and I really wish I could be in Shanghai with you at this time, but if I went back now it could severely jeopardize my chances of getting permanent residency in Australia. I hope you can understand and forgive me. Please send my best to my elder brother and sister. I trust they are still at the vanguard of China’s new entrepreneurs.*

*As for my so-called career, I had a show at Susan’s gallery in Paddington a couple of weeks ago and managed to sell three paintings, and got some good reviews in the local newspapers. Three paintings, by the way, is pretty good, as many artists don’t sell anything during this kind of exhibition. But the best thing was a big gallery owner from Hong Kong saw my show and is talking about exhibiting some of my paintings in Hong Kong, where there is a much bigger market for contemporary Chinese art. Unfortunately, I won’t be able to go to Hong Kong myself but one of Susan’s friends there said he would be more than happy to supervise the transportation of the scrolls and make sure the show is set up properly. Susan sends her best wishes, by the way, and says if there is anything she can do, please do not hesitate to ask.*

*My level of English is pretty good now and I have even started to pick up some of the local dialect, although Susan still likes to speak Chinese around the house. I tell her that I have to practice my English, but she says she has to practice her Chinese too. At least when we go out with friends there is usually no one else around who can speak Chinese, so we have to speak in English most of the time.*

*I spend a lot of time driving along the coastline and up into the hills. The landscape really is beautiful here. You really should come down sometime for a vacation. I can assure you that you will find it far more relaxing and pleasant than that stuffy old hospital of yours. The house is right by the beach and there is always plenty of room. In fact, as I write this, Susan says she is happy to pay for your plane ticket down here, so what have you got to lose?*

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*Your loving son, Xiaojun.*

"I like Susan," Hong continued. "She is really talented and capable. Can't understand what she sees in Xiaojun but that is another matter. By the way, do you know how old she really is? With foreign women, it is so difficult to tell."

"I have never met her in person," Dajun said. "But from the photos I've seen, I would say early 40s."

"Yeah, that sounds about right. Good for her."

"Actually, Mom," Dajun interjected. "Why don't you take up her offer of a trip to Australia? A vacation would definitely do you some good, and, from his description, it sounds like a really nice place. In fact, I might even go down there some time myself when this is all over."

"Now I have heard everything," Hong laughed. "You go to visit your lay-about artist brother?"

"Why not? Just because we don't agree on a lot of things doesn't mean I can't see him."

Chen listened with quiet satisfaction as Dajun and Hong continued with their random banter. For the first time in a long time, she felt her family was finally coming back together again.

## PART TWO

*I took care as I went out this morning. Old Mr Zhao had a strange look in his eye. It was like he was scared of me but at the same time wanted to harm me. There were seven or eight other people whispering about me, trying to avoid me. Everyone along the way was like that.*

“A Madman’s Diary,” Lu Xun, 1918.

### **Saturday, April 10, 1993 – Flight Delayed**

Chen wanted to see her son off at the airport, but the party secretary at the hospital had insisted that all department heads attend a hastily convened meeting that afternoon to study the *People’s Daily* editorial on unhealthy foreign influences. Hong said she would take her brother to the airport. Dajun pointed out that the hotel would provide transport, but Hong insisted on driving him herself. He nervously accepted the offer.

Chen’s political study session lasted for more than two hours, and, at its conclusion, she was seriously contemplating a vacation in Australia. When she returned to her office, there was a note on her desk from her assistant:

*Director Chen. Your daughter called three times. She said it is urgent. Can you call her back on her mobile phone or meet her at your home as soon as possible?*

Chen’s immediate thought was that Hong had been involved in some kind of accident. But if that was the case, why would she be at home? She called Hong’s mobile.

“Mom?” her daughter sounded beside herself with worry. “Something terrible has happened. My brother has been arrested. He was just about to check in at the airport and these policemen grabbed him. I tried to stop them but they just pushed me out of the way. We have to do something about this, and we have to act fast. We can’t let them get away with this.”

Chen hurried home to find her daughter was still shaking with rage, taking long, intense draws on her cigarette as she paced around the room.

“Those bastards,” she said, almost spitting her words out. “They were so rude. They didn’t say why they were arresting him, and they didn’t even show any identification or arrest authorization, just pulled him away. He tried to shout out something to me but one of them put a hand over his mouth and told him not to speak. Another of them actually pushed me to the ground when I tried to intervene. They were complete barbarians. No one did anything, of course, the airline staff just pretended nothing was happening, and the rest of the passengers stood there staring at the spectacle. I could have killed them.”

Once Hong had calmed down a little, they tried to piece together what exactly had happened. Hong had counted seven or eight police officers but thought there may have



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been more waiting outside the departure hall as backup. Only two of them were wearing uniforms. She thought they were public security bureau outfits but could not be sure. They could just as well have been the People's Armed Police. The rest of the officers were in plainclothes, and several had ear pieces or walkie-talkie radios. Before dragging Dajun away, they searched him—did they think he was carrying a gun or something?—and then grabbed his luggage and took that away as well. One of the uniformed officers mistakenly took another passenger's bags and when that passenger tried to reclaim them, the officer reached for his gun and told the man to back off, which he did right away. It appeared to be a well-planned and coordinated operation. The whole episode took no more than a minute. And soon after Dajun had been taken away, the terminal reverted to its normal business as if nothing had happened. The only person apart from Hong to make a fuss was the man whose suitcases had been confiscated.

The police must have been waiting for Dajun at the airport or had followed him there from the hotel. With such a large contingent, they were not prepared to risk him getting away. They both agreed that the arrest was not the work of a low-level public security organization and was almost certainly the result of an order from above. How far above was anybody's guess.

"Wait a minute," Hong said. "You don't think your political study meeting was anything to do with this, do you? Could they have arranged it to make sure you were out of the way?"

"I have no idea at this point. Anything is possible, I suppose."

"Then we should confront that old fart of a party secretary and force him to come clean."

"There's no point. Even if he did know something, he would not tell us."

"What about President Yuan? He might know."

"Possibly, but he would be risking his job just by talking to us, and I don't want to put him in that position. Besides, what good would it do us?"

Hong suggested that they go to visit Prosecutor Ma again, but Chen doubted he would be willing to help after his last warning. In fact, it seemed, just about everyone was reluctant to talk. Nearly all of Chen's old friends and associates had become increasingly distant. Her sister and brother-in-law had made it very clear they, too, did not want any part of her problems. Her colleagues at the hospital, while being polite and superficially concerned with her welfare, were reluctant to indulge in anything more than small talk. All of Li's old colleagues and contacts were now under suspicion themselves and were determined to keep as low a profile as possible. Chen thought it was remarkable how, in the space of a month, they had gone from being one of the best-connected and influential families in Shanghai to virtual outcasts, social pariahs whom no one in their right mind would want to talk to.

It was obvious to Chen that they would have to rely on their own initiative if they were to get her son out of custody. The one lead they did have was the American airline that Dajun had been due to fly on. The staff at the check-in counter were bewildered by the incident but had promised Hong that they would tell the airline chief representative, an American

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national, about it. They said he was scheduled to be at the airport the following day, so Hong suggested they start there. With nothing else to go on, Chen agreed.

**Sunday, April 11, 1993 – At the Scene of the Crime**

The Shanghai government had introduced a new traffic control system designed to reduce the number of cars on the road in the run up to the East Asian Games. It was crude and not particularly effective. Vehicles with an odd-numbered licence plate could travel on one day, while vehicles with an even-numbered plate, on the next. Hong's car had an even-numbered license plate and that Sunday was an odd-numbered day. They would have to take a taxi.

Even with fewer cars on the road, there was no guarantee of smooth traffic. Someone driving a rickety old three-wheeled tractor-trailer had attempted a U-turn in the middle of the airport road and had been hit by an oncoming truck. The ensuing pile-up caused traffic to be backed up on both sides of the road for several kilometres. Their taxi's progress was slowed further by the incompetence of the police in clearing the accident site and the determination of other drivers to slow down to get a good look at the blood and destruction.

The taxi driver cursed the tractor driver, who he blamed for the accident, and all rural migrants, who he said were a menace on the road. They should all be banned from the city, he said. Chen and Hong did not argue. Like most Shanghainese with an inbuilt sense of superiority, they too looked down on the rural migrants who had been flooding into the city to work in low-paid, menial jobs in factories, or as domestic helpers and street cleaners. Chen, however, did have some sympathy for them. She knew very well that the hospital would not be able to function without the migrant workers who now made up the bulk of the orderlies, cleaners and security guards there.

When they did eventually reach Hongqiao Airport, they headed straight for the airline desk. The staff remembered Hong from the day before and immediately paged the chief representative. Before long, a slight young man with glasses and thinning blond hair walked up to them and introduced himself. He spoke flawless Chinese but with a slight Taiwanese accent. He was very apologetic:

"My staff telephoned yesterday to inform me of the incident involving your son. It is highly regrettable. Unfortunately, while I sympathize with your plight, there is very little I can do. You see, this is an internal matter and as a foreigner I can't get involved."

"But my son was a passenger on your airline," Chen said. "Surely you have to take some responsibility for what happened to him?"

"We are obviously very concerned when something like this happens to one of our customers, but, again, your son is a Chinese citizen and this is China, not the United States, so my hands are tied."

"I appreciate that, but can you at least give us some information about who the police officers were and where they might have taken him?"

"I'm afraid the whole incident happened so quickly that none of us here really knows who was involved or why your son was taken away. I tried to make some inquiries but could not find out anything. All I can suggest is that you go to the airport security office on the second floor and ask them."

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He offered to escort them to the security department, and as they were walking over, Hong asked him where he had learnt his Chinese. He had gone to primary school in Taiwan when his parents had been diplomats there in the late 1960s and later went to university there. He had been working in mainland China for the last five years, and stressed that he much preferred the mainland to Taiwan. Perhaps, Hong thought, he should have gone into the diplomatic service like his parents, rather than the airline industry. When they reached the security department, the diplomat's son bade them farewell, and they were faced with some altogether less pleasurable company.

Two men in dirty, ill-fitting uniforms were sitting on either side of a desk, drinking tea and smoking cigarettes. They studiously ignored Chen and Hong as they walked in. Chen asked to see the person in charge and was bluntly told there was no one in a position of responsibility available. She told them she would wait until the head of security materialized and she sat down in the plastic-covered armchair by the door. Hong demanded to know when their boss would arrive, but the two men just shrugged.

It was just before lunchtime when the head of the security department finally showed up. He looked at his unexpected guests and then at his subordinates at the desk. They remained seated and said nothing. Chen got to her feet and introduced herself.

"My name is Chen Lan, and I am the director of the obstetrics and gynaecology department at Shanghai General Hospital," she said, handing him her business card. "My daughter and I are here to discuss with you an incident involving my son, Li Dajun, that occurred here in the terminal building yesterday afternoon."

It took a few seconds before he finally realized what Chen was talking about.

"I see. Please come into my office. It will be more comfortable there," he said, leading them down a corridor to a door at the far end.

Once seated in the boss's office, Hong relayed in detail what had occurred and asked the head of security to explain why Dajun had been detained, and, crucially, where he was being held.

"First of all, my department was not involved in any way in the incident you have described," he said, trying his best to sound important. "Other departments were responsible for the apprehension of the criminal Li Dajun. I was simply notified that the action would be taken and to assist only if necessary."

Chen was astounded. "How dare you say my son is a criminal. What is he accused of?"

"I do not know. I was not informed of the crimes. But I can assure you that the departments concerned would not have taken such action unless your son had committed a criminal offense."

"Who are the departments concerned? I'll talk to them directly."

"I am not at liberty to divulge that information. It is confidential."

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The head of airport security was evidently under the impression that he had assisted in the arrest of a major criminal and was determined to play his part to the full. Chen was becoming irritated and decided to pull rank.

“I can assure you that my son has not committed any crimes and that the police who arrested him have made a very grave error. If you do not tell me who ordered and carried out my son’s detention so that I can resolve this problem, you too will be in a lot of trouble.”

He shifted nervously in his chair and stared at Chen, trying to work out whether she was bluffing or not.

“Director Chen, I have to follow the orders of my superiors, and so I can’t divulge that information. However,” he paused, searching for the right words, “it would be normal procedure in a case like this to take the person concerned to his local public security bureau branch office for questioning.”

“I see. Thank you for your cooperation. We won’t take up any more of your valuable time,” Chen said, getting to her feet and shaking his hand.

“Not at all. I hope this situation can be resolved properly,” he replied, suddenly all smiles.

“I hope so, too.”

Hong, who had been biting her tongue throughout the ordeal, let her feelings known as they closed the door behind them. “What a pompous asshole! But at least you got something out of him, Mom. I was well impressed.”

They decided to head back into town and grab some lunch before visiting the public security bureau. Their cab was again held up by the accident which had delayed their journey to the airport earlier in the morning. The beaten-up old tractor trailer was still lying in the middle of the road, and the jack-knifed truck was still blocking the two east-bound lanes. The police officers on site were standing around, not even bothering to direct traffic. Drivers were forced to manoeuvre all over the place, along the bicycle lane, up on the sidewalk, and on the wrong side of the road in an attempt to get by.

“Great work, guys,” Hong shouted out of the window at the cops as they passed by. “God, I hope we can find a police officer in town who actually knows what he is doing.”

Although Dajun had been living in the United States for the last five years and had a green card there, the registered address on his Chinese identification card was still Kangping Road. It did not matter to the authorities if you had been living abroad for ten or even twenty years; even if you had a foreign passport, once you were back in the mainland you were still a Chinese citizen, subject to all the restrictions everyone else had to put up with. In some ways, those people with foreign passports or permanent residency abroad had a worse time than normal citizens because jealous officials would often take it upon themselves to make their lives a misery simply because they had something that the officials could only dream of.

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Chen remembered a couple of family friends who came back to China after spending six years in New Zealand. They were setting up a leather goods factory down the coast, in Ningbo, and they arranged for a loan of two million yuan from a local credit cooperative to get the business up and running. But somehow the official who introduced the couple to the credit cooperative had the money transferred to his own bank account, then withdrew the two million yuan in cash and promptly disappeared. The managing director of the credit cooperative then sued the couple for the two million yuan. When they refused to pay, the managing director asked his brother, who was a deputy section chief at the local public security bureau, to seize all their assets in Shanghai. One evening, the police turned up at their apartment, confiscated their car, arrested the husband and broadcast to the whole neighbourhood that they were taking an economic criminal and swindler into detention. As far as Chen knew, the husband was still in detention awaiting trial.

In order to ascertain the public security sub-bureau responsible for Kangping Road residents, Chen just had to look at her own ID card. The issuing authority's office was on Hengshan Road and comprised two three-storey office buildings that had seen better days, on either side of a narrow courtyard. The courtyard was crammed with police vehicles and several unmarked cars, including a large black Mercedes with tinted windows. A uniformed officer was washing the Mercedes and there were several other people hanging around, but none of them paid any attention to Chen and Hong as they walked in. Chen walked up to the man by the Mercedes and asked him where she should go make a report. He looked up from his work, took a drag on his cigarette and studied her suspiciously for a moment.

"I don't know," he said, "I'm not from this unit. Go and ask at that door over there." He waved his nicotine-stained hand at a small unmarked doorway in the building on the left of the courtyard.

The doorway led to a small office divided by a counter, behind which two young officers were slouched, reading magazines.

"Excuse me, comrades, I wonder if you could help me."

The elder one glanced at his colleague and then finally looked up at Chen. He was about thirty years old and wore thick black-rimmed glasses that gave him a bookish, almost effeminate appearance. "What is it?" he demanded.

"My son was arrested yesterday and I was told he was being held here. His name is Li Dajun. He is a businessman."

There was a long silence before the bookish one spoke again.

"I don't know anything about that," he said suddenly, finding a really interesting passage in his magazine.

"Well, perhaps you can put me in contact with someone who does know something about it," Chen said, trying to maintain her composure.

The bookworm glanced up again. "There is no responsible person here now."

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"Listen to me, young man," Chen snapped. "This is a very important matter and I am not leaving until I get some information about my son. I suggest you go and find someone in position of authority right now."

He groaned loudly and rummaged through his desk before pulling out a crudely printed form.

"Fill this in," he said, pushing the slip of paper toward Chen.

"This is crime report form," she said after glancing at the paper. "I'm not here to report a crime but to get information about my son."

"There is no form for that, you have to fill this one in," he said, his eyes still fixed on the magazine.

"But it is not the appropriate form. How can I fill in a crime report form if there is no crime to report?"

He snatched the form back and tore a blank sheet of paper off a note pad and thrust it front of Chen.

"Fill that in," he ordered, "name, work unit, address, age, sex and nationality. Describe the incident you have mentioned. Sign your name and put the date at the bottom."

She filled out the paper as instructed and handed it back to the bookworm. After reading it through, he decreed it was not good enough. He wanted more personal details about Dajun. Chen filled in the missing details and handed the sheet back to him.

"Wait here," he said and disappeared into a back room.

They waited for almost 20 minutes before the bookworm returned. He said nothing, just sat down at his desk and buried his nose in his magazine again.

"Excuse me," Chen said approaching the counter again, "Can I see a responsible officer now?"

"Wait here," was the gruff response.

Another 20 minutes passed before a fat, middle aged man with prematurely grey hair entered the room from the back door. He conferred with his two younger colleagues for a while, then walked to the counter and addressed Chen.

"You are Chen Lan of the Shanghai General Hospital?"

"That is correct."

"You say you are the mother of Li Dajun?"

"That is also correct." she said. "This is my daughter, Li Hong."

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“Show me your identification cards.”

He studied their ID cards, made some notes and placed the cards down on the counter next to the form Chen had filled in.

“Who told you that your son was being detained at this facility?”

“I was told by a member of the Hongqiao Airport security department that he would be held at his local public security bureau branch. This is the branch responsible for residents of Kangping Road is it not?”

“Who in the security department told you this? What is his name?”

“I didn’t catch his name, but I think he was quite senior.”

“What were you doing at the airport security department?”

“I went there to find out what happened to my son. It is only natural for a mother to worry about her son after he has been arrested.”

“Your son has not been arrested. He is under investigation.”

At last someone was willing to admit that they knew something about the case.

“Well, if he has not been arrested then I demand to see him,” Chen said.

“That is not possible, as it would prejudice the investigation. We have very strict regulations about not allowing visits during an investigation.”

“I just want to see him. I don't have to talk to him—I just want to see that he is alright.”

“I’ve already told you that is not possible.”

“But you admit he is being held at this branch?” she asked, increasingly desperate for any scrap of information.

“I did not say that. All I can tell you is that your son is under investigation and that he is being well-treated. All his rights will be observed.”

“What is he being investigated for? He hasn’t committed any crime. He just returned home due to death of his father.”

“That is for us to determine. As for the subject of the investigation, that is confidential. I cannot give you any information on that subject.”

“By confidential,” Hong asked, “do you mean it is a state security matter?”

The fat man hesitated. “That is none of your concern, Miss.”

No matter how they tried to get some information out of him, the fat man just spouted public security bureau regulations about confidentiality and the need to safeguard the



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investigation from outside influences. After going around in circles for what seemed an eternity, Chen concluded it was a waste of time to continue. She asked for their identity cards back, but she was told they would have to answer some questions before they could go.

“What!? Are we under investigation now?” Chen shouted in exasperation.

“No,” the fat man replied, “but we need some more information from you before we can let you go.”

He looked down at his notes again and then the interrogation began. When had Dajun returned from the United States? Where had he stayed whilst in Shanghai? What places had he visited, who had he met, and what had he discussed with the people he met?

They protested that they had not been with him at all times. In fact, they had only seen him a few times during his visit. This was not good enough for the fat man and he pressed on, warning them that withholding information germane to the investigation or providing false information was a criminal offense.

He was particularly eager to know if Dajun had any contact with Gu Lianhua during his visit. However, he did not ask about Chen’s visit to Gao’an Road. Perhaps he was unaware of that incident.

He also wanted to know if Dajun had left any papers or documents at the Kangping Road apartment. Chen told him that, as far as she was aware, all his papers were kept at his hotel, but the fat man did not seem convinced. He threatened to order a search of the apartment, and Chen told him to go right ahead because he wouldn’t find anything.

By the time the fat man was satisfied with their answers and had handed their ID cards back, it was already getting dark and noticeably cooler outside. As she was leaving, Chen noticed that the officer who had been washing the Mercedes was still there, sitting in the driver’s seat, with the window rolled down smoking a cigarette.

Something told her that Dajun was in that building somewhere and that whoever owned that car was in there with him.

**Wednesday, April 14, 1993 – Sisterly Advice**

The fat man had told them they would be informed of any “developments” in Dajun’s case, but they doubted he would live up to his word. He did not strike them as the most sympathetic or trustworthy individual in the world.

Chen went back to the police station the next day and the day after, only to be confronted by the impassive stare of the bookworm and his silent sidekick. The bookworm refused to answer any of her questions, saying only that she would be notified of the situation in due course. Chen did not expect to get any more information, but she was certain her son was in that building somewhere and she just wanted to feel closer to him. On each occasion, the black Mercedes was parked there, further reinforcing her conviction that someone very senior was involved in the so-called investigation.

It did not take long for news of her son’s detention to get out. Whenever Chen entered a work meeting, the room would suddenly fall silent. No one would talk to her unless they absolutely had to. It was as if mere contact could lead to dire consequences. Even her sister began to feel the cold stare of outsiders, and her brother-in-law at the *Liberation Daily* was explicitly warned by the head of the paper’s party committee not to get involved in the case.

A few days after the detention, Chen’s sister stopped by for a visit. She was normally the picture of poise and composure, but on this occasion, she was noticeably on edge.

“This is not easy for me,” she said, sitting stiffly on the living room sofa. “You know I am very fond of Dajun. He was always my favourite nephew. But this thing is very serious, and it could have some very unfortunate repercussions for all of us.”

“What are you trying to say?” Chen said. Her sister had an annoying habit of always beating around the bush when faced with an awkward situation and taking forever to get to the point.

“It’s like this. People are already beginning to talk. The word is that Dajun was detained in connection with the investigation into his father, and it is possible that other members of our family could be implicated as well.”

“Really?” Chen said. “And who exactly is saying this?”

“People who should know. My husband is getting very nervous. We both think that none of us should do anything to aggravate the situation.”

“What do you mean by ‘aggravating the situation’?”

“Well, we think you shouldn’t cause any more trouble by going to the police and causing a fuss like you have been doing. Just lay off for a little while and hope that Dajun will be released before too long.”

“You’re saying I just let him stay in detention and carry on as if nothing has happened? What kind of a mother do you think I am? If your son was in the same situation, would you just ignore him? I don't think so.”

“Please don’t get upset,” she said. “I am saying this for your own good. You won’t achieve anything by going around to the police station every day. You will only make them suspicious of you, and that will not benefit Dajun or any of us one little bit.”

“But he is my eldest son. I can’t pretend that nothing has happened. I’ve lost my husband, and I’ll be damned if I lose my son as well.”

“Now listen to me, and listen very carefully. You are going to have to set aside your personal feelings in this matter and think rationally about it. Making a big fuss about this will only make matters worse—believe me, I know. Try to cooperate with the police and don’t under any circumstances antagonize them further. That is the only way you are going to get Dajun back. If Dajun is innocent, then you will have nothing to worry about, but by causing trouble you will only make things more difficult for him.”

“What do you mean ‘if’ Dajun is innocent? Do you think he is a criminal?” Chen said, raising her voice.

“I didn’t say that. I’m sure he has done nothing wrong. It’s just that there are a lot of things about this case we don’t understand. We have to keep an open mind and remain calm and rational about this.”

Chen’s elder sister had always been the calm and rational one in the family, so Chen was not surprised that she would adopt such a cold and detached attitude towards her self-proclaimed favourite nephew. She was probably right that making a fuss would only cause more trouble, but Chen could not help feeling, based on her past actions, that her sister was acting more out of self-interest than genuine concern for the family.

Chen’s sister was six years her senior, and as a child Chen was never in a position to challenge her wisdom. Even as adult, Chen still had to defer to her in just about everything. Their parents too often followed her lead, believing that, in the New China, she was the one who should chart the direction of the family. Their father, rightly or wrongly, believed she was in the best position to understand and cope with the demands of the new society, a society he claimed was just too different from the one he had grown up in. Their brother had died in the Japanese bombing of 1937, making the elder sister the most senior of the children.

Her first family leadership role came soon after Liberation, when she was still a student at Fudan University and very much caught up in the passion and fanaticism of creating the New China. At the beginning of 1952, the party launched the Five-Anti campaign against the urban bourgeoisie and industrialists who had stayed on after the People’s Liberation Army entered Shanghai in May 1949. Their father, as the owner of a prominent textile manufacturing and trading company, was an obvious target. Although he tried to be a benevolent capitalist and had treated his workers much better than most during the hyperinflation and shortages of the late 1940s, several of his employees wrote letters of

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denunciation accusing him of bribery, tax evasion and the theft of state property, three of five vices the campaign was designed to root out. Chen remembered her father angrily protesting his innocence when a propaganda team came to their house to accuse him of these crimes, but her sister, who was an enthusiastic member of the Communist Youth League, persuaded him that he needed to make a confession if he was to become a legitimate member of the new people's democratic dictatorship. It was necessary, she said, to turn over a completely new leaf and confess to the sins of his past. Failure to do so would only cause greater hardship for the family.

In the end, after weeks of criticism meetings and mobs of activists with loudspeakers denouncing their father in front of his factory workers, he followed his eldest daughter's advice and made a "voluntary" confession in which he admitted illegally obtaining a large but unspecified amount of money and goods. This confession was eventually accepted and he was ordered to pay a fine for his crimes. Chen never found out exactly how much the fine was, but her sister convinced the family it was a lot less than the penalty which would have been imposed if he had not confessed.

Indeed, Chen knew of some capitalists who had been fined huge sums, becoming permanently indebted to the government. When the campaign was declared a victory at the end of April 1952, their father's companies were categorized as "basically law-abiding," which Chen's sister pointed out was a lot better than the semi law-abiding or serious law-breaking categories some of their father's hapless colleagues found themselves in.

Chen's sister was praised for her role in the campaign and assigned a plum job at the Shanghai People's Publishing House when she graduated. Following the Five-Anti campaign, their father rapidly lost interest in business and, at the age of 49, went into semi-retirement. In 1955, again at the urging of his elder daughter, he finally sold all his interests in textiles, real estate, manufacturing and shipping to the state and retired into his world of classical literature, poetry and painting.

His retirement was rudely interrupted during the Cultural Revolution, when the Red Guards accused both their parents of being capitalist exploiters and imperialist lackeys. Chen's sister, who was being struggled against at the publishing house, denounced their parents—but not quite to the full extent demanded by the most zealous of the Red Guards. She accused them of clinging to old ideas and of refusing to reform their thought and serve Chairman Mao.

Her denunciation probably saved her from a worse fate than the demotion she suffered at the publishing house, but it cost their father his cherished collection of books, scrolls and antiques. Over half the collection was destroyed when the Red Guards stormed their parents' apartment, and the surviving artwork was placed in storage. The property was returned in 1977, but by then it was too late. Their father had died of a stroke two years earlier. It was a comparatively mild stroke, and he could have been saved if the right medical facilities were available, but they weren't and there was nothing Chen, still confined as a factory worker, could do.

Their mother was heartbroken and died four years later. Chen's sister always maintained their parents' lives would have been made a misery if she had not intervened to get the

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severity of the charges against them reduced. She said their father would have been imprisoned and probably tortured if the zealots had won the day and that having their property confiscated was a small price to pay. "Who needs that old stuff anyway?" she had said. Funny then, Chen thought, that it was her sister who, without asking, took possession of nearly all the antiquities bequeathed by their mother.

### **Thursday, April 15, 1993 – Shelter and Investigation**

The day after her sister's visit, Chen received a note in the mail from the public security bureau. It was a small, badly printed form on poor quality paper, on which a few details of her son's case had been inked in by hand. The note stated simply that Li Dajun was being held by the local public security bureau under a "shelter and investigation" order for unspecified "illegal activities."

It was not much to go on. The vague term "illegal activities" didn't really add much to the store of knowledge, but at least it was an official acknowledgement that he had been taken into detention. But what on earth was "shelter and investigation"? It was not a term Chen had heard of before, certainly not in the context of a police action. It sounded almost humanitarian, having connotations of taking in wounded soldiers or waifs and strays and providing food and shelter for them, nursing their wounds and tending to their needs before sending them on their way.

Chen could not imagine why the police would want to take in and shelter someone they had accused of illegal activities, but then again, a lot of words which meant one thing when she was growing up had been turned around and transformed into something completely different over the past forty years. Chen thought it was possible that such a seemingly benevolent phrase could be just another way of saying arrest or detention, but she wanted to get some legal advice to confirm it one way or another.

Finding a lawyer was not an easy task. Chen had never needed a criminal defence lawyer before, and she didn't really know where to start. Ma Guoqiang was still off limits, and Chen feared that even asking friends or colleagues for advice could cause them trouble. Most law firms in Shanghai specialized in economic cases, contract disputes, debt defaults and accusations of embezzlement and swindling. Criminal defence lawyers were usually appointed by the court handling the case and could be relied upon not to put up a particularly vigorous defence. Chen called a few law firms that were listed in the directory, but none of them were willing to make an appointment, let alone agree to take her case.

There was one option, however, that Chen thought worth pursuing. Shanghai's first and only private detective agency had been set up the previous year by a group of retired police officers, and it had received a lot of publicity in the local media for their crime-busting activities: following unfaithful husbands and wives, tracking down stolen property, and the like. While she doubted that they would be able crack her son's case, she thought they might at least be able to offer some advice.

The detective agency was located in a small run-down apartment building near the junction of Beijing and Fujian Roads. A lot of the buildings in that downtown area had already been knocked down or were in the process of being demolished prior to redevelopment, so Chen had to pick her way across a construction site to get there. None of the construction workers could tell her where the building was. They were all migrant workers unfamiliar with the city.

She eventually found a local resident who directed her to the correct building. Chen walked up three flights of stairs, along a dimly lit corridor, and to a door at the end with a sheet of

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paper taped to it, bearing the name of the agency. The detectives, it seemed, were not that concerned with making a good first impression.

The door was slightly ajar. Chen knocked and entered the cramped, poorly lit room. A woman in her early forties with thick-rimmed glasses and a bad perm looked up from her desk and asked her what she wanted. Chen gave her name and explained that she had phoned earlier to make an appointment. The woman at the desk shuffled through the jumble of papers on her desk and told her to wait while she fetched the “chief detective.”

The chief detective turned out to be a tall, heavily set man with thinning grey hair, who must have been at least seventy years old. He walked in a slow, labored shuffling motion and had difficulty sitting back down in his office chair. Chen explained what had happened to her son, almost shouting at times to make herself heard, and then handed him the note from the public security bureau. He picked up a magnifying glass from his desk and, with both hands shaking, studied the note carefully.

“Your son is being held by the public security bureau under a shelter and investigation order,” he said, putting the magnifying glass down with a clatter.

Chen waited for him to continue but he just sat there as if this observation explained everything.

“I know that,” she said, “but what does it mean? How long will he be in detention, and can I visit him?”

“It is like this,” he said in slow drawl. “Your son is being held with regard to an investigation into his criminal activities. As such, you cannot visit him now, because that would interfere with the investigation. After three months, the public security bureau will determine if there is enough evidence to issue a formal arrest warrant. Then, once your son has been sentenced, you will be allowed monthly visits, provided, of course, that he complies with prison rules.”

“How can you just assume my son is guilty? You know next to nothing about this case. I have told you nothing of the background circumstances yet.”

“There is no need to shout,” he said. “I’m not deaf, you know.” He rearranged his large torso in his seat.

“I do not need to know the case details. It is for the relevant departments to determine whether your son has committed any illegal activities. And in my experience, the public security bureau does not detain anyone without a very good reason. Nearly all criminals brought into detention are found guilty by the courts. In fact, 99 percent of all criminals detained are eventually found guilty by the people’s courts, and I have no reason to believe this case is any different.”

Chen had had enough. This old policeman was simply repeating everything the officer at the local police station had told her. She stood up, picked up the note from the public security bureau and was about to leave when the woman with the perm demanded a “consultation fee” of one hundred yuan. Chen was stunned. She told the woman in no uncertain terms

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that her consultation was not worth one yuan, let alone one hundred, but she did want to risk being accused of theft. She looked in her purse and handed the woman two ten yuan notes. The receptionist looked at the money for a moment and said, "Do you need a receipt?"



**Friday, April 23, 1993 - Attorney Huang**

The detective agency may have been a bust, but Hong had also been thinking about where to find a sympathetic lawyer and had come up with an idea.

“You remember Xiaojun’s friend, Jacob Heller, at the Australian consulate?” she asked her mother. “He studied Chinese law and would probably know several criminal defence lawyers in Shanghai. And I’m sure he already knows about Dajun’s detention. He is very well-informed about that kind of thing, so he might be expecting to hear from you anyway.”

“That may be the case,” Chen said, “but I don’t think we should be involving foreigners in this matter. This whole thing started with suspicions about your father’s involvement with the Americans and bringing Jacob into the case could further complicate matters. And Jacob is very, what’s the word? Flamboyant.”

Chen remembered that when Xiaojun had first met Jacob back in the spring of 1987, it was as extras on the set of Stephen Spielberg’s *Empire of the Sun*. Just about every foreign student in Shanghai at the time had been recruited to the project but, at every turn, Xiaojun said that Jacob was determined to catch the director’s eye.

Hong tried to reassure her mother. “I know but he is more discreet these days. And all you have to do is ask for his advice and the name of a good lawyer, that’s all. What harm could it do to just meet him and talk about it?”

However, even just calling the consulate entailed risk. Ma Guoqiang had warned her that it was the standard policy of the State Security Ministry to record all phone calls and fax messages to and from foreign diplomatic missions as well as to follow diplomats suspected of being spies. Chen decided to call from a public telephone at the end of Kangping Road and talk very vaguely about the possibility of meeting for lunch sometime.

On the call, Jacob seemed to know what was going on and kept his own comments as bland and innocent as possible. He did not arrange a time and place for lunch over the phone but said he would let Chen know when it would be possible to meet.

The next morning, one of the drivers from the consulate arrived at her office with a sealed letter stating simply the name of a restaurant and the time she should be there. The restaurant was a small, privately run establishment on Urumqi Road, not far from the consulate and just down the road from Hong’s apartment on Anfu Road. In fact, Chen recalled, it was directly opposite the disappointing western restaurant that Hong had insisted they try a few weeks earlier.

Chen arrived on time, but when she approached the entrance, she saw a notice hanging on the door saying that the restaurant was closed. She checked the address again. It was definitely the right place, but there was no sign of Jacob or anybody else inside. She was about to leave when the door opened, and a man with a grease-stained apron poked his head out.

“Director Chen Lan?” he said in a low whisper. “We have been expecting you. Please come in.”

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As she entered the deserted restaurant, Jacob emerged from the kitchen. "I must apologize for the precautions, but I understand your situation is rather delicate, so I thought it would be best if we met in a safe place with no one else around."

Chen said she appreciated his efforts but thought to herself Jacob's cloak-and-dagger performance was a little over the top.

"Let me introduce you to the owner," Jacob continued. "This is Wang Dayue. He and his brothers have run this place for the last six years."

"Welcome," Wang said, enthusiastically shaking Chen's hand. "Please sit down and have some tea. Do you prefer oolong or jasmine?"

Chen ordered oolong, and they took their places at the only table set for lunch while Wang disappeared into the kitchen.

"You can trust Wang. He is an old friend, and he owes me a favour or two," Jacob said as he poured the tea. "His two brothers are in Australia now." If this piece of information was supposed to impress Chen, she did not betray any emotion.

"I was very sorry to hear about Dajun," he continued. "You must be extremely worried, but I think I can help you."

"That is very kind of you, but I don't want to get you or your wife into any trouble. You have already been of great help to our family, particularly to Xiaojun, and we are already in your debt."

"Think nothing of it. Xiaojun is a good friend, and I was glad to help. Now, I understand you are looking for a lawyer to help with Dajun's case, is that correct?"

"How did you know about that?" Chen said, slightly bewildered.

"It is no secret. Everyone around town is talking about it. A lot of lawyers are nervous about taking the case because they say the State Security Ministry is involved but I know one guy who is willing to help you. He is a very well-respected and competent defence attorney. I have already taken the liberty of calling him and he is more than happy to talk to you if you want to peruse this."

"It was not necessary for you to do that, but thank you anyway. Tell me about this lawyer. How do you know him?"

"We have a list of local lawyers at the consulate who we can contact if an Australian citizen is arrested and put on trial in Shanghai. This man, his name is Huang Zhengyi, defended an Australian student who was caught trying to smuggle eight kilograms of hashish out of Shanghai a couple of years ago. I don't know if you remember that case at all?"

Chen vaguely recalled reading something in the newspapers about it but could not remember the details. She asked Jacob to continue.

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“Anyway. There was no doubt this guy was guilty. He was caught with the stuff strapped to his chest and legs, but Huang put up a really solid defence. He argued that since hashish was a soft drug, the defendant should not be sentenced to the terms specified in the criminal law because the provisions were based on hard drugs like cocaine and heroin. And he was successful. The court only sentenced the defendant to four years in jail and a small fine. Other foreign drug smugglers have gotten 15 years in jail for similar offenses. The point is that Huang is not afraid to take on the system. In fact, I think he actually enjoys making trouble for the authorities. I don’t know if he can get your son out of detention, but I’m sure he will try. This is just the kind of challenge he relishes.”

Chen thought this lawyer was quite a character. His methods were dangerously confrontational, but he was probably the only viable candidate. She told Jacob she would make an appointment to see Huang.

“Good. Here is his office and home address and telephone number,” he said, reaching into his velvet jacket pocket and handing her a carefully folded sheet of consulate notepaper. “I happen to know that he has a fairly open schedule tomorrow.”

At that point, Wang arrived with the food: shredded chicken in sesame sauce, sautéed eel, carp with ginger and spring onions, and a couple vegetable dishes. It was good, honest fare, nothing fancy. Chen made a note to recommend it to her daughter if she was looking for a good neighbourhood restaurant.

As they ate, they talked about how Xiaojun was enjoying his new life in Australia, and how fortunate he had been to meet his partner Susan, who could look after him and help him adjust to his new environment. Chen happened to know that Jacob’s new wife also wanted to move to a new life in Australia; in fact, according to her parents, this was a major factor in her agreeing to the marriage, but this was evidently a touchy subject for Jacob and Chen did not pursue it. Instead, Jacob talked about his own plans for a range of artistic and creative projects which would keep him busy in Shanghai for several years to come.

At the conclusion of the meal, Jacob said he would stay a while longer because he had some business to discuss with Wang. After saying their goodbyes, Chen stepped outside and unlocked her bike. Two men in leather jackets and dark glasses were watching her from the other side of the street.

A few weeks ago, Chen would have been alarmed, but now she hardly batted an eyelid. This was part of her life now. As long as they just followed at a respectable distance and didn’t try to approach her, she felt safe. She actually felt quite sorry for them. It must be a very boring job, following her around all day. As she cycled back home, Chen occasionally glanced over her shoulder. They were always there, about 50 metres behind, expressionless, plodding along like remote-controlled robots.

The same two men were with her the next day as she made her way down Huaihai Road to Huang’s office. The congestion caused by the rain and road works made it difficult for them to keep up, and on at least one occasion they had to run a red light, ignoring the rantings and whistle-blowing of a particularly vigilant crossing guard. Chen slowed down to make sure they got back to their requisite 50-metre distance before picking up the pace again.

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There was no point in trying to lose them, as they would probably get into trouble with their bosses and that, in turn, would make life more difficult for her. Besides, she figured, she had nothing to hide in going to see a lawyer. It was the natural course to take for someone whose son had been detained.

Huang's firm, Shanghai International Business and Legal Consultants, was located on the fifth floor of a relatively new office building near the Jinjiang Hotel, right at the heart of the city's business community. There was a large brass plaque beside the door, and the walls of the lobby were plastered with the certificates and awards, some from colleges in the United States, handed out to the law firm's partners. Chen was greeted by a young receptionist who informed her that Huang would be with her shortly.

While Chen waited, the receptionist sat at her desk answering the telephone and admiring her nails but immediately jumped to her feet to when Huang entered the lobby. She introduced Chen to her boss.

Huang was dressed in a well-cut, dark grey western business suit with a silk tie and wore gold-rimmed glasses. His jet-black hair was swept back neatly over his forehead and seemed unnaturally dark and luxuriant for a man in his fifties. It was only later that Chen noticed the tell-tale bottle of 101 hair formula in his office. Her husband had occasionally used 101 when his grey patches began to stand out, but this man was clearly a regular user. There was not a speck of grey to be found anywhere on his head.

Huang had evidently been well briefed on the events and background surrounding both Li's and Dajun's cases. He told Chen that he would be able to help, but at a price: US\$100 an hour, to be precise. That was about 900 yuan at the swap market rate, nearly Chen's entire monthly salary.

"I realize it sounds like a lot of money," Huang said, sensing her incredulity, "but let me explain why the fee is so high. This law firm is, I think, the best in Shanghai. We have the best trained lawyers and a very talented selection of interns as well as an extensive legal library. Most of our clients are businesses who are willing to pay good money for sound legal advice because they know that will save them money in the future. We do not usually take on individual clients, except for foreigners who obviously can afford to pay more, so your case is somewhat unusual. What I am prepared to do is this: Your first consultation will be free of charge. If you are satisfied, we can then arrange for further work to be undertaken on your case."

Chen was not sure if she could trust this somewhat bombastic individual, and his fee was simply outrageous, but her instincts told her there was some real substance behind all the show. She handed him the note she'd received from the public security bureau, and he took one quick look before dropping it down on his desk and gently sighing.

"I'm afraid this is a very common abuse of power. Strictly speaking, it is inappropriate for the public security organs to use shelter and investigation to detain people such as your son, but, unfortunately, they do it all the time in cases where it is unclear what crime, if any, has been committed. Several legal papers have been written criticizing this practice, but I'm sad to say it continues unabated."

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“So, what you are saying is that the police have acted illegally in detaining my son? If that is the case, we can make a protest and get him out.”

“Don’t get too optimistic, Director Chen. Technically, it is illegal, but let me explain.” Huang settled back in his chair and folded his hands together. “Shelter and investigation is supposed to be used only in those cases where the identity of a defendant is unclear or the defendant is some kind of itinerant or gang member, roaming around the country, committing illegal acts at random. Obviously, neither of those cases apply to your son. However, shelter and investigation is one of several ways the public security organs can detain someone for a lengthy period of time without actually arresting them for a particular offense. It is used frequently in what some people call political cases. Now, while I would hesitate to label your son’s case as political, there are certain similarities, namely the involvement of higher-level authorities and what would seem to be a foreign dimension. In these cases, it is very difficult to free the defendant simply on the grounds of procedural misconduct.”

“What do you suggest we do then?” Chen asked.

“All I can do at the moment is write a letter to the relevant public security department requesting an explanation of why your son is being held under a shelter and investigation order when his identity and status is well-known. It might not lead to anything, but at least we will have an inquiry on the record. I will need some details from you. For a start, was your son carrying his identity card with him at the time of his detention?”

“Yes, he always carries it with him when he is here. And he must have had his passport and American green card, because he was right at the airport.”

“Good. And was any attempt made by the police involved to explain why your son was being detained, either to him or to other members of your family?”

Huang combed through the whole episode, asking detailed questions about the actual detention, the events leading up to it, the police surveillance and Chen’s attempts to see her son. When he was satisfied that he had all the information he needed, he carefully placed his expensive-looking fountain pen down next to a silver ink well and sat back in his seat again.

“Very good. I will draft a letter to the public security bureau this afternoon and of course I’ll let you know immediately if there are any developments. Again, there will be no charge for this initial consultation, but, if you wish to retain my services, I will have to bill you at my usual rate.”

The thought of a huge legal bill on top of all her other troubles certainly gave Chen a moment’s pause, but in the end, she agreed to Huang’s terms. She was not at all optimistic, but it was the only plausible option she had. Also, she was intrigued by this charismatic individual. She was not particularly impressed by the expensive suit and accessories—although he did carry them off rather well. What attracted her was his mind. He had immediately understood her situation, explained the problem and offered a tentative solution without over-promising anything. He was successful but still committed to basic

principles of justice. He was confident in his own abilities but not arrogant. And unlike many men of his age, he had not talked down to her.

On the slow ride home, Chen wondered what her late husband would have made of Attorney Huang. He was very suspicious of lawyers, assuming they were just out to make money by drawing up long, complicated contracts to close a deal when a handshake should be sufficient.

When Chen returned home she was surprised to find her daughter ensconced in her living room sofa under a low cloud of cigarette smoke.

“Do you think this attorney of yours handles divorce cases?” she asked when her mother entered the room.

“That fucker’s gone! No discussion, no goodbye. Just packed his bags and left. I came home from work at lunchtime and there was this note on the table.” She handed her mother a single sheet of office stationery on which Gao had written in rudimentary calligraphy:

*I am leaving. I can't stay in Shanghai any longer. The situation has become too difficult. I'm moving to Beijing to work in my company's office there. Please do not try to contact me. I will let you know if and when I plan to return.*

Chen stared at the note for a while, trying to disguise her relief. She had never liked her son-in-law. He was a shallow opportunist, and she had counselled Hong more than once not to rush into marriage prematurely. She was glad he was gone but tried to be diplomatic.

“How are you feeling? I know you must be upset but it probably is for the best. You would only have been miserable if he had stayed.”

“I guess so,” Hong said, lighting up another cigarette. “You know, I really tried to overcome our issues and make the marriage work. I just feel like such a failure. I mean there are two sides to every relationship, right? And I know I can be a difficult person to live with at times.”

“Don’t blame yourself. It wasn’t your fault he left. The situation was completely beyond your control, and, besides, as I’ve told you hundred times, you would need the patience and benevolence of the Buddha to deal with that man.”

Chen was convinced there was no point in Hong trying to save this doomed enterprise. She told her daughter that, if she was serious about divorce, she would ask Huang about it the next time she saw him.

(In a footnote to this chapter, we should note that the shelter and investigation system was formally abolished with the amendment of China’s *Criminal Procedure Law* in 1996. However, the procedure has now been replaced by the equally euphemistic “residential surveillance at a designated location,” which functions in exactly the same way and is used extensively by the state to keep troublemakers out of sight while they are investigated/interrogated.)

**Thursday, May 6, 1993 – The Officer in Charge**

Chen was in a meeting of the Women's Federation Standing Committee when Attorney Huang sent an urgent note about a "breakthrough" in her case. Chen was anxious to discover more but was reluctant to leave the meeting. The Women's Federation had been just about the only group not to completely ostracize Chen since her husband's death. Her fellow committee members continued to treat her with the courtesy and respect they had always accorded her, and the meetings provided her with a kind of sanctuary from her troubles. The committee members were all well aware of the cloud above her head but, unlike her co-workers at the hospital and most other professional associates, they chose to ignore it.

Most of the women on the standing committee were, like Chen, middle-aged, middle-ranking officials in the fields of education, culture and medicine, usually married to party members or higher-ranking officials. There was not one woman on the committee who actually outranked her husband. Although they were not close friends, they felt some kind of connection or commonality which made working together far more pleasant than Chen's other civic obligation, the Shanghai People's Political Consultative Conference, which was just one long tedious meeting after another.

The committee was discussing a series of complaints they had received from female university students who were still required to get higher grades than their male colleagues in order to get the same job opportunities. It was an important, long-standing problem, and Chen was determined to see the meeting through. Besides, if she left the meeting early, that would only arouse suspicion.

Thankfully, Huang's office was not too far away, and Chen hurried over there at the conclusion of her meeting.

"I have some good news for you, Director Chen," Huang said, as Chen stepped into his office. "It is very rare for the public security bureau to respond so quickly, particularly in a case where technically they do not have to respond at all. This shows they are taking your son's case very seriously." He delved into his briefcase, pulled out a single-page letter and placed it on the desk in front of her.

"As you can see, this notice is from the municipal bureau headquarters and names the officer in charge of your son's case. I cannot stress enough what a breakthrough this is. It is almost unheard of for such information to be given out before a formal arrest is made. Please read the letter carefully, and I will be happy to answer any questions you have afterwards. This is still part of the initial consultation, so no charge."

*From the desk of Superintendent (1<sup>st</sup> Grade) Cui Xiongjian.*

*With regard to your letter of April 23, 1993, Li Dajun, male, age 29, Han nationality, of Kangping Road, Shanghai, was detained according to law by officers of the Shanghai Municipal Public Security Bureau on April 10, 1993, at Hongqiao International Airport as he was attempting to flee the country.*

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*Li Dajun is being held under a shelter and investigation order issued by this department in connection with a wide-ranging investigation into the activities of a criminal clique. Li Dajun will be held under the order until the extent of his involvement in the activities of the criminal clique is determined. Once his role has been determined, the appropriate action will be taken by this department.*

*With regard to your questioning of the legality of the order, Li Dajun's legal and constitutional rights have been respected at all times. He is being well-treated and as a special dispensation, family members will be permitted to send his personal items to this office, should he request them.*

After reading through the letter carefully a second time, Chen was at a loss to see why Huang considered this to be such good news. It seemed that the public security bureau had already determined that her son was part of a criminal conspiracy and their only concern was to establish how deeply he was involved. The phrase “attempting to flee the country” particularly bothered her. Surely Dajun had explained to them why he had to return to the United States. He had documents to back up this claim.

Huang explained that the public security bureau always assumes criminal guilt during its investigations.

“They will not admit they are wrong or even allow the suggestion that they might be mistaken. It would be a loss of face,” he said. “The fact that they have not arrested your son yet shows they have not yet gathered sufficient evidence to hand the case over to the prosecutor’s office. As such, I still think there is a chance your son could be released before too long. Of course, there is no guarantee as to how long this pre-arrest investigation will last. It could be several months but I still think there is cause for optimism.”

Huang went on to suggest that Chen request a personal meeting with the officer in charge, Superintendent Cui, in order to find out the exact status of the investigation and request in-person permission to see her son.

To their surprise, the public security bureau agreed, and Chen was told to report to the main administrative office on Fuzhou Road on the morning of May 6. It was a grey, forbidding building just a couple of blocks from the municipal party and government headquarters on The Bund. That morning, the edifice appeared even more menacing, enveloped by the low cloud and rain that had descended on the city. Chen hesitated as she approached the dark archway that served as the main entrance to the labyrinthine complex. She almost made a U-turn and walked away, but, before she could escape, a young man in dark suit approached her and introduced himself as an assistant in the bureau’s administrative office.

The young man led her through a maze of corridors and stairwells, past a series of unmarked or anonymous-sounding offices with names like “the Fourth Department of the Second Division General Office.” Chen was taken to a large conference room on the fourth floor, offered some tea and asked to wait. The room contained a dozen slightly threadbare armchairs, each divided by small tea tables with a larger table in the middle of the room. There were three large windows on the far wall, but the blinds were drawn and the only light came from two dimly lit chandeliers suspended from the ceiling.



It was obvious to Chen who the officer in charge was as soon as the entourage entered the room. Superintendent Cui was tall, broad-shouldered, with a substantial pot belly and a shock of white hair which stood out in two huge tufts from the side of his head. He was dressed in a neatly pressed uniform covered in epaulets and walked with an air of authority that immediately distinguished him from the others. After introducing the various secretaries, assistants and responsible officers accompanying him, Cui sat down, took a sip of tea, and launched into his prepared speech.

“We have agreed to meet you here today in order to explain to you in person the situation with regard to the case of your son Li Dajun.” No fewer than three subordinates began taking notes. “It is not our usual practice to discuss such cases but under the circumstances we are willing to make an exception. This case has given rise to considerable gossip and rumour-mongering among certain disreputable sections of society, and we wish to set the record straight. The case of Li Dajun is being handled strictly according to law. He is being well-treated and his rights have been consistently respected. However, he will not be allowed visits from members of his family at this time because that would prejudice the investigation. Nor can we divulge the exact nature of the investigation. This is the law, and we must abide by it. However, I can tell you that the case involves national security considerations. It is a very serious matter. As such, I must advise you not to interfere in the investigation, as it will only make matters more difficult for yourself and your son. Allow us to do our job and you will be informed of any developments as and when they occur.”

Chen was expecting this and had prepared her own speech. “My son has never committed a crime in his life. His only reason for coming back to Shanghai this time was because his father had died. I cannot understand why you would think he is part of a criminal clique, as you state in your letter. He is a well-known and well-respected businessman. Moreover, he has been living in the United States for many years. How could he be guilty of any crimes here?”

“We are well aware of the events surrounding this case and your son’s activities, here and in America. The innocence or otherwise of your son will be determined by the investigation. It is not a matter for you to speculate on. If we need information from you with regard to the case, you will of course be notified.”

“How can I be expected to just sit by while my son is locked up with no contact with his family?”

“I appreciate that this must be difficult for you, but that is exactly what you must do. In this regard, you must not consult with the lawyer Huang Zhengyi anymore. He has no right to get involved in this case, and I must warn you that Attorney Huang is well-known to us as an unstable element. He may try to mislead you or feed you erroneous information if you continue to employ his services. On several occasions, Attorney Huang has been known to trick his clients into believing the public security departments are at fault so that he can pursue an erroneous course of appeal and extract more money from them. We are watching his actions with regard to this case very closely.”

Chen did not know what to believe. Was Huang really such a trickster as the superintendent made out? Was her husband’s jaundiced assessment of all lawyers applicable in this case?

Surely Jacob would have checked Huang out thoroughly before recommending him? Chen decided to trust her gut feeling about Huang and guessed that the police were trying to scare her off because they were worried that Huang could make life difficult for them if he got too deeply involved in the case. Nevertheless, there did not seem like much her lawyer could do for her at this stage.

After the meeting, Chen felt like she had come to another dead end. However, as she stood in the rain on Fuzhou Road trying to hail a cab, events were unfolding across the Pacific.

### **Petitioning for Help**

Soon after they had determined Dajun's whereabouts at the local police station, Chen and Hong had discussed whether or not to utilise the time-honoured tradition of "letters and visits," an administrative system that allowed ordinary citizens to petition the higher authorities in cases where an injustice had been committed against them. They quickly decided against it. The system had been in place for centuries but the 1990s version of it was designed more to monitor and control potential troublemakers than actually tackle injustice. Chen had heard numerous horror stories of petitioners from the countryside being beaten or held in black jails by the police after seeking to expose corruption in their hometowns.

And besides, petitioning would mean travelling to Beijing, and Chen really did not want to do that. Like many Shanghainese, Chen had a very low opinion of the nation's capital. It was a cold, inhospitable and impersonal place full of colossal buildings such as the Great Hall of the People that bore down on you from a great height. It was the centre of state power but never really felt like a real city. There was none of the urban hustle and bustle and zest for life that Chen took for granted in Shanghai. In fact, she often thought, the capital was really no more than a very big country town, inhabited predominately by country bumpkins.

Instead of petitioning Beijing, Chen had sought help from another quarter and posted a letter to her husband's cousin, Luo Ailing, in San Francisco.

Although she had not been back to Shanghai for more than five years, Ailing had always kept in close contact with her cousin and had helped Dajun financially when he was at the University of Southern California. She had even provided him with some useful introductions when he was getting his business started. She had sent a large wreath to the funeral but had not been able to attend in person.

Chen did not want to give the impression that she was begging for help, so her letter simply outlined what had happened since Li's death: Dajun's questioning by the FBI, his arrest in Shanghai and the subsequent police surveillance of family members. Chen asked if Ailing knew anything about the FBI investigation in the United States and whether or not she had any ideas with regard to resolving Dajun's current predicament.

Ailing was the eldest of four children born into a wealthy Shanghai family during the 1930s and '40s. Her mother was Li's paternal aunt, a sophisticated, outgoing woman who had the good fortune to marry a very ambitious young businessman who prospered throughout the anti-Japanese war and the subsequent civil war. However, when the Nationalist government introduced its new gold yuan in a desperate attempt to stem inflation, then at over 100

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percent a month, and Jiang Jingguo launched his massive crackdown on the urban bourgeoisie in 1948, Ailing's parents decided it was time to leave. They were well-connected to many powerful government and financial leaders, but no one was safe from the wrath of the younger Jiang. It was rumoured at the time that even the son of Green Gang Leader Du Yuesheng was arrested at the height of the campaign and charged with black market stock exchange trading. It was just as well they left when they did, because if they stayed they would certainly not have survived the Five-Anti campaign that came four years later.

On Christmas Day, 1948, the family went to board an American steam ship at the international docks. Accounts of what happened on that day vary, but it seems the younger of their two sons became separated from the rest of the family in the crowd milling around the dock and they set sail without him. No one knew what happened to him. He was only five years old at the time, and the general assumption was that he could not have survived too long in the chaos and turmoil that gripped Shanghai at that time. Ailing tried on several visits to find some trace of her little brother but always without success. Certainly, no one claiming to be him ever contacted Li or any other members of his family in Shanghai.

Ailing's father had managed to siphon off a considerable fortune into bank accounts in the United States and Hong Kong and so was able to establish his family in very comfortable surroundings when they arrived in San Francisco. Her mother, however, was heartbroken from the loss of her younger son and lived the life of a sad and mournful recluse in their spacious bay-view home until she died in the early 1960s.

The three remaining children were all sent to the best schools in San Francisco, went on to study at prestigious American universities, and forged successful careers in the United States. As the eldest child, it was Ailing who maintained the strongest interest in and connection with her homeland. The other two were very young when they went to the United States and became so immersed in their new home that they seemed to completely forget about their ancestors. Ailing, on the other hand, developed a deep-seated, almost passionate interest in the land of her birth. She had wanted to make a return visit from an early age but, because of the hostile relations between China and the United States after 1949, that was not possible until the meeting of Premier Zhou Enlai and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in the summer of 1971 opened the doors for Chinese in America to return home.

Chen did not see Ailing on her first visit. She was still consigned to the textile factory in the suburbs, and Li made no attempt to introduce them. Even after President Nixon's historic visit in 1972, having American relatives was not something people in China bragged about. Still, Ailing did manage to make an important contribution to the family at this time. It was Ailing who eventually persuaded Li to go ahead with his plans to bury his father, her uncle, in the family grave in Anhui. She provided the money to pay off everyone, and acted as a liaison between Li and his hometown relatives. Although she obviously could not attend the burial in person, the act could not have gone ahead without her help.

In 1978, Chen finally got to meet her mysterious American cousin. By that time, Ailing had already become something of a goodwill ambassador, forging links between Chinese and American cultural and educational institutions, as well as promoting her own business interests in textiles and footwear manufacturing. Her husband, the son of a wealthy

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vineyard owner in northern California, had been elected to the US House of Representatives and was one of the foremost government proponents of bridge-building between China and the United States.

During the 1980s, Ailing had visited China on average once a year and always took time out of her busy schedule to spend time with her family. Chen and her children thought their American cousin was quite exotic, always dressed in the most expensive clothes, with flashy jewellery and heavy makeup, and an unmistakable air of self-importance. Despite her American veneer, Chen felt Ailing was still Chinese at heart, with a deep-seated respect for her family and ancestors.

That faith was shaken somewhat in 1989. Ailing had been due to visit in July of that year, as a special guest at an investment seminar organized by Li, but she abruptly cancelled just before the seminar. She sent a letter to say it would be inappropriate for her to attend in light of the “tragedy of Tiananmen Square.” Chen thought it strange that she should connect the events in Beijing to an important meeting organized by her cousin. While the events in Beijing were unfortunate, Chen reasoned, it was certainly not sufficient reason for her to embarrass her own family.

Still, Ailing’s reaction was mild in comparison to the stunt her husband and a couple of his congressional colleagues pulled when they visited Beijing two years later. After a meeting with China’s Foreign Minister, Ailing’s husband and his congressional colleagues went to Tiananmen Square with an American television crew and unfurled a banner in front of the Monument to the People’s Heroes, denouncing the June 4 massacre.

State television and the newspapers called the incident a “premeditated anti-China farce,” and Chen, for one, agreed. It was not the kind of behaviour that responsible foreign government officials, as guests in another country, should have engaged in. How would Ailing’s husband have liked it if a group of Chinese officials had unfurled a banner outside the White House criticizing the American government’s treatment of poor and homeless people or African Americans? Needless to say, the congressional delegation was asked to leave, and Ailing, who was accompanying her husband, went back to the United States with him rather than visit her family in Shanghai as scheduled. Neither of them had been back since.

Chen was not sure if sufficient time had passed for Ailing to make a return visit, particularly when it concerned such a sensitive issue, but at least she was no longer the wife of a government official. Her husband had left congress a year earlier to take over the family wine business in the Napa Valley after his father died. As she posted her letter, Chen hoped that the news of her family’s problems would be enough for Ailing to set aside concerns over diplomatic protocol and come to her aid.

**Friday, May 7, 1993 – The Games Begin**

*Arriving May 9 on Flight CA986 from San Francisco. Please meet me at the airport.  
Regards. Ailing.*

The telegram took Chen completely by surprise, and, for a while, she was thrown into a panic. Why hadn't Ailing called beforehand? Had she actually read Chen's letter? What was she planning to do? Was she expecting to stay at Kangping Road, and, if so, for how long? Although Chen had hoped Ailing would eventually come back to Shanghai, she was totally unprepared for such a sudden visit. What would the police make of her appearance, and would they consider it more interference on Chen's part?

It was only after Ailing's letter, written six days earlier, arrived in the afternoon mail that the picture became clearer, although Chen still couldn't understand why Ailing just didn't pick up the phone and call.

*Cousin,*

*I was horrified to hear that Dajun had been detained by the police. This must be a terrible time for you, and you have my deepest heartfelt sympathies. I have discussed the matter with my husband—he also sends his sympathies—and we both agreed I should come see you as soon as possible. It was unforgivable that I failed to attend Cousin Li Heng's funeral, and it is the least I can do now to lend you what meagre support I can offer.*

*I still have a lot of old friends in Shanghai who might be able to help Dajun, including the US Consul General. I am personally disgusted that the consulate has not acted in this matter yet. Dajun has a green card and should be offered some kind of protection. I will make this point very forcibly when I see the Consul General.*

*I will send you a telegram to let you know when I will be arriving. I look forward to seeing you again. It has been far too long since my last visit, and I deeply regret that it has taken such a horrible tragedy to bring us together again.*

*Warm wishes,*

*Ailing*

Hong had always been fond of her rich, American aunt and was excited when Chen told her the news.

"Excellent! I was just thinking about her the other day. It will be great to see her again. I wonder if she will bring any goodies from California."

Hong was in the process of moving the last of her possessions out of her Anfu Road apartment and was standing in her mother's living room surrounded by cardboard boxes, suitcases and blue and red striped nylon holdalls, the kind favoured by migrant workers on their annual return home. Her mother marvelled at the amount of stuff Hong had acquired over the last year. Chen knew Hong was a compulsive shopper, but this was ridiculous.

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It had not taken Hong long to decide to move back home. Initially, she had wanted to stay in the Anfu Road apartment in the hope that Gao would return, but after she managed to phone him in Beijing, she soon changed her mind. He had told her point-blank that he did not want to see her again, that she had caused him nothing but trouble, and cursed the day he first met her.

After clearing out all her possessions, she smashed all the photographs of them in the apartment and left the apartment door wide open, much to the consternation and amazement of their neighbours, who had gathered around to watch the excitement. The apartment belonged to her husband, and once she left, she no longer cared what happened to it. In fact, she said, she hoped a bunch of thieves would go in there, steal everything of value and destroy what was left.

She was feeling very pleased with herself when she arrived with the last of her possessions, and the news of her aunt's impending arrival only served to put her in an even better mood.

"It will be wonderful," she said. "Three women altogether. We will have so much to talk about and, best of all, there won't be any men to bother us."

"That's true, but don't forget the main reason that she is coming is to try to help your brother."

"I know that." She looked hurt. "I was just thinking out loud, that's all. I'm sure she will be a great help. She really knows how to light fires under people."

"Yes, I'm a little concerned about that. I'm worried that she could charge around creating more problems than she solves. I mean, she has already threatened to harass the American Consul General, and who knows what else she has in mind. I told you what that police officer said about interfering in the case. Her being here could be bad for all of us."

"Don't worry about it. We'll just have to tell her to be a little more circumspect than usual. Besides, she will be the one doing the interfering, not us... Oh shit!" Hong suddenly stopped. "We have a problem. Aunt Ailing is arriving the day after tomorrow, right? That is when the International Olympic Committee delegation arrives for the opening of the East Asian Games. We will be lucky if we can get anywhere near the airport."

"Is that all? I thought it was something serious. The security won't be that tight, surely."

"Believe me mother, it will be impossible. This is a really big deal: the president of the International Olympic Committee himself will be arriving, and General Secretary Jiang is coming down for the opening ceremony. We won't be able to move out there because of the cops on the streets. In fact, we can't even take my car because it is an odd-numbered day."

The more Chen thought about the Olympic delegation, the more she agreed with her daughter. She'd had the misfortune to be in Beijing when the Asian Games was held there three years previously and that had been a thoroughly miserable experience. She was with a delegation attending a medical conference organized by the 301 Military Hospital. Although they were stationed a long way from the main Asian Games village in the north of Beijing,

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they were not allowed to leave the guest house except in the official delegation bus, because traffic had been restricted to allow free passage for the athletes and officials. 301 was probably the most important and influential hospital in the country, but—like just about everywhere else—it was still subject to power outages during the games so that all the city's limited electricity supply could be channelled into the games facilities. The lights in the guest house went out every other evening, and there was even a power failure at the hospital right in the middle of a demonstration of a new technique for prostate surgery. The back-up generator kicked in fairly quickly, but for an awful moment, the patient, a lieutenant general from the Nanjing Military Region, was left horribly exposed. Everyone was happy that China won so many gold medals during the games, but Chen couldn't help wondering if it was all worth it. The lieutenant general probably felt same way.

Technically, the Asian Games in Beijing was a more prestigious event than the East Asian Games in Shanghai, but the Asian Games were just a prelude to Beijing's campaign to win the Olympics in the year 2000, whereas the East Asian Games would be the final audition. The government was leaving nothing to chance and had spent the last two months cleaning up the city, knocking down or covering up unsightly buildings and getting the stadia and gymnasias in perfect working order.

There had been a noticeable increase in the number of police officers and vehicles on the streets, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to find a taxi because of the alternate day driving rule. With the arrival of the IOC president and his delegation, and the presence of the top state and party leaders from Beijing, it was bound to get a lot worse. Roads would be blocked off for hours so that the VIPs could be whisked from the airport to their hotels and the stadium without having to negotiate the rush hour traffic like everyone else.

Ailing's flight was not scheduled to arrive until 5.20 p.m. but they booked a taxi for 3.30 p.m. just to be safe. They had phoned four different cab companies before one of them agreed to take them to the airport at a reasonable rate. The others either refused to go anywhere near the airport or demanded outrageous fees, 300 yuan for a round trip that would usually cost no more than 60 yuan.

In addition to arranging transport, they had to get Hong and all her belongings installed in her old room, clear out the spare room for Ailing, dust and vacuum the house, do the laundry and get in good quality meat, seafood and fresh vegetables. Ailing was very particular about what she ate and was not shy about telling you when something was wrong. After a frantic and exhausting two days, they were ready to greet their own VIP.

The traffic was not quite as bad as feared. They were held up for about half an hour to allow a huge convoy of Mercedes and Audi limousines led by motorcycle outriders and police cars with flashing lights to speed past, but they actually got to the terminal well before the flight was due in. The last of the athletes, officials and specially invited guests were still arriving and being greeted in cordoned-off reception areas, but by five o'clock, the official meeting and greeting activity was beginning to die down and the terminal reverted to its normal level of chaos.

Ailing's flight was actually on time and it was not long before they spotted her emerging from the baggage claim area, dressed in a stiff black suit, her hair tied tightly back in a bun,

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showing off two huge jade earrings. She was marching imperiously ahead of a red-jacketed attendant pushing a cart laden down with Louis Vuitton luggage. Ailing stood for a while, surveying with ill-disguised contempt the melee that surrounded her, until Hong called out her name and elbowed her way through the crowd.

As they walked through the terminal to the taxi rank, Ailing launched into a tirade against the appalling service on Air China, swearing it would be the last time she ever flew on China's national carrier.

"Even in first class," she said, "they didn't have a clue. They served warm champagne! Can you believe that?"

Chen and Hong looked at each other. They really could not understand why she was making such a fuss about the temperature of her drink. Given Ailing's mood, Hong made sure to apologetically explain all the problems they'd had in finding a car on that day. Nevertheless, Ailing did not conceal her disgust when they finally reached the battered little Daihatsu that was waiting for them in the parking lot.

The main problem was finding enough space for all her luggage. The minuscule trunk was already half-full with buckets, rags and various other odds and ends the driver had stuffed in there, and even after much rearranging, Hong still had to carry two of the smaller bags on her lap in the front seat. Ailing had refused to even consider sitting three people in the back.

As they drove down the airport road towards the Hongqiao development zone, however, Ailing's mood began to improve. She was obviously impressed with all the new construction work that had been carried out since her last visit. New hotels, office blocks, villa complexes and apartment buildings had sprung up all along the route in areas that were previously open land or occupied by low-level industrial or residential complexes.

"You really have come a long way in the last five years, haven't you," she said. "It's starting to look like a real city again."

When they reached Kangping Road, Ailing somehow persuaded the taxi driver to take her bags up to the apartment and tipped him royally for his pains. After complaining throughout the entire journey, he finally left with a big smile on his face and an offer to chauffeur her around Shanghai any time she required transport. She politely declined his offer and shut the door in his face.

Chen immediately set about preparing dinner while Hong helped her aunt unpack and settle into the spare room. Their animated chatter ended abruptly, however, when Ailing presented Hong with a belated wedding gift. After a long pause, Hong explained that her husband had actually left her.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. That was very insensitive of me. I just assumed... I'm sorry, I should have checked with your mother before going out and buying you something."

"It's alright," Hong said. "You weren't to know. It only just happened and we are all still somewhat in a state of shock. It is a lovely gift, Aunt Ailing. I really appreciate it."



“Well, just think of it as personal gift to you in your time of need. Really, you have all been through some tough times lately. I know I should have been more supportive, but you get so out of touch living in United States.”

She may have lost track of events in China, but Ailing was clearly up to date with the news in America. In fact, as she explained over dinner, she had known about Dajun’s interrogation by the FBI almost as soon as it had happened but did not call Chen because she did not want to alarm her. The main reason she did not come back for the funeral, she said, was because she wanted to find out where Dajun was being held and help get him released before contacting his family. However, security surrounding the case was so tight that she couldn’t do anything. Even seasoned Washington insiders like her husband were being blocked from access.

“It sounds just like what is happening here,” Hong said. “Everything is top secret, and a lot of people are getting very nervous about it. You know, that was one of the main reasons why my husband ran away, because he did not want to get involved.”

“Well it’s not quite that bad in the United States, but certainly there is some kind of witch-hunt going on.”

“Do you know what they are hunting for?” Chen asked. “Here it is all so vague, nobody really knows what is going on or if they do they are refusing to tell us.”

Ailing confirmed a lot of what Dajun had told them: that the focus of the investigation was a company called United Dynamics, and that persons connected to that company were suspected of selling advanced military technology to China in violation of the sanctions imposed in 1989. Just like at Shanghai United Auto, the company was being purged; anyone who’d had dealings with China and all those Chinese citizens who’d done business or had any connection to the company were under investigation. Dajun was a major target of the investigation, she said, simply because he had arranged a lot of electronic technology transfer deals for American companies similar to United Dynamics. He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Ailing had some personal insights into United Dynamics, having owned stock in the company at one time. She told Chen that Li Heng and Dajun should be the last people the FBI should be suspecting, given the antagonistic and dysfunctional relationship between United Auto and United Dynamics. Ever since United Auto first bought the company in 1984 and rebranded it as United Dynamics, she said, the tension had been palpable.

United Auto thought that having a high-technology company specializing in advanced electronics would help their automotive division get a step ahead of the competition in new automotive design, but it never worked out. The two companies were very different, one from the old industrial east, the other a brash new west coast start-up. They had completely opposite corporate philosophies, and very soon the tensions began to show. Before long there was almost open warfare between the two companies. There was no way, she said, that United Dynamics managers would let Li and Dajun anywhere near the advanced weapons systems the company was developing. All they ever did was get carefully scripted guided tours of facilities under the auspices of United Auto managers.

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Ailing went on to say that her husband had briefed one of President Clinton's top policy advisers—a close friend of his—on the case prior to his trip to Beijing to discuss human rights and China's Most Favoured Nation trading (MFN) status. They hoped to get Dajun's case mentioned during the negotiations as an example of China's lack of respect for human rights, but they were not optimistic since there were a lot of other "more traditional" human rights cases ahead of his.

"You know," Ailing explained, "this whole MFN thing is really just a big political game. Everybody knows that the United States is not going to revoke it. There are too many big business interests at stake, but President Clinton has to make a show of his concern for human rights because during his election campaign he criticized Bush for being too soft on China. Beijing knows this as well, so they will make some concessions like releasing some political prisoners to allow Clinton to save face. But China has to deny that these concessions have anything to do with MFN, because it can't be seen to be bowing to American pressure. Because then China would lose face.

"Do you remember that reporter from the World Economic Herald who was imprisoned for two years after 1989. He was released in 1991 but was constantly harassed by the authorities here, but then late last year he was suddenly allowed to leave Shanghai. He is now settled down in Berkeley.

"This is how the game works. We have all these high-profile negotiations designed to show how tough both governments are being, while in reality they are both looking for the easiest compromise. It's all very childish and quite pathetic, if you ask me. They should just ignore MFN and concentrate on the real issues, but unfortunately politics doesn't work that way. I'm really glad my husband decided to retire last year. It has made our lives a lot easier. If I never go back to D.C. again, I can tell you I will not regret it in the slightest."

## Tuesday, May 11, 1993 – Visiting Old Friends

Ailing had insisted that the first thing on her agenda was to visit her cousin's grave. Chen had warned her about the size of the plot and the refusal of the company leaders to move the grave to Anhui but she was still shocked at what she saw out at that desolate suburban graveyard. The plot was located at the far northwest corner of the graveyard, almost hidden among the long rows of plaques and headstones. The anonymity of the setting was particularly upsetting to her.

"This is appalling," she said as they walked down the narrow paths to the grave site. "He did so much good in his life, and now he has been laid to rest alongside these common, insignificant people. Where is the justice in that? If they didn't want to bury him in a hero's cemetery, then at least they should have granted his wish to be buried in the family plot. This place is just so lonely and impersonal. It is almost as if he was being punished for something in the afterlife."

When they reached the small plaque that bore Li's name and a short inscription, Ailing placed a bouquet of flowers on the concrete slab that delineated the plot and lit the three incense sticks they had brought along. She stood in silence before bowing three times and putting her hands together in prayer. Chen thought her observances were a curious mixture of Chinese and Western, Buddhist and Christian ritual, but she kept her thoughts to herself. She just stood next to her daughter with her head bowed until Ailing completed her rites. They walked back to the car in silence.

There was only one other family at the cemetery, an elderly couple with whom Chen presumed was their young grandson. They were sitting by a headstone talking quietly among themselves. Chen imagined they were swapping stories and reminiscing about the person they had lost, maybe a son or daughter, maybe one of the young boy's parents. She found the scene very calming, and in some ways comforting. It had only been two months since her husband's death but so much had happened that she had not had time grieve properly. She knew the process would take a long time but eventually she reasoned she would come to terms with her loss. Maybe one day in future, she thought as they drove back to Kangping Road, she would be sitting in that cemetery with her own grandchildren, telling them all about their colourful grandfather, the great General Manager Li Heng.

The calm quickly evaporated once they arrived back home and Ailing started working the phones. She had a long list of old friends and associates that she planned to contact in the hope of finding new information about Dajun's case and hopefully to help him get released. Chen knew a lot of the people on her list and had talked to many of them over the last few weeks. None of them had been able or willing to help.

Over lunch, they narrowed the list down to about half a dozen names who were either sufficiently well-placed or influential enough to have relevant information or make some impact on the case. They soon discovered, however, that despite Ailing's reputation and considerable powers of persuasion, it was very difficult to even get hold of these people, let alone get something out of them. She became increasingly frustrated as she was blocked time and time again by the functionaries that important people surround themselves with. They claimed their bosses were either in a meeting, out of town, or for some other reason

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unavailable. Even the US Consul General, who knew she was coming, now seemed reluctant to meet her. For Ailing, this was unacceptable.

“Do you know how I am?” she lectured the consul general’s secretary. “I have probably done more to foster good relations between China and America than all of you at the consulate put together, and I think I deserve more respect than I am getting from you at the moment. I don’t care how busy the consul general is or if my visit comes at an awkward time. I have travelled half way around the world to be with my family at a very difficult time for all of us. I think the very least he can do is to grant me the courtesy of a short meeting.”

The consul general’s office phoned back in the late afternoon to say that a meeting could be arranged for two days hence.

The only other person to agree to a meeting with Ailing was someone Chen only knew of by reputation. She had never been granted a personal meeting. Mao Yougen had been the personal secretary of Ailing’s father’s former business partner. Unlike Ailing’s father, his business partner, who also came from one of the most powerful and affluent families in Shanghai, had elected to stay in China, even after the communist takeover, and work with the new government. He was rewarded for his patriotism and placed on a number of committees, including a vice-chairmanship of the Shanghai United Front. It was he who was instrumental in organizing the Five-Anti campaign and encouraging other capitalists, such as Chen’s father, to confess their non-existent crimes. For this he was further rewarded by the party and named an official adviser to the central government in the mid-1950s. He suffered during the Cultural Revolution but was soon rehabilitated after the fall of the Gang of Four and reinstated as a government consultant.

This time, during that initial period of economic reform and opening up, his advice was in even more demand than before. His knowledge of capitalist management techniques and foreign enterprises was just what the party and government wanted. By this time, however, he was already in his eighties, so all of his affairs were handled by his secretary. Mao Yougen quickly grew to occupy a position of great influence in reform-era Shanghai. He was widely believed to be privy to all the key economic decisions made by the local party and government. Ailing had first met him in the early 1980s and, although they were never really close friends, the family connection was strong enough to grant her considerable access. She had his home telephone number and called him that evening. To her relief, he seemed delighted to hear from her and readily agreed to meet her for dinner the following day.

That evening, while Ailing was out being treated to a lavish dinner by Mao Yougen, Chen and Hong sat in front of the television eating noodles. The main item on the evening news concerned General Secretary Jiang, who, after proudly officiating at the opening of the East Asian Games, had gone on an inspection tour of Pudong. Jiang was effusive in his praise of Pudong, saying that the central government was absolutely committed to development of the region. In fact, he said, since Shanghai had once been a capitalist haven and its citizens were familiar with the market and commodity economy, the city should take on the role of the pace-setter for economic reform in China.

“Perhaps capitalism and economic freedom are okay only in Pudong,” Hong said, only half joking. “It feels very different on this side of the river.”

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“I know,” Chen said. “I am getting more confused by the day. Let’s hope your aunt can clear things up a bit.”

When Ailing returned home around nine o’clock, it was clear that the situation was as murky as ever. She threw her Chanel handbag down on the table, walked to the drinks cabinet and poured herself a large brandy, and then sunk into an armchair.

Mao had been very friendly at first, asking her about life in the United States, her business interests both there and in China, and the state of the Sino-US relationship. But as soon as she mentioned Li, he became very suspicious, his whole demeanour changed, and he soon started looking for excuses to curtail the meeting. Ailing, however, persisted and eventually squeezed some new information out of him. He confirmed that the investigation was no longer confined to just the car company or Li’s family, friends and associates. It seemed that any Shanghai company with links to Shanghai United, no matter how insignificant, were now under suspicion and that a systematic campaign to isolate anybody with a dubious record was well underway.

A particular focus, he said, was anyone who was aware of or familiar with Li’s business dealings with United Auto or any other American company or individual. An exhaustive trawl was being conducted to uncover all evidence of links and contacts with the Americans dating right back to the early 1980s. Mao told Ailing that Li’s case had raised some very serious questions about state security and that the party and government was determined not to let such lapses of security arise again.

He did not say how this related to Dajun. In fact, when Ailing broached the subject, Mao became very agitated and said it was impossible for him to even talk about it.

“He warned me that it was a very serious matter and suggested that if I had come back to Shanghai with the sole purpose of trying to help Dajun then I should get on the first plane back to San Francisco. He was very rude about it, saying my presence here would only make matters worse.”

“To be honest, I’m surprised he agreed to see you at all,” Hong said. “I mean, no one I’ve approached has been willing to talk about this and a lot of people are deliberately avoiding us. So, for someone like Mao to give you anything, I think, is something of a breakthrough.”

“Well I’m glad you can see a positive side to this. For me it was a very frustrating and disturbing experience. It is not something I would wish to repeat in a hurry.”

It was slowly dawning on Ailing that not even she could just fly into Shanghai, wave her magic wand and solve all the family’s problems. That said, she still had her meeting with the consul general and she was determined not let him off lightly.

### **Wednesday, May 12, 1993 – Matters of National Security**

It had been a month since Dajun's detention, and Chen had understandably neglected a lot of her work commitments. She had missed meetings and passed on a lot of projects to her deputy, including the hospital's upcoming study mission to Europe, which just about everyone wanted to be a part of. However, she could not afford to ignore the hospital's annual budget meeting, which had been scheduled for the same day as Ailing's meeting at the American consulate. She knew she could not rely on her deputy to argue the department's case for a larger share of the budget. Funding had been significantly reduced in real terms for the last four years in succession, and all departments were feeling the pinch. It was imperative for the survival of the obstetrics and gynaecology department that she be there in person and prevent the others grabbing a larger slice of the ever-shrinking pie. The other departments were all in a much better position to take in private patients and charge for expensive operations. Her department could charge prospective mothers for ultrasound examinations, and there was a handful of foreign women living in Shanghai who wanted to give birth there, but generally they had to rely on state funding.

Many of her colleagues were surprised when Chen entered the conference room and were even more startled when it became clear just how well-prepared she was for the meeting. They had all assumed, not without good reason, that she would be too distracted to give a good presentation. This, of course, worked to her advantage, and she was able to give a very persuasive argument for increasing her department's share of the budget next year. Even the hospital president seemed impressed.

"Director Chen," he remarked following her presentation, "I'm glad to see your recent problems have not affected your commitment to this institution. Keep up the good work."

It was only after the meeting, when she was back in her office, that Chen noticed the small note hidden among the mail she had picked up that morning. It was from the Public Security Bureau. Again, it was in the form of a printed sheet with the relevant details inked in by hand. This time Chen immediately understood the significance of the information it contained. Dajun's case had officially been handed over to the Shanghai State Security Bureau for further investigation. Her heart sank. The Public Security Bureau had been difficult enough to deal with, but at least they were to some degree accountable and had responded to her inquiries. State Security was another matter entirely.

Although the police had specifically warned her not to deal with Attorney Huang again, Chen couldn't think of anyone else to turn to for assistance at that point. Huang was out of the office when she called, but his secretary said that his original lunch appointment had fallen through and he could likely see her over lunch if that was convenient. Chen was supposed to have a lunch meeting with some ultrasound equipment suppliers but decided to let her deputy deal with them. She agreed to meet Huang at the New Jinjiang Hotel at 12.30.

He was twenty minutes late, apologizing profusely for his tardiness as he hurried into the lobby. Chen waited until they had taken their seats in the coffee shop and ordered before handing him the note.

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“Hmm. I was afraid this might happen. I’m sure you realize this makes things very difficult. There is not much I can do for you in this situation. I can make some inquiries on your behalf, but I’m not optimistic they will lead anywhere.”

Huang explained that the only time he could legitimately get involved was if and when charges were brought against Dajun and his case actually went to trial. But, as he pointed out, if it went to trial, the verdict and sentence would almost be decided beforehand by the party’s court adjudication committee.

“Cases involving matters of national security are always decided well before the trial even starts. The panel of judges will never overrule the adjudication committee, and the adjudication committee will take its lead from the higher party authorities. It is a no-win situation. I actually wrote an article in the magazine *Democracy and Law* back in 1988 criticizing this very practice but it is just as common today as it was then.”

“Did you get into trouble for saying something like that in public?” Chen asked.

“Not at the time. You remember, back in ’88, it was a comparatively liberal time: *The World Economic Herald* was at the height of its influence and that inspired a lot of other commentators to come out of hiding and say what had been on their minds for some time. Of course, when they closed the *Herald* down in ’89 and the student demonstrations got out of hand, things became more difficult. I was detained and interrogated on several occasions and accused of supporting the demonstrations. They didn’t have enough proof to put me in prison, but they told me to stay out of politics or face the consequences. I’ve been under police surveillance ever since. They don’t like me and are determined to keep me in check.”

“I was going to mention that they told me you were being investigated, but I was not sure if they were telling the truth or not.”

“Oh, I’m under investigation all right. I suppose they told you I trick clients into paying fees for work I can’t do?”

“Yes, how did you know that?”

“They often tell my clients that. It’s a way of scaring people off. I’m glad you were not so intimidated. You don’t strike me as someone who backs down from a fight. But just to reassure you, I have already marked your case as *pro bono*, so you will not be getting any bill. To be honest, I think the real reason the police are targeting me is because I earn more money than they do and they are jealous. That is what this really boils down to.”

Huang’s law practice had made a lot of money, mainly from corporate clients, but, he said, that income was used primarily to promote his legal reform agenda rather than his personal enrichment. He said the Chinese judicial system was severely handicapped by the lack of a presumption of innocence, and that it was his mission to ensure that people unjustly accused of a crime could get the best defence available under the law both in individual cases and through systematic change.

Over lunch, Huang explained that he first became interested in law when, as a student of politics and Marxist theory at Fudan University in the late 1950s, he first met Qin Benli. The

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Hundred Flowers Campaign had just been launched and many new ideas were being brought into the public domain. Qin was an old communist revolutionary who had become disillusioned with the direction the party was heading and soon became known as one of the most outspoken critics at that time. He encouraged Huang to challenge many of the ideas held by the party and stressed the importance of building a legal system that was truly independent of the party and government. They both got into a lot of trouble when the Anti-Rightist Campaign was launched, but Huang stuck to his ideals, and, soon after his release from prison, studied hard to qualify as an attorney. Huang always maintained close links with his mentor, and when Qin founded the *World Economic Herald* in 1980, he was one of the first people to contribute articles and offer support to the new publication.

Chen had always enjoyed reading the *Herald*. It was a refreshing alternative to the official newspapers she was required to study, and it provided a forum for new ideas and news items one just couldn't find reported anywhere else. She was so annoyed when the authorities shut the paper down in 1989 that she actually took part in the massive protest that May to support the newspaper and demand it be reopened. It was the first and only protest demonstration that she had ever participated in. When she told her husband, he was furious, saying that if she had been spotted in what would be labelled an anti-government demonstration, her career and all her official positions would be put in jeopardy. But Chen was unrepentant. It was an issue she felt strongly about, and she wanted to let people know about it.

Chen was beginning to see Huang as some kind of kindred spirit, and was particularly impressed with his actions after Qin Benli died after a long battle with cancer in 1991. The municipal government wanted to keep the funeral quiet so as to not rekindle memories of 1989, and many of the *Herald's* former staff were too scared to defy the orders. But Huang, again risking arrest, demanded publicly that Qin be accorded a public funeral in keeping with his reputation and all the good work he had done over his long career. In the end he was unsuccessful, but Chen greatly admired his determination to honour his mentor and give him the funeral he deserved.

"You know," Chen said as Huang was settling the bill, "I spent quite a lot of time at Fudan when I was studying at Shanghai Medical College in the late '50s. I wonder if we ever bumped into each other at that time."

"You would not have remembered me, Director Chen, but I certainly would have remembered you."

A few blocks away, at the US consulate, Ailing was having a less pleasant conversation. She had demanded a one-on-one meeting with the consul general to discuss what the United States government could do to help Dajun, but when she arrived the consul was not alone. An officer from the CIA station was present and it soon became apparent that he was the one in charge.

When Ailing returned to Kangping Road and met up with Chen and Hong, she was fuming, and plotting the demise of the consul general. "The nerve of that man, treating me like that. I'll make sure he never works for the State Department again."



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“This CIA officer—he only identified himself as Kelly—did not even let me explain why I had requested a meeting. He just launched into a long speech about how Dajun was wanted for questioning by both the FBI and the CIA on matters related to national security and that, as an American citizen, I was under an obligation to tell them everything I knew about the case. They wanted to know what had happened to Dajun since he came back to Shanghai and what the police were up to. It was an interrogation, pure and simple, just like those cop shows on television.”

Chen and Hong had no idea what cop shows she was referring to, but urged her to continue.

“I protested, of course. I told him that he was out of his jurisdiction and that I was under no obligation to help him. In fact, I said, the consulate was obligated to help me because a member of my family had been unjustly arrested. It was then that the pathetic little diplomat dared to speak up for the first time, saying that because Dajun was not a US citizen, the consulate could not demand access to him, even if he had been arrested.”

“Wait a minute,” Hong interrupted. “Did you say ‘if’ he had been arrested? What are they talking about?”

“Yes, that is the really strange thing. They don’t believe he is in detention. They seem to think he is hiding somewhere in order to avoid going back to the United States.”

“I don’t believe this. This is just too weird. Didn’t you tell them about all that my mom has gone through with the police and the lawyers to find out what happened? Damn it, Aunt, we have documents to prove he is in detention.”

“Don't you snap at me, young lady,” Ailing barked. “Of course, I told them about the notes and everything.”

“Can everybody calm down a little, please?” Chen pleaded. “Arguing among ourselves is not going to help anyone. Hong, apologize to your aunt.”

Hong did not normally accept chastisement without a fight, but, on this occasion, she complied.

“I’m sorry for interrupting, Aunt Ailing, please carry on.”

“That’s quite alright, dear. Apology accepted. Now, as I was saying, this CIA agent seems convinced that Dajun is being hidden somewhere and that the arrest at the airport was an elaborate piece of theatre, staged to give the impression he was in trouble with the police here. I told them that was ridiculous because we had confirmation from the Public Security Bureau that the detention order had been issued, but he said that was just part of the charade the authorities were playing.”

“I suppose the note my mom got this morning saying Dajun’s case had been transferred to State Security is just part of this charade as well.”

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“Yes, it’s a pity I didn’t know about that before my meeting, but you’re right that it probably wouldn’t have made any difference to their thinking. It is obvious they have their minds made up and nothing is going to change that.”

“In fact,” she continued, “I have been thinking. There is not much more I can do here. My presence here is only making life more difficult for you both, and I think it is better if I go back to San Francisco.”

“But you’ve been a tremendous help to all of us,” Hong said, trying to get back into her aunt’s good graces. “There is no need for you leave at all. You know we both really appreciate you coming all this way.”

“That is very kind of you, my dear, but we all would be better served if I were to go back. People are already becoming suspicious of what I’m doing here, and, besides, I could probably be of more help if I were in San Francisco. You know you can call me any time, and if you ever need money or any other kind of assistance you just have to ask.”

Chen knew there was no point in arguing. Ailing had clearly already made up her mind. The very next day, she went to the airline office downtown and managed to get on a flight that afternoon to Tokyo, from where she could pick up a connecting flight to San Francisco.

## Tuesday May 18, 1993 – The Basketball Fund

Neither Chen nor Hong believed the absurd conspiracy theories of the Americans. It would have taken one of the biggest and best coordinated smoke screens in the history of espionage to pull all of that off. The investigation, the surveillance and harassment of their family, the issuing of phoney police documents—it must have been a massive operation. Whoever was masterminding all of this was clearly an organizational genius.

Then again, if the Shanghai police and state security were correct, and Li and Dajun were involved in a conspiracy to provide the Americans with some kind of classified or secret information, why on earth would the FBI and the CIA be so convinced they were spying for China? But short of knocking on the door of the US consulate and asking the CIA officer there to visit the state security bureau officer in charge and discuss the case over tea, Chen and Hong really could not come up with any answers.

That weekend, however, Hong spotted a short article in the *Liberation Daily* about the Dream Team Basketball Fund that had been set up by her father the previous year to promote basketball in China. There was no mention of Li, but the fact that it was still going was an encouraging sign. In fact, Hong pointed out, it was kind of a miracle that it was still there at all.

The basketball fund had seemed like a good idea when it was launched. The American “Dream Team,” which had trounced everybody in sight at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, had ignited a global basketball fever. Li’s idea was to establish a ten-million-yuan fund sponsored by Shanghai United Auto that would be used to provide additional funding to the national basketball team and help develop the sport at universities and high schools. The ultimate goal was to create a basketball team capable of taking on the best from the National Basketball Association in America and winning.

“One day,” Li was fond of saying to anyone who would listen, “even Michael Jordan will be humbled by China’s dream team.” Of course, this never happened, but the extent to which the NBA has now taken off in China might have surprised even Li.

The problem was that, back in 1993, very few other people shared Li Heng’s dream. The China Dream Team National Basketball Fund, as it came to be known, generated some buzz in the local media, but basketball was nowhere near as popular as football, badminton or table tennis. Even athletics, with the emergence that year of the Ma Family Army from Liaoning, was beginning to gain a higher profile than basketball. From the moment that the fund was launched, it became obvious that Li would have his work cut out if he were to raise just one of the ten million yuan he had promised. Corporations and government agencies simply weren’t interested in contributing. Many of them had already spent vast amounts of money to sponsor the Chinese teams in various events at the Barcelona Olympics, and now businesses were being told to contribute to the East Asian Games. Those who did not cough up were branded as unpatriotic. Even some of Li’s closest business associates declined to make donations to the dream team, saying that the East Asian Games took precedence.

As the Games came closer, Li was criticized in the sports press for pushing the basketball fund instead of making a contribution to Olympic glory. The writer of one article (Li clipped

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and collected every article written about him or his work) attacked him for bringing over an American college basketball coach to take charge of the national team. The national team, the writer said—with a lot of evidence to back him up—had actually gotten worse since the coach arrived, and that this was one more reason why people should stay away from the dream team fund.

Li eventually got the message and decided to put the project aside for a while. He assigned one of his junior managers to take care of the fund, and concentrated on more important issues. Now, this junior staff member, Feng Xia, had somehow not only kept the fund afloat, he was now boasting in the local press about how much money had been raised. Not quite the ten million, but near enough, he claimed.

Hong suggested that her mother pay this young man a visit. “You have met him before at Dad’s office, remember? What have we got to lose?” she said. “You don’t even have to say anything about Dad or the investigation. All you have to do is ask him about the fund and see where that conversation leads. No one could blame you for taking an interest in how one of Dad’s projects is surviving after his death.”

Chen agreed that it could be a worthwhile lead, and a chance for them to get back to basics after all the conspiracy theories. Feng Xia would probably still be in touch with Li’s old colleagues, but, being one step removed from the car company, he might be able to speak more freely.

Moreover, she knew more than most about the sport of basketball so would be able to call bullshit if she heard it. Li had always tried to get her to take more of an interest, pointing out that Chen’s alleged doppelganger, Qin Yi, had starred in the 1957 Xie Jin movie, *Basketball Player Number Five*. Chen rolled her eyes whenever he mentioned this but she’d learned enough simply by process of osmosis to hold her own with genuine sports fanatics.

The day of Chen’s visit to Feng Xia was dull and overcast with a constant drizzle covering the city. It was the last day of the East Asian Games—another cloud that had been hanging over Shanghai for the last ten days. Officially, of course, the Games had been a great success, with China winning 25 of the 35 gold medals on offer, but even the most patriotic supporters recognized that the competition was a bit of a farce: for example, China and Japan were the only two countries that bothered to show up for the women’s sprint relay finals.

In addition to the lack of any real spectacle, the city government had gone out of its way to stifle and suppress any sign of dissent or protest that could have spoilt the party. Well-known troublemakers were taken on “vacation” outside the city and a couple were even locked up in mental institutions during the Games.

However, the gloom did not seem to be affecting Feng Xia when Chen entered his recently refurbished downtown office. He was dressed in an expensive pinstripe suit, had two gold rings on each hand, and was sporting a slim-line Rado watch, one of the new must-have items for the young and upwardly mobile in Shanghai.

## The Games

Feng did not recognize Chen at first. He was on the phone when she walked in. He motioned for her to take a seat and, after hanging up, continued to look at her, sensing that they had met before but was unable to place her face exactly.

“Can I help you?” he said.

“I’m Chen Lan, General Manager Li Heng’s wife.”

His expression changed instantly. The muscles on his face and neck tightened visibly, and he shifted quickly in his chair.

“Director Chen, forgive me. I did not recognize you. It has been quite some time,” he stuttered.

“There is no need to apologize. I hardly recognized you myself. You’ve turned into quite the big boss.”

“Not at all,” he said with an embarrassed laugh. “I’m still a humble servant trying in my limited way to carry on your late husband’s good work.”

“Well, that is what I wanted to talk to you about,” Chen said. “I read a short article about the dream team fund in the newspaper and was curious to find out for myself how things were going.”

“Everything is going very well. I must say General Manager Li’s idea has inspired a lot of people to contribute to the development of basketball in our country. The response to the fund has been tremendous. We are all very satisfied with the progress that has been made so far.”

“The newspaper said you had nearly reached the ten-million-yuan target set by my husband. Is that correct?”

“Oh, that article, it was in the Liberation Daily, wasn’t it? Well, that was not entirely correct,” he said, shifting uneasily in his chair. “I mean, we have money coming in all the time, so it was more a projection than a statement of fact. I can’t tell you exactly how much we have now, but as I said before, we are all very satisfied with the progress we have made. You have to understand that these things take time, but we are confident the target of ten million yuan will be met before too long.”

“I see. And do you have a list of projects or programs you will be donating the money to?”

“Absolutely! We have been working very closely with the Sports Commission in Beijing and the local agencies in Shanghai, as well as the national basketball team in order to determine the best use of the money. We have already designated five university and college programs that we think have great potential and are worthy of our support. And there is one very exciting idea we are working on which is still in the planning stage but will give a tremendous boost to basketball in China if it works out.” He paused briefly for dramatic effect before continuing.

## The Games

“We are negotiating with some of the American National Basketball Association teams to bring some players over here to play a few exhibition games against the National Team and maybe some local teams. In fact, I will be going to America in a few weeks’ time to discuss this matter further. I’m sure you will agree this is a very exciting development and one your late husband would have been very proud of.”

“Yes, I’m sure he would have appreciated all the work you are doing. Can you tell me some of the teams or players you hope to play in these exhibition games?”

Feng was shifting around in his chair again and nervously adjusting his tie. He was not expecting to provide details.

“Well, firstly, I should emphasize that negotiations are still at a preliminary stage and that nothing is definite yet, but of course we would be delighted if Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls could play in China. The Chicago Bulls were the American champions last year, you know.”

“Yes, I know. But what about the Detroit Pistons? They were my husband’s favourite team and were back-to-back champions three years ago. And they were the only team to dominate Michael Jordan.” Devised by the Detroit Pistons to combat the Bulls by neutralising their most potent weapon, the “Jordan Rules” became something of a mantra for Li Heng in his dealings with rival companies, and as such Chen was all too aware of the concept.

“Yes, yes, Detroit is a very fine team indeed. Unfortunately, I will not be able to visit Detroit on this trip.”

“What a pity. So, what other teams will you be talking to?”

“I will be going to San Francisco first. The San Francisco team is one of the best in America at the moment. Then I will go to Chicago and New York. New York also has a very fine team. I will be talking to these three teams to see what arrangements can be made.”

Chen knew that there were actually two NBA teams in New York, but she had never heard her husband mention a team in San Francisco. She thought this was odd but did not challenge Feng. He was becoming even more nervous as he talked in very vague and roundabout terms about his proposed trip to the United States. He refused to look Chen in the eye throughout the conversation and beads of sweat were starting to form on his upper lip. Chen decided to change the subject.

“You are obviously keeping very busy,” she said. “Do you ever miss life at the car plant? It must be quite a change working here after the car industry.”

“It is certainly a very different environment, but the actual work is quite similar. As you know, I worked in the accounts department at Shanghai United Auto and this new work is really nothing more than glorified accounting. I spend most of my time adding up the books and doing publicity work for the fund.”

## The Games

"I see. And do you manage to keep in contact with your old friends and colleagues at the car plant? I imagine it must be quite difficult with them all the way out in Jiading County."

"Actually, many of my friends and colleagues live in the city and commute to work, so I often get to see them, usually at the weekend, and talk over old times. Why do you ask?"

Feng was becoming suspicious.

"Well, I have been hearing of some strange goings-on at the car plant, and I wondered if you had heard anything about it too."

"What kind of strange goings-on?" he asked, on the alert.

"There is talk of an investigation into my husband's links with the Americans, and I'm sure you will understand that I find this disturbing. I was curious to know if you had any information about this, and what it would mean for my husband's good name."

"Director Chen. You can rest assured that your husband's good name is intact and that everyone at the company still cherishes his memory. Your husband did more than anyone else to ensure Shanghai United Auto enjoys the prestigious position it occupies today. None of us will ever forget the good work General Manager Li did during his time at the company. No matter what happens in the future, I can assure you that your husband's reputation will not be affected."

"I appreciate your comments very much, but I'm still worried about what this investigation is all about. Do you have any insights? Particularly since, as you say, you will go to America soon."

The beads of sweat on Feng's upper lip had now joined to form a small river, and he was nervously loosening his tie even further.

"I'm not really supposed to talk about this but since it is you that is asking, I suppose I should let you know. I am indebted to your late husband and I believe he would want me to inform you of the situation. Unfortunately, this is neither the time nor the place. I am expecting some clients very shortly and it would not be appropriate for them to see you here. Perhaps we can arrange to meet again next week, over lunch maybe, when we can discuss this matter in more convivial surroundings."

Chen did not trust Feng but she tentatively agreed to meet him at a downtown restaurant of his choosing on the following Monday.

The morning after her meeting with Feng, Chen got a phone call from Ailing, who had arrived safely back in San Francisco and was already digging into the case again. Ailing's husband had managed to talk to one of his old CIA buddies who had confirmed that the agency was indeed taking the case involving Dajun very seriously. Chen, in return, mentioned her visit to Feng Xia and his planned trip to the United States. She said he had been very nervous and was probably hiding something.

## The Games

“He mentioned that he was going to San Francisco to talk the NBA team there. Does San Francisco even have an NBA team?”

“Well, there is the Golden State Warriors, but that franchise is based in Oakland, not San Francisco itself, but close enough.”

“I see. This guy Feng Xia said San Francisco had one of the best teams in the league. Do you think that is true? I got the impression he was just making stuff up.”

“I don’t think the Golden State Warriors are a very good team, but let me ask my husband. He is actually watching the game now.” There was a long, muffled conversation in the background before Ailing returned. “Sorry about that, I could not shut him up. It turns out that the Warriors are worse than useless. They did not even make the playoffs this year. According to my self-proclaimed expert husband, they need a new coach, new players, and a new system—whatever that means.”

“I see. Looks like Young Feng is a little confused.”

“Confused or just badly informed. Either way, why on earth would my cousin put someone like that in charge of his pet project?”



### **Monday, May 24, 1993 – Stood Up and Set Up**

The restaurant Feng had chosen for their lunch meeting was on Huaihai Road, not far from the site of the First Party Congress. Chen arrived five minutes late, but there was no sign of Feng, just a couple of young women engaged in an animated discussion about their recent purchases, and a few bored waitresses.

Chen took a seat by the window and waited. She was not impressed with Feng's choice of venue. It was one of those new privately-run cafes that were cropping up all over the place, serving a curious mixture of western and Chinese fast food. They were all decorated in the same unimaginative, generic style: small tables covered in red-and-white checked tablecloths with a single red plastic rose in a thin-stemmed vase. At the far end of the restaurant there was a glass display case containing unappetizing, plastic-looking bread, cakes and pastries. The whole atmosphere was one of sterility and conformity. Chen was dismayed that so many young people in Shanghai, including her own daughter, now preferred to eat in places that served tasteless hamburgers and sandwiches rather than a traditional family-run restaurant that took pride in its work and stuck to traditional cooking.

Her mood worsened as she eavesdropped on the conversation of the two young shoppers next to her. They had evidently spent the morning scouring the new Japanese department store just down from the restaurant and were planning their next raid to the complex of boutiques and designer clothing stores further down Huaihai Road. Their discussion focused almost entirely on a comparison of the various designer labels now available in Shanghai. However, their evaluations seemed to be based on the price rather than the intrinsic quality of the items they were discussing, as if the most expensive brand was automatically the best.

After a while, it was clear that she had been stood up. Chen left the café and walked over to her bicycle. She now noticed that the two men who had followed her there had been replaced by two more serious-looking individuals. They were both dressed in blue jeans and leather jackets, and one of them wore a pair of dark sunglasses that seemed to cover half his face. They walked over and blocked her path.

"Chen Lan, you have to come with us. Please walk with us to the car over there." The man with the sunglasses nodded in the direction of a grey Toyota parked illegally by a bus stop.

"Who are you?" Chen demanded. "Are you with the public security bureau? What do you want?"

"We are state security," he said, flashing an identity card that she did not recognize. "Let's go. You don't have any choice, so do not create a scene."

The other man had his hand inside his jacket and was looking nervously around at the passers-by. Chen calculated that if she tried to get away or call for the police, they would have simply dragged her into the car. No one would have done anything to help her. Chen had never seen anyone in Shanghai come to the aid of a stranger in difficulty (at least not in the New China), and it was unrealistic to expect things to change now. She walked toward the car and was pushed into the back seat, while the two men jumped in the front. They sped away heading west.

## The Games

The car turned right on to Chongqing Road and continued north along Chengdu Road before crossing Suzhou Creek and the railroad tracks and moving into the industrial suburbs. Throughout the journey, neither of the men responded to Chen's questions as to where they were taking her or why she was being held. They were more concerned with whether or not they were being followed. Once they were certain no one was on their tail, the man in the passenger seat radioed ahead that they had made their pickup and were on their way. Chen soon lost track of where they were. It was not a part of Shanghai that she, or just about anyone from the urban elite, was familiar with. With the constant twisting and turning, the grey anonymous landscape rapidly became a blur.

They had been travelling for about an hour before the car turned in to an unmarked gate and came to a stop in a courtyard. The complex resembled a small factory or workshop with several rows of low-rise brick buildings interspersed with piles of building materials, but there was no evidence of any production in progress. There were two other vehicles parked in the courtyard, a black Mercedes and a dirty white mini-van. Apart from that, the complex appeared deserted.

"Wait here." The man with the sunglasses got out of the car and walked to a door in the middle of the adjacent brick building. The other man remained in the passenger seat, silently smoking a cigarette. The man with the sunglasses was talking to someone hidden by the dark glass pane in the door. After about five minutes, the man with the sunglasses returned to the car and ordered Chen to get out.

They escorted her past the nearest brick building and down a narrow passageway, clogged with garbage and building materials, which opened up onto another small courtyard with a three-storey concrete block building at the far end. Chen was taken into the building, led up one flight of steps and down a dark corridor to a steel door at the far end. Another man, sitting on a metal chair outside the door, stood up as they approached.

"Give me your bag and empty your pockets," he said gruffly.

Not wanting to aggravate the situation, Chen did as she was told.

"Go in and wait there until they are ready for you," he said, opening the door and pushing her inside. The door closed with a heavy metallic thump. She heard the sound of the door being locked behind her, and then silence. Chen looked around the room. The walls were bare concrete and there was just one small window protected on the outside by metal bars. The only furniture in the room was a small wooden desk and chair and a metal-framed bed with a thin mattress, one sheet and a padded quilt. There was a metal bucket in the corner. She sat down on the bed, held her head in her hands, and tried to think.

The situation was not totally unfamiliar to her. She had been arbitrarily detained on several occasions by the red guards during the Cultural Revolution and knew from experience that her only hope was to cooperate with her captors in hope that they would get what they wanted and let her go. However, this was 1993, not 1966, and her captors were from State Security, not a red guard faction subject to outside pressure. State Security could hold her as long as they liked, and nobody would be the wiser.

## The Games

After assessing the immediate situation, Chen's first thoughts were of her daughter. Was she alright, had she been picked up as well? If not, what would Hong think when she didn't come home that night? Would Hong be able to find her?

Hong's only lead would be Feng, and it was now obvious to Chen that it had been Feng who had set her up. Feng was still technically an employee of the company and must have been subject to the same orders laid down by Kang that all contacts related to Li's case must be reported immediately.

Chen kicked the bed frame in frustration. How could she have been so stupid? Why didn't she realize straight away that Feng wanted to avoid talking about the case in his office just so that he could alert Kang and his cronies and set up a convenient meeting place? She had received so many warnings to stay out of the way, not to get involved. The police, her family, friends, and colleagues had all told her to leave it alone. Why didn't she listen to them?

After several deep breaths, Chen calmed down and told herself that it was very simple. *You got yourself into this mess, and you need to get yourself out.*

It was getting dark when she heard the door to her cell being unlocked. The same man who had taken her handbag and other personal possessions was standing in the doorway with a small, dumpy woman probably in her late 40s.

"You are to come with us," the woman said.

Chen straightened her clothes and tidied her hair and walked as calmly as she could out of the cell and into the corridor. Without saying a word, the two of them led her along the corridor, up another flight of steps, halting at the doorway at the top of the stairs. The woman knocked loudly on the door and there was a command to enter.

There were two men in the room seated behind a long desk facing the doorway. The older man had thinning hair combed in greasy strands over his spotty bald scalp. He wore thin metal-framed glasses which reflected the light from the single light bulb suspended from the ceiling. The younger man to his left had a strangely handsome face. He was not classically good-looking but had a prominent forehead and a thick-set jaw. Chen thought he was Mongolian or some other ethnic minority but couldn't be sure.

"Sit down," the older man ordered, as Chen was led to the small wooden chair placed directly in front of the desk. As she sat down, the woman who had accompanied her from the cell took the vacant seat to the right of the older man behind the desk.

"You are in lot of trouble," the older man said. "If you cooperate with this investigation and confess your wrongdoing, you will be treated fairly and with leniency. If you do not cooperate, if you seek to hide the truth or lie to us, or in another way obstruct this investigation, you will be punished severely. No mercy will be shown whatsoever. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand." She understood perfectly. This was exactly the line her red guard interrogators had used at the start of every struggle session.

## The Games

“You are the widow of Li Heng, the former general manager of the Shanghai United Automotive Company, are you not?”

“I am.”

“And you are aware, are you not, that on March 8, 1993, the same Li Heng killed himself by jumping out of his fifth-floor office window at the above-mentioned Shanghai United Automotive Company?”

“Yes, I am aware of that.”

“Together, with the said Li Heng, you have a son by the name of Li Dajun, born on September 10, 1964, do you not?”

“Yes, I do.”

The woman next to the chief interrogator was carefully ticking off Chen’s answers on a printed sheet of paper.

“And are you aware that the same Li Dajun was detained by the Shanghai Public Security Bureau on April 10 this year and is now being investigated by organs of the State Security Ministry?”

“Yes, I was notified to that effect.”

“All these facts are incontrovertible. Why are you attempting to distort the truth through base propaganda and lies?”

This took Chen completely by surprise.

“I’m sorry, I don’t understand. What propaganda and lies?”

“I have already warned you that failure to cooperate will lead to dire consequences. Your attitude will have to improve if you are to be granted leniency. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I understand, and I do wish to cooperate, but I am not clear as to what you are referring to.”

“You say you are not clear. I do not believe you. I believe you know exactly what I am talking about, but let me refresh your memory.” The younger man handed the older man a couple of sheets of paper, which he studied briefly before continuing his interrogation.

“On May 17, you went to the office of a man named Feng Xia, an employee of the Shanghai United Automobile Company. This visit was unsolicited and was not requested by the said Feng Xia. What was your purpose in visiting this man? And remember, failure to tell the truth will lead to dire consequences.”

Chen now knew for sure that Feng told them about her probing questions concerning the investigation into her husband, but she doubted he would have mentioned the discussion

about the basketball fund. This, she thought, could be turned to her advantage, if she played it right. It was a risk but worth a try, just to test the waters if nothing else.

"I understand," she said. "I visited Feng Xia with two purposes in mind. The first and main purpose was to discuss the China Dream Team basketball fund established by my husband, which Feng now manages." She waited for a response from the older man but none was forthcoming.

"I suspected that Feng was not managing the fund correctly and that he had in fact been stealing money from the fund for his own ends. During our discussion, I believe I did uncover evidence of Feng's corruption and larceny."

"That is no concern of this investigation. What was the real purpose of your visit?"

"I'm sorry, I thought you would have been interested in hearing about Feng's crimes," she said, hoping to divert attention away from herself. During the Cultural Revolution, it had been standard practice to denounce others in the hope of saving oneself, but it did not appear to be working in this case.

"We are not interested in your accusations against this man. I ask again, what was the real purpose of your visit to Feng Xia?"

"The second reason for me to visit Feng was to ask him if he had any information about an investigation into my husband's connections with the Americans at the car plant. There have been a lot of rumours about this matter, and I thought Feng, being a Shanghai United Auto employee and an associate of my husband's, might be able to provide some information on the subject."

"Why did you want information on this subject? Any investigation would be handled by the relevant authorities. It would be no concern of yours."

"My only concern was that my husband's good name could be tarnished by an investigation, and I wanted to know if this could happen. Feng assured me that it would not, and I was satisfied with that."

"Again, you are not telling the truth. Think very carefully before you answer the next question. Why did you ask to see Feng again if you were satisfied with the information he provided?"

"I did not ask to see him again. It was Feng who suggested we meet again. He chose the time and the meeting place. It was not somewhere I had ever been to before. I do not know what he wanted to talk about, but I thought it would be a good opportunity to find out more about his corrupt activities with regard to the basketball fund."

The older man looked very annoyed with the answers he was getting. He leaned over to the younger man and held a whispered conversation for a few minutes before pulling out another sheaf of paper. The woman on his right continued to stare impassively ahead of her.

## The Games

“Why did you invite the Chinese American named Luo Ailing to Shanghai on May 9, 1993?”

“Luo Ailing is my cousin. She came to Shanghai of her own accord after I informed her of the death of my husband and the arrest of my son. She came to provide support in my hour of need.”

“That is just a pretence for her visit. What was the real purpose for Luo Ailing to come to this city on that date?”

“I know of no other purpose than the one I have just given you.”

“You are lying again. We know for a fact that the said Luo Ailing came to this city as your agent to stir up trouble and spread lies and propaganda with regard to the situation of Li Heng and Li Dajun. Now, you will explain why you co-opted this person into your base scheme.”

Chen was becoming quite nervous at this point. She did not know how much information they already had about Ailing’s visit, and she knew she would have to be very careful.

“The only activity I can think of in this regard is my cousin’s visit to the American consulate here to inquire if they could help in my son’s case, but she did that of her own accord. I did not ask her to go and I did not accompany her. You will have to ask her or the Consul General in person for a record of the conversation.”

“Do you deny then that you dispatched Luo Ailing to the United States Consulate in Shanghai with the express purpose of besmirching your own country and telling lies about the situation in China to a foreign power?”

“My cousin has spent her life trying to improve relations between our country and the United States. She would never attack or tell falsehoods about China. All she wanted to do was help my son, but unfortunately the Americans refused to help because they said my son was not an American citizen.”

“Why then did the same Luo Ailing pay a visit to Comrade Mao Yougen on May 11, if not for the same purpose of spreading lies and propaganda at your behest?”

So, Mao had reported Ailing. This was potentially very dangerous. Chen could not risk accusing such a prominent party member of wrongdoing. Her only option was to plead ignorance.

“I believe Mao Yougen is an old friend of my cousin’s. He was also the secretary of her father’s business partner before Liberation. I understood her visit was simply to renew that acquaintance, but I have no knowledge of what transpired between them.”

“Do you expect us to believe that you never discussed this meeting between Luo Ailing and Mao Yougen?”

“It is possible that we did discuss it after my cousin returned from the meeting, but I’m afraid I do not have a clear recollection of that discussion.”

“Are you saying you did not discuss this matter before the meeting?”

“I believe my cousin might have mentioned the fact she was going to see Mao Yougen, but we did not discuss the matter in detail.”

“We know that is not the case. Now think very carefully and tell us again what discussions you had with Luo Ailing before her meeting with Comrade Mao Yougen on May 11.”

“All I can remember is her saying she wished to renew her acquaintance with him because she had not seen him in several years. I did not ask her what she was planning to talk to him about.”

“I can assure you that I am very patient and am willing to wait for a long time for you to remember correctly what was discussed between you and Luo Ailing.”

The younger man shifted through the papers on the desk in front of him and handed the older man another file.

“Do you know a man named Gao Haiqing?”

Her heart skipped a beat. Surely, they hadn't got to him as well. Did that mean they would detain Hong as well?

“Yes, he is my son-in-law.”

“Gao Haiqing is married to your daughter Li Hong?”

“Yes, but they are now separated. He moved to Beijing.”

“When was the last time you saw Gao Haiqing?”

“I don't remember exactly the last time I saw him, but he left for Beijing about two or three weeks ago, and I have not seen or heard from him since then.”

“Where is he living in Beijing?”

“I don't know. As I said I have not heard from him since he left.”

“Why did he leave Shanghai?”

“I presume because of problems in his marriage with my daughter but you will have to ask him in person because I cannot speak for him.”

“Isn't it true that you sent him to Beijing to continue spreading lies about the situation with regard to Li Heng and Li Dajun in this city?”

“No, that is not true.” Chen was getting exasperated with this barrage of accusations. “He left of his own accord, and to be honest I will be very happy if I never see him again. He treated my daughter very badly and caused her tremendous distress.”

## The Games

“There is no evidence of what you have alleged. There is, however, incontrovertible evidence that Gao Haiqing engaged in a campaign of disinformation on your behalf in this city. It is obvious, therefore, that you sent him to Beijing to continue this base mission in the people’s capital.”

“I have no knowledge of any such activities by my son-in-law in this city or in Beijing. I suggest you contact his company’s office here in Shanghai, find out where he is in Beijing, and ask him yourself. But, personally, I would not trust a word that man says. He has already told many horrible lies about my daughter and my family and will do anything to save his own neck.”

“Enough!” The older man slammed his fist down on the desk. “You are not here to make accusations against others. You are here to answer questions. You have so far failed to provide adequate answers. You will return to your cell and think about what I have said and be prepared to answer truthfully when we see you again.”

“Am I to spend the night here?”

“You will stay here as long as is necessary.”

“In that case, I want to call my daughter to let her know what has happened.”

“That is forbidden. Take her back to her cell.”



**Tuesday, May 25, 1993 – Day Two**

Chen was woken at six o'clock the following morning by the sound of the door clanging open and a sudden burst of light from the lamp above her. The woman from the previous day walked into the room and roughly roused her from the bed and ordered her back to the interrogation room.

Chen had only managed to get a couple of hours of fitful sleep and was feeling very groggy. The interrogation had not gone the way she'd expected, and she knew she had seriously antagonized her inquisitors by her forthright defence of her actions and refusal to admit any wrongdoing. Her attempt to deflect attention by accusing Feng and Gao of wrongdoing had backfired and only served to make her interrogators more suspicious.

As she lay awake at night, Chen calculated that she would have to confess to some wrongdoing if they were to ever let her go, but what could she admit to and still not incriminate herself to the point where she would be in danger of a long prison sentence? Did they really want detailed information about her activities and those of Ailing and Gao, or were they simply trying to scare her? They had certainly succeeded in the latter, but how much further did they want to go?

Chen knew from previous experience that interrogators usually let their suspects know what they want from them during the course of the interrogation, but this was significantly different from the Cultural Revolution. These were professionals, not young and overzealous red guards. It was unlikely they would tip their hand as easily as her captors of 26 years ago. The older man had already stated that he had a great deal of patience and was willing to wait until she came around.

The same two men were already seated in the exact same positions behind the desk when she entered the interrogation room. They did not appear to have changed their clothes. In fact, Chen thought, they might not have moved at all during the time she was away.

"Sit down," the older man ordered, as the woman took her seat to his right. "Have you thought about what I told you yesterday?"

"Yes. I have thought a great deal about what you told me."

"Good. Are you ready to confess?"

"I'm sorry. I'm still confused as to what you want me to confess to. I can't think of anything I have done wrong."

"It is not for us to tell you what to confess. You know what you have done. You have to confess and make atonement for your actions."

Chen's back ached, her shoulders ached. The small wooden chair was uncomfortable. She simply did not have the will to engage in another battle of words with this man so early in the morning. She just wanted to go back to her cell and get some sleep.

## The Games

“I admit that I have been making inquiries to the public security bureau as to the whereabouts of my son and how he is being treated, and that I talked to a lawyer to see if he could help me get my son released, but I was not aware I was committing a crime in so doing.”

“It is not a crime to consult with the public security bureau or talk to a lawyer, but that is not what you were doing. You had an ulterior motive in taking these actions, namely to spread lies and propaganda about the situation regarding your son and late husband. We have indisputable evidence to this effect. You have no option but to admit your wrongdoing and make a full and proper confession.”

“If I did do something wrong, and since you have the evidence I suppose I must have done, it was only because I was concerned about the welfare of my son and the reputation and good name of my husband. Any wife and mother in my situation would have done the same thing. I’m sure you can understand that, can’t you?” Chen said, turning to the woman seated behind the desk. She did not look up or acknowledge Chen’s existence at all, and just continued to look at the papers in front of her.

“You are not permitted to ask questions,” the older man snapped. “Your attitude is still very disappointing. You say that you were motivated simply out of concern for your family, but your actions show a systematic attempt to spread lies and disinformation. How could that possibly help your son or late husband? Your actions were clearly dictated by some other, more sinister motive. You will have to confess your real motivation and admit all your wrongdoing since the death of Li Heng on March 8, 1993.”

“I understand, but I assure you that my motivation was simply that of a concerned wife and mother. If I inadvertently spread lies and propaganda during my attempts to find out what had happened to my husband and son, then I am truly sorry. It was not my intention to do so, but there was so much gossip and so many rumours flying around, I did not know what to believe. I wanted to find out the truth and the only way I could do that was by asking people about these rumours.”

“So, you admit you did spread lies and propaganda? That is a start. However, you will have to do much better than that before we are satisfied with your willingness to cooperate. We need a full and detailed account of all your wrongdoing, and a full and complete confession of your evil intent.”

“I understand. But a lot has transpired since my husband’s passing. I can’t remember all the details, the times these events took place, and the people involved.”

“Very well. I will give you some time to remember. You will return to your cell and remain there until you are ready to confess. And remember, we will not accept anything less than a full and frank admission of your guilt and a proper atonement for your mistakes. Do you understand?”

“I understand.”

“Good. Take her back to the detention room.”

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The woman behind the desk got up and walked around to escort Chen back to her cell. The guard opened the door and she was shoved inside. She collapsed on the bed and went straight to sleep.

Chen did not recognize where she was when she awoke mid-morning. She looked around the small, dark room and thought she was still dreaming. Reality slowly dawned, however, as she needed to use the bathroom. She really wanted to avoid using the bucket in the corner, so she walked over to the door and tried to summon the guard. The metal grate in the door opened and she was confronted with the face of the guard, his mouth half full with a steamed bun.

“What do you want,” he spluttered.

“I need the bathroom.”

The grate in the door closed and she heard the guard walking off down the corridor. After a couple of minutes, he returned and opened the door. The woman from the interrogation room was with him.

“Come with me,” she said.

She led Chen down to the other end of the corridor and into a public bathroom with a row of stained squat toilets opposite a couple of rusting metal sinks.

“Is there any soap or a cloth I can use?” Chen asked after surveying the scene.

“If you wish to wash yourself, just use the water from the tap.”

The water was cold and dirty, but it was better than nothing. Chen let the water run for a minute and then washed her hands the best she could, splashed her face and tried to rub some of the sleep out of her eyes. When she had finished, she was escorted back to the cell.

Chen sat down on the crumpled bed cover and tried to think of a course of action that could get her out of this hellish place. She had a better idea of what they wanted but was concerned about how much they already knew. Whatever she said would have to tally with the information already in their possession.

They had been following her and other members of her family at least since Dajun returned from the United States, and it would be prudent to assume that they had been watching their movements ever since Li’s death, possibly even before. It was likely that her telephone had been bugged as well. There was also the chance that they had obtained some incriminating evidence while interrogating her son, but Chen doubted very much that Dajun would have knowingly given them information which would land her in trouble.

She would have to recount her activities in as accurate a manner as possible, but at the same time gloss over or place a positive interpretation on some of her more suspicious actions. She was prepared to admit that her questioning of certain people resulted in the spread of propaganda and lies but not that her actions were motivated by malicious intent. She knew she had to be patient and take things one step at a time and hope to work out

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some kind of compromise. Even with all the power on their side, in some strange way, a confession was still a matter of negotiation. Chen was determined not to give in without a fight.

She stood up, took a couple of deep breaths and walked over to bang on the door again. The metal grate opened and Chen was confronted by the face of the guard again.

“What is it now,” he said.

“I want to confess.”

Chen was handed a pencil and a notepad, and she sat down at the small desk to write her confession. It had been about 15 years since she had been required to write a confession, but the *pro forma* technique was still ingrained in her memory. The trick was to talk a lot without actually saying anything, to make a big show of one’s desire to learn from one’s mistakes without actually specifying what those mistakes were.

The style was always far more important than the content. One had to sound contrite, admit one’s mistakes in the vaguest manner possible, apologize for them and promise to behave correctly in the future. This was easier to do during the Cultural Revolution because there was a clearly defined and very narrow political discourse everyone had to adhere to. One simply filled the confession with as much Marxist diatribe as possible and quoted extensively from the *People’s Daily*. Now, the boundaries of political discourse had been widened considerably and there were no longer any clear guidelines as to the language to be used. The generic language of confession, atonement and redemption was, however, still very much in vogue and it was in this discourse that Chen chose to couch her first draft.

The sight of her industrious scribbling evidently pleased her captors, because soon after she sat down to write, the door opened and the guard appeared with a plate of steamed cabbage, watery soup and a bowl of cold, gritty rice. Chen was so hungry that she inhaled the tasteless fare in a few minutes.

The confession took over two hours to complete, and it covered five pages. After she had finished, Chen read through it again and found it satisfactory. It sounded contrite and apologetic yet contained no information whatsoever that they could use to accuse her of any crime. She outlined a detailed chronology of events since her husband’s death: the funeral, Dajun’s return from Los Angeles, his subsequent detention, her son-in-law’s desertion of his wife, Ailing’s visit to Shanghai and a list of all the people she had talked to about her husband.

She was very careful, however, not to incriminate Ma or Gu or anyone else who had been kind enough to help her. She confessed that she had been anguished by the malicious rumours she had heard concerning her husband and the circumstances of his death and that she concerned to uphold his outstanding reputation and good name so that her children would not be tarnished by the same brush.

She admitted that she had been told by several upstanding citizens, such as her brother-in-law at the *Liberation Daily*, not to pay any attention to these rumours, but she was weak and insecure and continued ask too many questions. She apologized for inadvertently giving

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credence to the rumours by taking them at face value and promised in the future not to pay them any heed.

Likewise, with regard to Dajun, she pleaded guilty to listening to the evil gossip of others rather than accepting the good word of the public security bureau and allowing them to do their work. She promised in future to be a good citizen, serve the party and government and never spread any lies or propaganda again.

After making one or two alterations, Chen walked over to the door.

“I have completed my confession,” she told the guard. The grate closed again and ten minutes later the dumpy middle-aged woman appeared, took a cursory glance at Chen’s offered confession and walked out without saying a word. The door was locked and Chen lay down on the bed and waited.

It was getting dark outside when she was eventually summoned back to the interrogation room. She could not tell from the emotionless expression on the dumpy woman’s face how well her confession had been received, but she figured that since several hours had already expired, combined with the fact that they provided her with another meal, this meant that they had not rejected it out of hand.

The same two men were in the same places behind the desk when she entered—did they ever move? Again, there was nothing in their faces to suggest what the response would be.

“This so-called confession is totally unacceptable,” the older man said in a grave monotone. “Your attitude has shown some improvement, but it is still far from satisfactory. You need to think very carefully about your predicament and act accordingly.”

Chen sighed deeply, looked at the ground in front of her, and said nothing.

“This document you have given us is nothing but a series of dates and names of people. Your actions with regard to this matter are already well-known to us. There is no need for you to describe who you have met and when. We know what you have done. What we require is a truthful and honest explanation of your actions, including your motivation and hoped-for consequences, not a mere description of them.”

“I apologize if I did not provide an adequate explanation of my actions, but I am aware of my obligations in this regard, and I did try my best to do so. I explained that I fell prey to malicious gossip and ignored the good advice of others, especially the dedicated and upstanding officers of the public security bureau.”

“That is simply description. Why can you not understand that it is not good enough? The purpose of a confession is to acknowledge your mistakes and wrongdoing, and to show that you are willing to reform, not to make pitiful excuses for your actions.”

“I assure you that I am not just making excuses. I said clearly in my confession that I was wrong and spread the propaganda of others, and I promised never to do it again.”

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“To claim that the lies you were spreading were the creation of others is just an excuse. And, furthermore, you have provided no evidence that other people generated this propaganda. You have given us no names of the guilty or explained why you did not report these people to the relevant authorities. It is clear that it was you who created, developed and disseminated these vicious lies and propaganda. You alone are responsible, and you alone must admit your guilt.”

“The reason I give no names of these people is because there were so many. Everybody was talking about this issue, even taxi drivers I met were spreading rumours about my husband. If I were to give you a list of rumour-mongers it would be longer than my entire confession as it stands at the moment. You are from this city, so you must know how people gossip and spread rumours. It is like an epidemic, and I fell prey to that epidemic.”

“We are not aware of any persons spreading these lies and propaganda other than yourself and those directed by you. Our concern is with your actions, not of others.”

“I realize that. I understand that very clearly, but I do not live in a vacuum. I am subject to and affected by the words and actions of others, this is a scientific fact. As you know, I am a scientist, and I understand how these things work.”

“Your scientific credentials are of no relevance to this matter.” The older man was getting more and more frustrated with Chen’s refusal to give in. She sensed he wanted to get this interrogation over and done with as much as she did, but he had to get a full and proper confession before he could go home.

As the inquisition progressed, Chen became more and more convinced that he’d had enough. He began to tell her in more detail what was required and what would be acceptable to them. It appeared that what they really wanted was an acknowledgement that Chen had attempted to interfere in or disrupt the investigation of the State Security Ministry and Public Security Bureau into her son’s and husband’s activities.

It was the first official confirmation Chen had actually received from the State Security people themselves that her husband had indeed been under investigation. Sensing an opportunity, Chen told the older man that she realized her first confession had been mistaken and had failed to acknowledge the true picture. She asked if she could rewrite it. A faint hint of relief appeared on his face. It was the first real expression of emotion he had displayed throughout the interrogation.

“Very well. Your attitude has improved somewhat, and I’m willing to let you correct your mistakes. However, if your revised confession is still unsatisfactory, you will be made to suffer the consequences. As it is already late, I suggest that you take time to seriously consider the task before you and begin to rewrite your confession in the morning. You will be woken at 6 o’clock in the morning and provided with writing materials. Now go.”

The dumpy woman led Chen back to her cell. She too was tired and fed up with the proceedings. Her face was haggard, and she was constantly massaging her right hand to relieve the pain from writing down notes from the interrogation.

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The lights went out almost as soon as the door was locked behind her, and Chen had to feel her way to the bed before lying down to sleep. Unlike her first night, Chen was no longer overly concerned about her fate. She knew what she had to do and was confident she could do it. The only unknown was if the older man's superiors, or whoever it was who would eventually be judging her confession, was as anxious to get rid of her as he was.

**Wednesday, May 26, 1993 – On the Third Day**

Chen was not allowed to keep her original confession, so she had to be careful not to contradict herself. Any contradiction would be seized upon as evidence of her mendacity. She would have to do a complete rewrite but ensure the information in the second confession conformed to that in the first. She would have to insert the additional information required, such as an admission of interfering in police business, in a seamless fashion that would not give rise to suspicion.

It was not an easy task, and it took her the best part of the morning to complete. She reread and rewrote the confession half a dozen times before she reached the point when any further alterations would have been redundant. It was good enough, she figured, and if they didn't like it, she would just have to face the consequences.

After handing in her confession, Chen was treated to a special lunch of instant noodle soup and a steamed bun. Compared with the tepid, bland fare she had been served on previous occasions, it was a veritable banquet, and she savoured every bite, using the steamed bun to mop up the last of the gritty soup residue at the bottom of the bowl. She was still hungry after finishing her meal and considered asking the guard for more but thought better of it. That would be pushing her luck a little too far.

With no option but to wait for the response to her revised confession, Chen lay down and tried to get some sleep. It was the first time in a long time that she had been able to take a post-lunch siesta. The irony was not lost on her.

Even though workers in China had a constitutional right to a post-lunch rest period, the custom was rapidly dying out. Everyone in the city was just far too busy to indulge in the luxury of taking an hour off work after lunch. Very often, business people would work solidly from eight in the morning to eight or even ten o'clock at night, if they were entertaining clients.

Chen regretted the disappearance of the siesta. She felt the world around her was getting far too frenetic and wished for the more relaxed pace of life she enjoyed before everyone became obsessed with business and commerce. In many ways, she thought, the renewed drive towards economic development, kicked off by Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour the previous year, was no different from the political fanaticism of earlier campaigns. Everyone had to get on board, and there was no room for dissent. In the last few years, however, there has been some push-back by ordinary workers against the excessive working hours (9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week, or even 15 hours a day, seven days a week) but the slower rhythm of Chen's time has probably been lost forever.

Chen managed to get several hours of uninterrupted sleep. When she awoke, there was still no word from her captors. She got up and stretched, trying to relieve some of the muscle ache. She then stood quietly at her narrow window watching the sky slowly darken and the lights in the surrounding suburbs flicker on.

She heard the door being unlocked and turned around to see five people facing her: the main interrogator, his younger sidekick, and the dumpy woman, plus one of the men who had picked her up outside the restaurant, and a middle-aged man dressed in a dark grey



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tunic. He was short and stocky and stared directly at her with a chilling, penetrating gaze. It was this man who spoke.

“We have examined your confession very carefully and found it to be unsatisfactory in several areas.”

Her hands began to tremble, but Chen tried to remain calm and keep her composure.

“You have again failed to admit your true motivation for engaging in your felonious conspiracy to undermine the work of the people’s security organs and spread malicious lies and propaganda to slander the good name of these organs. We are very disappointed by your vain attempts to hide the truth. You should be under no illusion that we know exactly what you have been doing and why.

“I am here to warn you that we will not tolerate any more interference by you or your agents in the legitimate work of the people’s security organs. Any further transgressions of the law or relevant regulations on your part will lead to very dire consequences. Do you understand clearly the warning I have given you?”

Chen nodded and mumbled acknowledgement.

“Although this document is not satisfactory, your attitude has shown some improvement, and you have demonstrated a degree of contrition and expressed a desire to reform your erroneous ways. Therefore, we have decided to give you a second chance to prove to us that what you have said in this document is indeed the truth. However, if your actions do not live up to your words, you will be made to suffer the consequences. We will be watching your actions very closely to determine if you live up to your declaration of intent to become a good citizen and serve the party and government. If you fail to do this, we will be forced to reform you under the direct supervision of the people’s security organs. Have you clearly understood everything I have told you?”

“Yes, I have, and I thank you for giving me a second chance. I promise I will fulfil all my obligations and refrain from any words or deeds that could undermine the work of the people’s security organs.”

The man continued to glare at her for what seemed like an eternity before abruptly turning on his heel and walking out the door, followed by her three interrogators. Chen was left alone with one of her original captors.

“Come with me,” he said, taking her by the elbow and marching her down the corridor, down the stairwell and out into the darkness through a series of passageways, to a small gate where the other captor, the man with the sunglasses, was waiting.

“These are your personal possessions,” he said, handing Chen her handbag.

The other man then unlocked the padlock on the gate, and she was pushed out on to a dirt road with no street lights, sign posts or anything that could possibly tell her where she was.

“Go now,” they said, almost in union.

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“But I don’t know where I am. How I am I to get home?”

The gate slammed shut and she heard the chains being rattled as they re-locked the padlock. Chen saw some lights and heard traffic in the distance and started to pick her way slowly down the dirt road in the hope of finding someone who could give her directions.

She eventually found a paved road, but there was no one else to be seen, just a few trucks and cars passing by. She stood by the roadside for a while, hoping to find a taxi, but there were none to be found. This was not a part of the city where people took taxis. Just standing around on the dusty roadside was pointless, so she continued to walk in the hope of finding a landmark or road sign that she recognized.

After half an hour or so, she reached a bus stop for a service that terminated at the railway station. Thankfully, she did not have to wait long before the bus turned up. She clambered aboard and found an empty seat by the window near the back. She watched the dark streets pass by as the bus slowly lumbered along, taking a tortuously slow and twisting route on its way to its destination. It was only as they approached the railway station that Chen finally recognized where she was.

When the bus pulled into the terminus near the station, Chen disembarked and made her way across the parking lot to the taxi rank. She collapsed into the back of the first cab she found and told the driver to go to Kangping Road.

“Are you alright, Madam?” the driver said, turning around in his seat. “You look like you’ve been beaten up or something.”

“It’s nothing. Please just take me home. As quickly as possible.”

The driver was clearly concerned and continued to stare at her in his rear-view mirror.

“Are you sure you don’t want to go to the hospital or something?”

Chen stared back and said nothing. The driver got the message, and they drove in silence to the Kangping Road apartment. When she looked in her purse, she found she had only just enough money for the fare. She was certain that she’d had considerably more cash two days earlier when she was picked up, but at this point she did not care.

As she unlocked the front door and entered the apartment, Hong came running up and was just about to put her arms around her mother when she stopped.

“Mom, where have you been? What on earth has happened? You look terrible. Were you in some kind of accident? Why didn’t you call? I’ve been frantic with worry; we all have been. I’ve been calling everyone to find out what happened, and no one had seen you or knew where you were. I was really scared, Mom, I thought you might have been... Please tell me what happened.”

Chen just wanted to get out of her rancid clothes and take a long, hot bath, but she could not ignore her frantic daughter.

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“You know that guy I was supposed to meet the day before yesterday? Well, he must have reported me to State Security because they were waiting for me. They took me to this place in the suburbs, interrogated me and forced me to write a confession. But it is alright now. They have let me off with a warning, and I’m home now.”

“But what did they want? What did you have to confess?”

“It doesn’t matter. I will tell you all it about later. Can you fix me something to eat? Anything is fine. I’m starving.”

**Thursday, June 3, 1993 - Time for a Vacation**

Three days in a black jail was enough to convince Chen that it was time to get out of China, at least for a while. She remembered the letter from her younger son suggesting she take a vacation in Australia, and now that idea was becoming more and more attractive.

Life in Shanghai would be hell from now on. Everywhere she went, everyone she met, everything she did would be under constant scrutiny. The longer she stayed in Shanghai, the greater the chance was that she could slip up and end up back in that black jail or worse. And she was sure it would not just be for two or three days the next time. Of course, just applying to leave the country would raise a red flag as well, but Chen felt she had sufficient grounds for asking for permission.

Her daughter took some convincing.

"What are you talking about, Mom? We can't just get up and leave. You don't know how long this investigation is going to last. It could go on for a month, half a year, even a year or more. Are you seriously considering staying away for that long? It just doesn't make sense. And what about my brother? Are you suggesting we leave him behind to face his fate?"

"Of course not. The thought of abandoning Dajun even for just one day leaves me wracked with guilt, but there is nothing we can do to help him here. If we so much as mention his detention in public, we can be accused of interfering in the investigation or perverting the course of justice. His fate is entirely up to State Security now; they can do what they want with him. Should he, by some miracle, be released, then we can leave word with my sister as to where we are."

"I suppose so, but it is still not clear to me how we could even get to Australia. Do you know how much airplane tickets cost, and how on earth would we get visas, anyway?"

"Well, I have thought about that, too. We can ask Jacob at the consulate to help. When I met him earlier, he seemed very proud—almost boastful—of his ability to get people visas, and he said he is more than willing to help if we need anything."

"I don't know, Mom. It's tempting, but it just seems like a really drastic step to take. So many things could go wrong."

"I realize that. So, we take this one step at a time and just test the waters. If it is not feasible, or if it looks like we could get into trouble, we will simply abandon our plans and hope to limit the damage caused. That is why I'm going to do everything in the open and above-board. I will go to the hospital president and explain that I have been suffering from stress and that I would like to take an extended vacation. I will tell him that I have not seen my younger son in over two years and this would be a good opportunity to visit him. You know the president. He is a very kind and sympathetic man. I'm sure he will not oppose me. In fact, ever since your father's death, he has been telling me to take as much time off as I need. With his support, there should not be any problem in getting an exit visa from the public security bureau. You are the head of a foreign company. You travel to Hong Kong all the time. So, there is no reason for them to refuse you an exit visa, either.

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“Actually Mom, I already have a valid exit visa in my passport, but I still have a very bad feeling about all of this.”

The next day, Chen put phase one of her plan into action. As expected, the hospital president was delighted at her proposition.

“That is an excellent idea, Chen,” he said with a broad smile. “My only regret is that you did not come to this decision sooner. A long vacation will do you a world of good. And Australia, as well, that must be very exciting. I have never been there but everyone says it is a beautiful country. I’m sure you will have a wonderful time. I will personally process your application for an exit visa, so there is no need for you to worry about that.

“You know, my own son is currently studying in Germany, and I am very much looking forward to seeing him again when the study mission goes to Europe later this year, so I understand perfectly your desire to be with your children again. It is unfortunate these days that families are so split up, with family members all over China and all over the world. It is important for young people to see new sights and gain new experiences, but I personally miss the good old days when three or four generations of families all lived together. It was a very supportive and comforting way of life, don’t you agree?”

“Oh, very much so. I should not have to travel half way across the world just to see my son, but there it is, that is the way things are today.”

Actually, Chen did not miss the days of three or four generations in one house at all. It was invariably a recipe for constant squabbling, arguing and infighting. Her own mother-in-law came to mind. But she thought it best not to argue the point.

The next stage in the plan, getting hold of Jacob, would not be so easy. Although she wanted to do everything in the open, calling a foreign diplomat on an open line would not be prudent, no matter how innocent she tried to make the conversation. Chen remembered that Jacob’s wife, Yunxia, worked at a kindergarten on Hengshan Road. She thought about stopping by as she was passing on her way to or from work, but, again, that would just create trouble for the kindergarten staff. Instead, she leafed through the phone book, found the number of the school and called from a public phone on Tibet Road.

Chen did not need to explain anything. Yunxia understood and suggested they meet in a public place one evening next week. She recommended the Long Bar at the recently opened Portman Hotel on Nanjing Road West.

The following Thursday was an even-numbered day, so they took Hong’s car for the short drive to the Portman. It was not long before they spotted the security detail in the car behind them. Hong was not sure if she should drive normally or wait for the agents to catch up if they got stuck at a junction. The result was several close calls with pedestrians and cyclists before they made it to the safety of the underground car park at the hotel.

The agents did not enter the car park, but chose instead to park on the forecourt. As Chen and Hong walked up the ramp back on to the forecourt, they saw the agents arguing with a hotel security officer who was trying to get them to move their vehicle. As they turned on to

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the escalator that led up to the Long Bar, the agents just pushed the hotel employee aside and followed them up.

Jacob and Yunxia had secured a booth by the window, surrounded on either side by mixed groups of local and foreign business people. They would fit right in. The state security people entered the bar to discover they could not get within ten metres of their table without evicting other people from their seats. They took seats at the end of the bar and glared. Chen pointed the watchers out to Jacob.

“Yeah, you can spot them a mile off. You would think they would at least try to blend in a little bit with their surroundings,” he said.

Chen updated Jacob on the events since their last meeting and her desire to visit Xiaojun in Sydney. Jacob was encouraging but cautious.

“I think it would be a very good idea for both of you to get out of here for a while. From what I hear, this investigation into your husband and son has placed nearly everyone who has contacts with foreigners under suspicion. A lot of people at the consulate are finding their regular contacts are refusing to see them anymore. Everyone is very nervous.

“Now, I can’t guarantee getting you visas, but I will certainly talk to my supervisor and plead your case to him. Actually, we no longer issue visas in Shanghai. We had too many problems with people going to study English in Australia and not coming back, so now everything goes through the embassy in Beijing. That said, we can certainly recommend you as a priority case, and I could even argue that you are subject to persecution and could be arrested if you stay here. Don’t worry. Everything will be absolutely confidential, and no one outside the Australian government will know about it.”

Jacob promised to let them know as soon as he had any word about their case, and they agreed upon a method by which they could contact each other without arousing suspicion. Hong and Yunxia would act as liaisons, and Chen would only meet or talk to Jacob directly if absolutely necessary.

As they discussed life in Australia, Hong became noticeably keener on the idea, and by the time they said their goodbyes, she was already thinking of ways to arrange her own exit from her trading company.

Chen insisted on paying for their drinks. As she was looking through her handbag, she noticed a small piece of tightly folded paper in the bottom. It was an official receipt from the Shanghai Municipal State Security Bureau for the payment of a total of 90 yuan, 30 yuan for each day of her “board and lodging” during the interrogation. So, that at least explained why she had only just enough change for the cab fare home that night.

### PART THREE

*Fortunately, in this universe, my life is mine and mine alone to play with. I've already wasted enough of it, and it seems to be a matter of little consequence that this whole experience has brought me to such depths of despair. I don't want to stay here... I've decided to take the train south and waste what is left of my life in a place where nobody knows me.*

"Miss Sophie's Diary," Ding Ling, 1928.

#### **Wednesday, June 23, 1993 – International Olympic Day**

In the weeks following her abduction, Chen Lan sought to keep as low a profile as possible, only going into work when absolutely necessary and not talking to any of her colleagues about her son's case. She spent most of her time at home reading old novels and short stories, plus a few books on Australia that she had managed to find in the Xinhua bookstore on Fuxing Road.

On the evening of June 23, Chen was at home watching the television news. Just about the entire bulletin was dedicated to Beijing's increasingly vociferous bid for the Olympic Games in 2000. There had been a ceremony in Tiananmen Square that day to mark the establishment of a corps of high school students who would volunteer during the National Games in August. There was also going to be a pop concert featuring more than a hundred artists in Beijing's Capital Stadium to support the Games bid. This concert was sponsored by several major companies including, unsurprisingly now, Shanghai United Auto.

She was startled out of her viewing trance by a phone call from the hospital president.

"Director Chen, how are you? I trust you are enjoying your time off." The president sounded anxious. "I am sorry to call you so late, but I'm afraid I have some bad news for you. I don't know why this has happened, and I assure you that I protested on your behalf, but there was nothing I could do."

Chen braced herself for what she feared was coming.

"You see, I have just received a notification from the public security bureau with regard to your request for an exit visa. It seems that your application has been turned down."

"I see. I don't suppose they gave any reasons for turning it down."

"Well, not at first, but when I queried the decision, I was told that you would not be allowed to leave the country. In fact, you would not even be allowed to leave the municipality of Shanghai until further notice. They did not say why this was so but I suspect it must have something to do with the unfortunate events concerning your son. Do you think that could be the case?"

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“That is possible, but I’m not supposed to talk about those events, because it would jeopardize the proceedings. I hope you can understand that.”

“Yes, I think I understand. I don’t know what to say. I’m sorry this has happened, but I’m sure you can appreciate there is very little, if anything, I can do at this juncture.”

“Indeed. You have been very helpful and supportive throughout this ordeal, and I am very much in your debt.”

“Not at all, not at all. I only wish I could have done more. There is one thing I want to emphasize, however. This development, unfortunate as it is, need not alter your plans for an extended vacation. You can take as much time off as you wish. Just let me know what your plans are, and I will personally make the necessary arrangements.”

Chen was half expecting the public security bureau to reject her exit visa application, but the news that she could not even leave Shanghai was a complete shock. She rarely had cause to leave Shanghai. Her life, her family, her friends and work were nearly all in Shanghai, but suddenly being told she couldn’t leave was a crushing blow. In an instant, the vibrant, bustling and stimulating city that had been her home for her whole life became a prison.

She needed to get out of the apartment. The walls appeared to be closing in, and she was finding it difficult to breathe. She picked up her keys, walked down the stairs and out on to the street below.

The warm evening air was trapped under the heavy canopy of plane trees. There was no relief here from her sense of confinement, so Chen started walking. She did not know where she was going, but she just wanted to breathe in some fresh air and clear her head. Three men were sitting in a car across the road. They watched for a while before one of them got out and started to follow her on foot. Chen walked along Kangping Road the short distance to the complex that served as the residence of the Shanghai party secretary.

She stopped and looked intently at the uniformed, armed guards for a while. They all looked so young and innocent, teenagers from the countryside recruited into the armed forces because there was nothing else for them in their villages. Chen felt sorry for them. They were probably very proud to be selected for such high-profile guard duty.

She continued on for a while and turned north towards Huaihai Road, where there was at least something of a breeze, and began circle back to her apartment building. She passed several old French colonial mansions on her way back and spent some time outside a few of them, trying to imagine their former grandeur.

There was one house that particularly appealed to her. It was a three-story mansion with stone turrets on the roof that gave it the appearance of a mythical European castle. It now housed the offices of the city’s chemical engineering research association.

After walking around for a while, Chen began to think about how she could adapt to this new reality. It would be difficult, but she rationalized that she could probably get used to the restrictions placed on her movements and contacts with other people. She had, after all, gotten used to the routine at the textile factory during the Cultural Revolution, and, if she



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could tolerate that, then there was no reason why she could not adjust to this new set of circumstances. Besides, if there were any developments in her son's case, she told herself, she really should be in Shanghai to offer any support she could.

When she returned to the apartment, she watched as the man who had followed her got back into the car. His colleagues must have asked him about her curious excursion. He shrugged his shoulders and lit up a cigarette. Chen wondered what kind of explanation they would come up with in their report. Maybe they would write that she was giving a secret signal to one of her special agents in the chemical engineering research association or planning an escape route for a later date. Who knows what they would tell their bosses.

Not long after Chen got back, her daughter returned as well. She was laden down with shopping bags from one of the designer boutiques on Huaihai Road and had a big smile on her face.

"Looks like you've cleaned out the entire store," Chen said as Hong dumped the bags down on the living room floor.

"More or less," she said, still grinning. "I've bought us both some going-away outfits."

"What do you mean, 'going-away outfits'?"

"Good news, Mom. I got word from Yunxia that our Australian visas have been approved. We are going to Australia, Mom. Isn't it wonderful?"

Hong was jumping up and down with excitement, but her mood changed when she saw her mother's expression.

Dinner that night was a sombre occasion. Neither of them felt like talking much, and the shopping bags were left unopened on the floor.

Later, while they were in the kitchen washing the dishes, Hong finally said what had been on her mind.

"You know, just because your exit visa was refused, that does not necessarily mean the end of it. I've heard there are ways to get out of the country without going through normal emigration channels. I mean, whenever I'm in Hong Kong, I always hear about illegal immigrants crossing the border without any problem. There are so many of them that the Hong Kong authorities find it very difficult to stop the flow."

"You are not seriously suggesting that we sneak out of the country illegally. I can't walk out of my front door without being followed, so how am I supposed to get to Hong Kong without being noticed? And even if we did make it, what then? You know very well that if you enter a country illegally you have to leave illegally. Do you suggest we build a boat and sail to Australia?"

"Mom, you are being silly. It's just a suggestion, that's all. Listen, we need to get our passports back in case, so we could arrange another meeting with Jacob and discuss it with him first. If he thinks it is impossible, then that is probably the end of that. But you are

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wrong about leaving Hong Kong illegally, you know. It is well-known that there are people in Hong Kong who can forge stamps in passports and provide illegal immigrants with phoney documents. It is a big business and hundreds of people enter Hong Kong illegally only to leave for another country with forged papers that can never be detected.”

“I still don’t like the sound of this scheme at all. It smacks of desperation, and I think we both need to keep a cool head about this.”

“You are right, Mom. We should both think about all our options and discuss them in detail when we see Jacob. And don’t worry about the meeting. I will make sure it’s safe—trust me.”

### Saturday, July 3, 1993 – The Jade Buddha Temple

Hong's preparations for the meeting with Jacob and his wife were indeed elaborate. Chen and Hong were to leave home separately and meet at a small privately run bar near the Jade Buddha Temple that was owned by the cousin of one of Yunxia's old high school friends. They agreed that if any one of them was seen in the vicinity of the bar, they would abort the mission and go home. If they were successful in avoiding their watchers, Hong had devised a cover story that they could fall back on if they were questioned later. The story would be that, on the spur of the moment, they had gone to see a movie at the Cathay Cinema that night. Hong had checked the listings and times, and picked a Jackie Chan movie called *Crime Story* that a friend of hers had seen at the Cathay earlier that week, as, she told her mother, it seemed like an appropriate title.

The directions to the bar were complicated enough, but that was the least of Chen's problems. Getting out of the house without being followed was going to be the biggest challenge. In the event, it was easier than she thought. She had noticed that whenever she left the house on foot, the watchers did not follow in their car, but delegated one of their number to shadow her on foot, and that night time was no different.

She left the house at about eight o'clock and started off on the same circular route she had taken the previous week. The car stayed outside the apartment while one watcher followed Chen at the standard 50 metres behind. Chen had been walking for about ten minutes when she spotted a taxi. She successfully hailed it and told the driver to go the Jing'an Guest House on Urumqi Road as quickly as possible. She could see her watcher frantically yelling in to his walkie-talkie as they sped off.

When they arrived at the guest house, Chen got out and walked quickly around the back, through a small garden, and into the rear entrance of the adjacent Hilton Hotel. She climbed up a flight of marble stairs, walked across the lobby, and into another cab waiting at the front of the hotel.

There was not a watcher in sight as they drove off, and, within 15 minutes, she had reached her destination. She looked around several times before heading down a dark alleyway to the bar. There was a small neon arrow at the end of the alley pointing the way to the bar, and she found the entrance without any problem. As she entered the small, dimly lit room, she was approached by a young man who asked if she was a friend of Wang Yunxia. Chen was then led into a back room where Jacob, Yunxia, and Hong were all waiting.

"Mom, you made it! Did they follow you?"

"They tried, but I lost them pretty quickly. I only hope they won't be too mad when we get back."

"We'll worry about that later. I've already explained our situation to Jacob, and he thinks he might be able to help us."

Chen sat down next to Yunxia. Chen had always thought she was a good-looking girl, but this evening she was stunning, resembling a 1930s movie star. She leaned back in her chair, showing off her luxuriant dark hair, disdainfully surveying the scene while holding a long-

stemmed ivory cigarette holder in her right hand. She seemed to be purposefully ignoring her husband.

"I think Hong is overstating the case a little bit, Madam Chen," Jacob said. "I can certainly give you some advice and maybe put you in touch with some people, but basically you will have to help yourselves. There is no way I can get directly involved in what I am about to suggest."

"I understand, Jacob, please go on."

"Well, Hong is correct when she says it is possible to leave China and get to Australia via Hong Kong without going through entirely official channels, but I must tell you now that it will certainly be very expensive and could be very dangerous. I have an acquaintance here in Shanghai who can put you in contact with a group of people in the south who run a kind of underground network that specializes in getting people out of China, either into Hong Kong, Macau or sometimes even Taiwan, and from there on to another destination."

"I see. And how would I contact this person?"

"My acquaintance is, as you might expect, very circumspect. He was detained for a year and a half after 1989 and is still under surveillance by the public security bureau. They don't follow him all the time, but there is a danger that if you are seen together you could both get into a lot of trouble. I can arrange a time and place for you to meet, but before I do, you will both have to be sure you want to go through with this. You will probably only be able to see him once, and he will not talk to you for long. You cannot haggle or negotiate with him. He is simply the representative of the people in the south and it is they who dictate the terms. He will tell you the terms and you can either take it or leave it."

"Who exactly are these people in the south you are referring to?"

"I'm not sure you really want to know," Jacob said, more to himself than to anyone else.

"They have the right to know who they are going to be dealing with," Yunxia interjected. "They will be entrusting their lives and welfare to these people, so I think we should tell them. They are triads, Director Chen."

"We don't know that for sure," Jacob said quickly. "It is more than likely that they are connected to one of the societies, but you cannot say that for certain."

"Oh, come on, of course they're triads. Who else would have the ability to do this kind of thing? But they are not really gangsters or anything like that, Director Chen, they are more of a brotherhood that looks after their own and helps others in distress. They operate some illegal activities, but they are certainly not just a gang of criminals."

"What kind of illegal activities?" Hong asked.

"Smuggling, mainly. You know, cigarettes, electronic goods, that kind of thing."

"Luxury cars more like," Jacob said. "They steal luxury cars in Hong Kong, and ship them across the border into Guangdong for sale to private companies and rich businessmen."

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"You don't know what you are talking about," Yunxia shot back. "These people don't go in for that kind of big time stuff."

"How do you know? You have never even been to Hong Kong."

"That is because you won't take me."

"Could I just ask you something?" Chen said, in an attempt to forestall an embarrassing fight. "This acquaintance of yours. Is he a member of this society?"

"No, not at all. When I said that he was their representative, that was not strictly accurate. He is more of a liaison man. He helps people in Shanghai, mainly political dissidents who need to get out of the country, get in contact with the people down south. He is not directly involved in smuggling or anything like that."

"I see, and do you think we can trust these smugglers to do what you say they can do?"

"That is a good question. I have to be honest and say I can't guarantee they will do as they promise. All I know is that of the three people my acquaintance has referred to them, all three made it to Hong Kong or Macau and from there on to their final destination."

"Where did they end up?" Hong asked.

"One I know went to Australia and is now living in Brisbane, and the other two I think ended up in the United States."

"They certainly sound as if they are competent and know what they are doing. I think we should consider it, Mom, don't you?"

Chen was not as confident as her daughter: "I'm not sure. It sounds very dangerous, trusting our lives to a group of people we don't know."

"There is one more thing I should tell you before you make a decision," Jacob said. "You realize, of course, that if you do take this course of action, it is very unlikely that you will ever be allowed back into China. You will have to give up everything: your home, your jobs, your family and friends. You may never be able to see Dajun again, unless he too can somehow get out of the country. You will be exiles in a foreign land, and although you will be with Xiaojun, you will find it very difficult to adjust to such a radically different lifestyle. This is a very big decision for both of you, and it is not something you should rush into."

"Yes, I understand all the implications. And I can assure you that neither myself nor my daughter are going to make any rash or hasty decisions in this matter, are we, Hong?"

"No, mother," she said meekly.

"There are a few more questions I would like to ask, however. You say it would be possible to get to Australia, but what would happen then? Would we have to apply for political asylum or something like that?"

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“Not necessarily,” Jacob said. “The embassy in Beijing is already familiar with your case. They know about the problems you are experiencing here, so I can’t imagine there will be any problem convincing the government to let you stay as long as you want. I will certainly do what I can to lobby on your behalf.”

“I see. And you said it would be very expensive. Do you know how much money it would cost exactly?”

“No, I don’t. All I know is that it is beyond the reach of most people. I don’t know how much money your family has, but I would have thought you were in a better position to come up with the money than most.”

“Please don’t tell this acquaintance of yours that we are a wealthy family.”

“Of course not,” Jacob laughed. “Besides, this guy is not in it for the money. He only helps people in trouble with the authorities, people like you who have been unjustly accused and persecuted.”

“You make me sound like one of those dissidents you were talking about.”

“Well, in a way,” Jacob said, “you are. Everyone knows the action taken against your family is part of a bigger political narrative, probably some kind of power struggle in Beijing. No one really believes the accusations of espionage levelled against your husband and son. It is obvious that you have just been the unfortunate victims of processes beyond your control. And it is only because you refused to acquiesce and stay silent, and instead spoke out to expose the lies, that you are being targeted yourself now. So yes, you are actually not that different from political dissidents. I don’t know what the American angle is but I suspect a similar game is being played, an apparent breach of national security that allows the authorities to pin the blame on convenient scapegoats and settle political scores.”

Chen thought Jacob had a very active imagination but said she would think very carefully about what he had told her. They agreed not to meet again in person unless it was absolutely necessary, but they would continue to keep in contact through previously established channels.

“What do you think?” Chen asked her daughter as they walked out of the alleyway in search of a taxi.

“I think we should do it. I mean, what have we got left in Shanghai? They are making both our lives a misery, and there is no future to look forward to. My job is kind of meaningless now, nearly all my friends are avoiding me. You know I feel terrible about leaving Dajun alone to meet his fate, but I’m now convinced there is nothing we can do for him. I think you should at least talk to this liaison guy and see what he has to say.”

“I know. But Jacob is right—this is a really big decision, and I’m not sure I’m ready for it yet.”

**Thursday, July 8, 1993 – A Surprise Visit**

A few days later, there was a short article in the newspaper about the possibility of the American National Football League staging an exhibition game in China as a means of showcasing Beijing's Olympic facilities. So much, Chen thought, for Feng Xia's pledge to bring NBA teams over to China. It seemed that even American football, a sport no one cared or knew anything about, now took precedence over basketball.

She had just put the paper down when there was a knock at the door:

"Good morning, Director Chen. I hope I'm not disturbing you."

She had not seen or heard from Ma Guoqiang for several months and was shocked to see him standing on her landing that morning. She had assumed that it was now far too dangerous for him to be seen with her, and she had given up trying to contact him.

"Did anyone see you come here?" she asked, as he stepped into the living room.

"There are two people in the car across the road, but I don't think they noticed me. They appeared to be asleep."

"I was not expecting to see you again. I mean, after everything that has happened. I assume you know about my recent problems."

"Yes, I do, and that is why I had to come here this morning. I must apologize for not returning your calls, but people in my office were starting to get suspicious about my links to your family. I hope you can forgive me."

"Yes, of course. I understand perfectly." At this point, Hong entered the living room to pick up her briefcase. "You remember your father's old friend, don't you?"

"Yes, it is a pleasant surprise to see you again, Prosecutor General."

"Likewise. I must say you have grown up to become quite the young executive. I'm glad you are here, because what I have to say affects you, too. Can we sit down?"

"Of course, take a seat. Would you like some tea?"

"That would be good, thank you." Ma sat pensively on the edge of the sofa, gripping his hands together tightly.

"Is anything the matter?" Chen asked, handing him a cup of tea.

"I'm afraid there is. I have been hearing some very disturbing reports concerning your son's case. As you know, every criminal case in Shanghai has to go through my department before going to trial. So, in this regard, you can rest assured my information is accurate. It seems state security, which, as you also know, is currently handling the case, is preparing to hand the case over to my department in preparation for trial. Some initial discussions with the chief prosecutor and the departmental party committee have already taken place as to the evidence available, charges to be laid and possible sentences to be imposed."

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“They are already talking about sentences? I thought you said your office had not even been handed the case yet?” Hong said. She had not been party to her mother’s talk with Attorney Huang on this issue and still assumed there would be some measure of due process. “I thought the judge was supposed to determine whether someone was guilty and only then impose the sentence.”

“That is true in theory, but in cases like this everything is decided long beforehand. You see, your brother’s case involves issues of national security, and, as such, state security and the other relevant authorities want to get the matter sewn up well before it goes to court. In fact, they could try to dictate their terms without even consulting my department, but in this case, they want to get our cooperation in order to ensure nothing goes wrong.”

“What kind of sentence is being discussed at the moment?” Chen asked.

“Nothing has been decided yet, but they want to charge Dajun with selling state secrets to agents of the United States government, and that would normally lead to a sentence of 15 years in prison with a subsequent deprivation of political rights.”

“15 years! You have got to be joking, he will be 44 years old when he is let out,” Hong said. “This is ridiculous. He hasn’t done anything wrong. It is a set up!”

“I’m sorry, Young Hong, but what you or I think doesn’t matter anymore. They have decided he is guilty of these crimes and there is nothing we can do to prevent him from going to prison. If I were you, Chen, I wouldn’t even bother hiring that expensive lawyer you have been seeing. It would just be a waste of time and money.”

“Did I tell you I had been seeing a lawyer?”

“No, you did not, but your activities are now common knowledge. We all know about your interrogation and the warning you were given, as well as the kind of surveillance you and your daughter are under. That brings me to the most difficult part of what I have to tell you. I am risking my job by telling you this, so you must not reveal it to anyone—and I mean anyone—what I am about tell you, and especially who told you.”

“We both swear to you we will not say anything. Now please tell me what you know. You are beginning to scare me.”

“Alright. As I said, state security is preparing to put your son on trial, but they are still conducting their investigation, trying to dig up new evidence. It is now clear that the new focus of this investigation is you, Chen. That detention and interrogation was just the beginning. The harassment will only get worse, and I think it will only be a matter of time before they finally arrest you.”

“Are you absolutely sure about this, Old Ma? What about my daughter? Is she in danger as well?” Hong was sitting on the nearby chair in stunned silence.

“I’m afraid they are investigating her, and her husband as well. His flight to Beijing has made them very suspicious.”



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"I might have known Gao would be responsible for this," Hong said, reaching for her cigarettes and lighting up.

There was a long silence before Ma spoke again.

"I wish I could offer you some helpful advice, but short of leaving Shanghai and hiding somewhere out of sight, I can't think of anything. I'm sorry, but there is nothing I can do except warn you of what might be coming. Now, I think I should be going. I've already stayed too long. It was pleasure seeing you again, Hong, but I am really sorry it was under these circumstances."

He placed his teacup on the table, stood up and walked to the front door.

"I'm doing this because I am indebted to Old Li. But I can do no more. I hope you can appreciate that. Good luck, Chen Lan."

"Thank you. And please be careful of the state security officers outside."

"I will. I trust you will do the same."

Chen closed the door and walked to the window to watch Ma exit on to the street below. The security guys remained motionless in their car.

"Mom, we have got to go to Australia now. We can't afford any more hesitation." Hong was pacing around the room, cigarette in her hand. "I mean, you heard Old Ma, there is nothing any of us can do to help Dajun now. He is going to be put in jail for 15 years, and, the longer we hang around here, the greater the chances are both of us will also go to prison. We have to make arrangements to leave as quickly as possible."

"Hold on, wait a minute. I thought we agreed we were not going to make any rash decisions here."

"That was before this morning. The situation has completely changed now. We have to act and act fast."

"I agree the situation has changed, but we still have to consider every option."

"What is there to consider, Mom? You heard what he said. Our only option is leave Shanghai and hide somewhere. Now, surely Old Ma knows about the restrictions on your movements. He knows everything, for heaven's sake! He would not have told us to leave unless it was really serious. He was basically telling us to break the law, and he is the deputy chief prosecutor in this city. Isn't that clear enough?"

"Yes, I was wondering about that. Do you think he knew about my application for an exit visa?"

"Of course, he knew. Don't you see? He was basically telling us it was okay to go, that there is no point in hanging around here waiting to get arrested."

"Maybe you're right, but I just don't want to rush into something I might regret later."

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“Look, Mom, I think you’re still in shock from the news. You’re not thinking clearly, so here is what I’m going to do. I’m going to work now, and I will make arrangements with Yunxia and Jacob for you or both of us to meet with this liaison guy he mentioned, and, once the meeting is set up, we can take it from there. But we have to act fast. Time is very precious now and we can’t afford to waste it.”

Chen knew there was no point in arguing with her daughter when she was in this kind of mood. In many ways, she was just like her father. When his mind was made up about something, there was no stopping him. Hong picked up her briefcase and keys and marched to the door.

“You stay here, Mom. I’ll see you this evening. And don't worry, I’ll have everything fixed and under control in no time.”

Chen watched her leave the building and get into the back of the car that her company driver had brought around a few minutes earlier. By this time, the watchers had woken up. They did not follow Hong, but Chen saw one of them talking into his radio as her car pulled off.

She went back into the kitchen to finish her breakfast but could eat only a few mouthfuls. What, she wondered, had Ma meant when he said he was indebted to her late husband? They were very old friends, for sure, but she could not think of anything her husband had done which would place such a heavy debt on Old Ma that he would risk his own career and possibly his own freedom to tell them what he knew about her son’s case.

**Tuesday, July 27, 1993 – Jing'an Park**

It took nearly three agonising weeks of clandestine negotiations and secret messages before a meeting with Jacob's mysterious acquaintance was finally set up. It was decided that a meeting in public would be better than trying to meet in secret and risk getting caught. Hiding in plain sight, Hong explained, was the best option. Chen was to go to Jing'an Park, find an empty bench by the small pond on the south side of the park and wait there to be contacted. She was told to bring the copy of Ba Jin's novel *Family* that she had been reading. Her contact would use that to identify her.

As she wheeled her bicycle out of the apartment building, Chen saw one of the watchers get out of their car, clumsily extract a battered old bicycle from the trunk and start to follow her down Kangping Road. It was a pleasant summer afternoon, and she enjoyed the 15-minute ride through the back roads to the park. There was a cool breeze blowing, providing temporary relief from the summer heat and humidity. She locked her bike at the main northern entrance on Nanjing Road West, paid her ten cents admission fee and walked down the arterial path to the pond area. Her watcher did not bother to pay his ten cents and just walked straight through the gate, much to the annoyance of the elderly gatekeeper.

She found an empty wooden bench just to the west of the pond and settled down to read her book. The watcher, seeing this, hesitated for a moment before taking a seat under some trees about 20 metres away. The park was quite crowded with families taking an afternoon stroll, old men playing chess, young children kicking a soccer ball around and playing badminton. From time to time, Chen looked around, trying to identify her contact. Before long, a young woman joined her on the bench. Chen did not say anything but continued to read her book. The woman looked over her shoulder to see what she was reading and then looked away. Could it be?

"Hey, stop that! Get over here right now, you little monster."

Chen almost jumped out of her skin. The woman's shrill voice shot straight through her. Chen looked around to see a fat little boy waddling sheepishly across the grass toward his mother.

"How many times have I told you not to do that?" she said, grabbing his upper arm. "Good little boys don't do that kind of thing."

"I am a good little boy," the child whined pitifully and began to sob.

"There, there, yes you are mommy's good little boy. Now, please don't cry. Look, mommy has something for you."

The fat child immediately stopped whimpering and started anxiously pawing at his mother's handbag.

"I want that one," he said, grabbing a large piece of candy and devouring it hungrily before throwing the wrapper on the ground at Chen's feet.

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“He is normally very well-behaved, but his grandparents spoil him sometimes.” The woman turned to Chen and shrugged in a gesture of apology.

“I’m sure he is,” Chen smiled.

“Mom, Mom,” the boy was tugging at his mother’s sleeve. “I want some more candy.”

“You can have some more when we get home, okay?” She stood up and dragged her child off down the path while he jumped up and down trying to get his dirty little paw inside her handbag.

Chen cringed. Inwardly, she could not help but feel at least partly responsible for that child’s appallingly selfish and unruly behaviour. She had, after all, been instrumental in implementing Shanghai’s one-child policy in the early 1980s.

It was an urgent and necessary measure to take, given the rapidly growing population, but little thought was given to the long-term effects the policy would have on families and on social behaviour. People were used to having large families and did not appreciate that bringing up just one child could lead to a host of social and psychological problems. The authorities were only concerned about keeping the population down and did not bother to educate new parents as to their responsibilities.

Chen did eventually introduce an education program for new parents at the hospital, but by then it was too late. Tens of thousands of “little emperors” like the one she had just encountered had already been born. Little time bombs, ready to explode at any moment.

“Is this seat taken?” a slightly built young man with a severe crew cut and thick black-rimmed glasses sat down beside her and opened a copy of the *New People’s Evening News*. “Don’t look at me, and don’t speak to me directly or make any sudden movements. Just pretend to read your copy of *Family*.”

Chen did as she was told, raising the book to her face and turning slightly away from her new neighbour.

“There is a man in jeans and a white shirt sitting on the bench across the grass. Is he the state security officer assigned to you?”

“Yes,” she replied in a nervous whisper.

“Is he the only one here or are there others?”

“I have not seen any others.”

“Good. Now pay close attention to what I have to say because I can’t stay here too long.” Chen gripped her book a little tighter and looked intently at the pages.

“My associates have been informed of your case and have tentatively agreed to help you and your daughter, should you wish to go through with this. However, there are several conditions you must adhere to. First, you must never ask any questions of us. Do not

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attempt to ascertain our identity or tell anyone you have been seen with us. Confidentiality is of paramount importance. Is that clear?"

Chen murmured her assent.

"Second, you and your daughter will have to make your own way to Guangzhou. We cannot help you until you reach the south. Can you do that?"

"I'm not sure. They watch every move I make, but we can certainly try."

"It is not that difficult to leave town unnoticed. I do it all the time. Just remember not to book any transport in your own name. Once at the designated location in Guangzhou you will call a telephone number and my associates will contact you. Third, when contact is made, you will immediately and without question hand over the required fee of 200,000 yuan."

"200,000 yuan! That is extortion. I cannot possibly get hold of that kind of money."

"Keep your voice down. That figure is a preferential rate and it is non-negotiable. If you cannot get the money, the deal is off."

"Alright, alright, I'll see what I can do, but it will take time for me to get the money."

"Take as much time as you like. None of us is in any hurry. Pay attention! Do not look up but your friend is walking over in this direction. Continue to read your book and ignore me completely until I speak again. Do not forget to turn the pages."

Out of the corner of her eye, Chen saw the watcher slowly approaching along the pathway. She tried to concentrate on the book but the characters just swam up before her eyes. The watcher slowly walked past and made his way a little further up the path before stopping. He then turned and walked back towards them. Chen was certain that the game was up, but the watcher passed by again without stopping and headed back to his bench. As he walked away, Chen noticed her neighbour slip something into her handbag.

"That envelope contains the name of the hotel you will go to in Guangzhou, the telephone number you will call and the code name of the person you will ask to speak to. Keep it in a secure place and do not let anyone else see it, not even your daughter. Do you understand?"

"I understand."

"Good. As I said, there is no hurry for you to get all the money. By the way, it should be in cash. Used one hundred yuan notes only. Once you have the money and have made your preparations to leave, you should notify Mr. Jacob and give him an approximate time for when you will arrive in Guangzhou. He will pass that information on to me. You will not be able to see me again, so if you have any more questions you should ask them now. After I leave here it will be too late."

"I don't know, can you give a minute to think about it?"

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“Certainly, but do not take too long.”

She was still in a state of panic following her close encounter with the watcher and couldn't think clearly. After a couple of minutes, her neighbour started to fold up his newspaper and prepare to leave.

“There is one thing I would like to know. What happens after I make contact with these people in Guangzhou and give them the money?”

He put down his paper and lit a cigarette before picking up the now neatly folded sheet in his free hand. “They will get you to Hong Kong where their associates will provide you with the necessary protection and give you the documentation you will need to get to Australia. I cannot tell you exactly how this will be done. You will just have to trust me that they will do as they say. They are honourable men and they will not cheat you, I can assure you of that. Now, it is time for us to part. You will go first and I will wait here until I see that your friend is following you and then I will leave. Whatever you do, do not look back at me. Good luck, Director Chen, and have a pleasant journey.”

“Thank you.” She placed her book back in her bag, got up and without looking at her companion, slowly walked back to the north gate. She kept looking straight ahead until she was out of the park and safely into the bicycle parking area. She looked up from her bike and was relieved to see the watcher at the park entrance.

### Thursday, July 29, 1993 - A Request for Financial Assistance

Even Hong's all-consuming enthusiasm for Australia was dented by the prospect of finding 200,000 yuan. It was a ridiculous amount, even for families a lot wealthier than their own. Chen's annual salary was only about 14,000 yuan including bonuses—just about double the average wage in Shanghai at the time. Unlike many doctors at the hospital, Chen's income was not boosted by red packets from patients seeking preferential treatment.

Hong, in her capacity as a Hong Kong company representative, was paid a lot more, but even so their combined annual income added up to only a fraction of the total required. Li had put away a lot of money in his personal and company accounts, but there was no way they could gain access to that. Ma Guoqiang had told Chen quite early on in the investigation that all those accounts had been confiscated by the authorities. Dajun, likewise, had a significant amount of money in American banks, but it would be impossible for them to get their hands on that, too.

Chen's current assets, in bank deposits and government bonds, totalled just over 35,000 yuan. Hong spent most of her salary on consumer goods and entertainment, but she had invested quite successfully in the stock market over the last few years. She had about 24,000 yuan in stocks and securities. Even assuming they could liquidize those assets without arousing the suspicion of the authorities, that would still leave them with a shortfall of more than 140,000 yuan. Of course, that would just be for the fee. They would have absolutely no money left over if and when they made it to Australia. And, although Xiaojun was living in fairly comfortable surroundings, it would be totally unreasonable to expect him, or rather Susan, to support them.

"Are you sure he said 200,000 yuan not 20,000 yuan?" Hong said, still somewhat stunned from the news.

"Yes, I may have been nervous at the time, but I distinctly heard him say 200,000 yuan. After all, if you think about it, 20,000 yuan would barely cover the cost of the tickets to Australia."

"I suppose so. But where on earth are we going to get that kind of money? I don't think my company even has that amount of cash on deposit."

"I hope you weren't thinking about stealing it from your own company," Chen asked.

"Well, to be honest, the thought had crossed my mind, and I think I could probably get away with it. But you're right—we have enough problems already without running the risk of getting arrested for grand theft. Then again, if we are going to go down, we might as well go down in style."

"No, absolutely not. It would just be too dangerous." Chen was astounded that her increasingly reckless daughter would even consider such a scheme.

"There is one other option," Hong said. "We could ask Aunt Ailing for a loan. I mean, she is loaded. Her husband is some kind of millionaire, right? They would hardly notice 200,000 yuan here or there."

## The Games

“I don’t want to ask your Aunt for money, especially not that amount of money. I just wouldn’t feel comfortable.”

“I think the time is long gone when we can only do things we are comfortable with. This is a desperate situation, Mom, and it calls for desperate measures. Aunt Ailing has more than enough money to provide us with a loan. And I’m sure that when she was here she said if we needed money we should just ask. If you don’t ask her, I will.”

“No, I’ll call her. You are right, there is no harm in asking. Besides she should know what has been going on here since she left.”

Getting hold of ‘enemy of the state’ Luo Ailing, however, would be fraught with danger. Chen could not call her from her home or office. Sending a telegram would be equally dangerous because the authorities could get their hands on that in no time. Chen considered going to the long-distance telephone office south of People’s Square, but there was no guarantee that call would not be monitored as well.

Finally, she decided to go to the business centre at the Hilton hotel, which Dajun had used when he was staying there and had recommended. Again, she could not be absolutely sure there would be nobody listening in, but it was certainly safer than the alternatives.

Chen arranged to meet Hong for lunch at the Shanghai Express restaurant in the basement of the hotel as a cover. During lunch, Chen placed her handbag on the table and casually made her way to the business centre on the third floor. The watcher who had followed her into the restaurant observed her progress up the staircase to the lobby but, seemingly content that she was not about to make a run for it, he settled down and ordered his own lunch.

The young woman at the business centre reception desk assured Chen that her need for privacy would be respected. She led her to a small booth and asked her to wait while the hotel operator placed the call. It would be about nine o’clock in the evening in San Francisco and Chen prayed that Ailing would be in. She did not relish the prospect of repeating this charade over and over again. Before too long, the phone in the booth rang and the operator connected her to Ailing.

“Why are you calling from a phone box? Has something happened?”

“Yes, it is long story, but I can’t call from home anymore because the phone is probably bugged. I have a big favour to ask of you, and I will understand if you cannot do it, but my situation has become rather desperate.”

Ailing listened in stunned silence. She evidently had no idea what had been going on in Shanghai since her departure.

“That’s terrible,” she said after Chen had finished, “but are you sure about leaving China? I appreciate that it must be difficult for you to stay, but leaving everything behind like that is a really big step to take.”



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"I have thought long and hard about all the implications, and, believe me, I would not be calling you unless I was absolutely certain that this is the only course of action available to me and my daughter at this stage. The information we have about Dajun and the plans for my own arrest are completely reliable. There is no future for either of us here, and this escape route through Hong Kong is our only way out. I can't just get on a plane and leave."

"I'm sure you are right, but you don't know anything about these people who say they can get you to Hong Kong. They could be bandits or gangsters. They could just steal the money and leave you stranded or worse. We know all about these people smugglers in San Francisco. They are vicious criminal gangs and are totally ruthless. They have been known to kidnap and even kill people who don't pay them the money they owe."

"I know about that too, Ailing. But these people are different. They came highly recommended, and I've already met one of them and he seems very sincere. I admit I know very little about them, but they are by necessity a very secretive group. I think I can trust them and, to be honest, even if they do end up cheating me, I would prefer that to being left in Shanghai just waiting for the inevitable."

"Okay, but I'm going to have to think about this. I can lend you the money, that is no problem, but actually getting it to you without it being detected could be difficult. Let me think about the ways to do this, and I'll call you back in a couple of days."

"You can't call me at home, remember? It's too dangerous."

"Well, what do you suggest then?"

"Why don't I call you in two days' time?"

"Okay, better make it three days. Call me again on this number and at this time. Give my best to Hong."

The phone call cost her 120 yuan, but under the circumstances, Chen thought it was worth it. Her watcher was hunched over a bowl of noodles when she returned to the restaurant.

"How did it go?" Hong asked.

"Great. She was not very enthusiastic about our plan but said she would try to get us the money anyway. I have to call her back in three days to find out if it's feasible or not. She sends her regards by the way."

"That's wonderful! I told you Aunt Ailing would come through for us."

"Let's hope so. By the way, did our watcher stay there the whole time?"

"Yeah, he was glaring at me all the time, ugly little creep that he is. At least the ones who usually follow me are reasonably good-looking."

"So where are these good-looking guys anyway. Did you give them the day off?"

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“I don’t know. I think I may have lost them in the traffic coming over here. I wasn’t really paying attention.”

“You know, I don’t like it when you lose your watchers. It only makes them more suspicious.”

“It doesn’t matter Mom; they’ll pick me up again when I go back to the office. By the way, do you need a ride home?”

“No thanks, I came by bike, and, anyway, I thought I would go and sit in the park for a while. It really is a very pleasant spot by the pond there.”

“Sounds good, just don’t talk to any more smugglers okay?”

**Sunday, August 1, 1993 – Army Day**

Going to the Hilton again would arouse suspicion, so Chen decided to borrow the office of a colleague in the hospital's international liaison division. International liaison was one of the few offices in the hospital that had telephones with international direct dialling. Moreover, August 1 was the day the party celebrated the founding of the People's Liberation Army during the Nanchang Uprising of 1927. Most of the hospital's administrative staff would either have the day off or be required to take part in commemorative activities. Either way, Chen was fairly confident she could use the phone in her colleague's office without being disturbed.

Chen went to her own office in the late morning on the pretext of sorting out some paperwork. After the few remaining staff on her floor had gone to lunch, she walked down the corridor to her colleague's office. His door was unlocked as usual and his secretary was nowhere to be seen. The coast seemed clear. Chen gingerly picked up the receiver, checked the dial tone for tell-tale clicks and buzzes, and dialled the number.

"Chen Lan, is that you? Good. Now listen carefully. I can get the money to you but it will take a minimum of three days for it to be converted into cash, is that enough time?"

"Yes, that is more than enough time. We haven't even worked out how we are going to get out of Shanghai yet."

"Well, when do you think you will need it because I don't want you carrying such a large amount of money around Shanghai for any longer than is necessary."

"Neither do I. Let's say two weeks from today, on Saturday, August 14."

"Alright. This is what I'm going to do. I'll wire the money in US dollars to the office of one of my associates in Hong Kong. His company has a branch office in Shanghai and I will instruct him to transfer the money to that branch office's US dollar bank account. Their bank account is with a foreign bank so the transfer should not be detected by the Chinese banking authorities. The head of the Shanghai branch will be instructed to withdraw the money on your behalf and wait for you to pick it up on that day at, shall we say, 10 o'clock in the morning. The branch representative is a Singaporean woman named Alice Peng, and her office, Miracle Trading, is on the 12th floor of the Union Building at the bottom of Yan'an Road, near The Bund. Now the next thing, do you need the money in US dollars, Hong Kong dollars or Chinese currency?"

"They said they wanted the money in used 100 yuan bills, but, I don't know, maybe they would accept US dollars."

"Of course, they will accept US dollars; it is the universal currency. And besides, I'm sure these people would have no problem converting into Chinese currency by themselves if they really want to. They probably specified 100 yuan bills because they did not know if you could get hold of hard currency or not. I'll instruct Mrs Peng to give you the money in US dollars and then you can decide what to do with it. For one thing, it will be less bulky to carry around than a whole suitcase full of 100 yuan bills."

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"How can I thank you, Ailing. This is just so generous of you. I'll be eternally grateful to you."

"Think nothing of it. It is the least I can do. But don't forget that as soon as you get the money, you and Hong have to get out of Shanghai as soon as possible. I'll give you some contact numbers in Hong Kong that you should call when you get there, or, God forbid, if something goes wrong when you are in Guangzhou. I want to know that you are safe."

"Of course, I'll let you know as soon as we get to Hong Kong."

"Alright. I'll tell Mrs Peng to give you the contact numbers when you pick up the package. Is there anything else you need to know?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Good. Well then have a safe journey and the next time we talk, hopefully you will both be in Hong Kong."

Chen replaced the receiver and walked quietly to the door where she came face to face with her colleague's startled secretary who almost dropped her lunchbox in surprise.

"Director Chen! What are you doing here?"

"I came to see your boss, but he wasn't in."

"No, he is attending the Army Day reception."

"Of course, how silly of me. I lose track of time these days."

"Oh, it is okay. I understand. Shall I tell him you came by?"

"Don't bother, it was not important. But thank you for your help."

"Not at all. Oh, Director Chen, before you go, could I ask you something? I meant to ask you earlier, but I couldn't find you. You see, my little sister is about to graduate from university this year and would really like to work as an office assistant here. I heard that your assistant is to be transferred to another hospital, and I wondered if you would consider meeting with her just to see if she would be a suitable replacement or not."

Chen had no idea her assistant was being transferred and tried to conceal her surprise.

"Well, as you know, that is not the normal way we do things around here, but why not? I'll be glad to see her. Tell her to make an appointment with my secretary."

"Oh, thank you, Director Chen. That is so kind of you. You won't regret this; she is a very intelligent and hard-working girl."

"I'm sure she is."

Chen felt bad deceiving her colleague's secretary and her sister, but the news of her assistant's departure had unsettled her. Was this her assistant's own decision or something decided from above? She knew it was of little importance now but she disliked it when her

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staff kept her in the dark about something. She did not want to put her assistant on the spot so she resolved to ask the hospital president about it when she got the chance.

Of more immediate concern, however, was the problem of how to get out of Shanghai. They obviously could not just buy a plane or train ticket to Guangzhou. Even if the ticket purchase did not show up in the public security bureau's computer, they would certainly both be arrested as soon as they got to the train station or airport.

That evening, as they took a stroll around the neighbourhood, Chen and Hong struggled to come up with a legitimate excuse for going to Guangzhou. Hong suggested inventing some business commitments in southern China. Then Chen would ask for permission to accompany her. But they soon came to the conclusion that the authorities were unlikely to fall for such a lightweight plan. They had no relatives or close friends in Guangzhou that they could visit. In fact, the mere request to visit Guangzhou, so close to the Hong Kong border, would probably arouse the suspicions of state security.

"You know what we could do, though?" Chen said after a long silence. "Why don't I ask for permission to visit my old aunt in Hangzhou. She must be over 90 years old now, and I haven't seen her for ages. I can say she is very ill and we want to see her before she passes away. Hangzhou is less than a four-hour train ride from here, so they are less likely to be suspicious, and it is also on the Guangzhou mainline, so once we get on the train we can just keep going south and not get off in Hangzhou."

"I guess it could work, but what if they don't give us permission to go Hangzhou? What then?"

"Well, we will just have to think of something else. But you know, if I ask the hospital president about it, I'm sure he will put in a good word for me. He is always telling me how important it is to keep extended families together. Besides, there is something else I have to talk to him about."

"Okay, let's assume for the sake of argument that they do give us permission to visit Hangzhou, won't they be a little suspicious when we don't get off the train? They will probably dispatch police to every train station on the route to try to find us."

"I think you are being a little dramatic," Chen said. "I really don't think the police are that well-organized. Remember, once we are outside Shanghai, it is going to be much more difficult for them to coordinate surveillance and track us down. Different towns and counties in the same province don't talk to each other, let alone different provinces."

"Maybe you're right, but there is still one small problem. Do we buy tickets all the way to Guangzhou or just to Hangzhou? I would think the watchers would want to see our tickets before we get on the train, so we would have to buy tickets just to Hangzhou, and then there is no guarantee we can change those to Guangzhou tickets after we get on board."

"What if we buy two sets of tickets, one for each city, and just show the Hangzhou tickets to the watchers?"

"Okay, but what if the Guangzhou tickets show up in the public security bureau computer?"

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“Oh yes, I forgot about that. We could get someone else to buy them for us. Maybe Wang Yunxia could do it. We have to let them know when we are leaving anyway.”

“I suppose it is worth a shot, and I can’t think of a better idea. Why don’t you talk to the hospital president, and then I’ll make arrangements to get tickets for the evening train on August 14. That way, we can pick up the money and be out of Shanghai all in the same day.”

**Monday, August 9, 1993 – Rude People**

Before Chen could talk to the hospital president, she had to decide what, if anything, to tell her aunt in Hangzhou. It would be too risky to tell her what they were planning, and she probably wouldn't understand anyway, but Chen was concerned that the authorities might check with her to make sure they really were coming. In the end, Chen decided to phone her just to say hello and float the suggestion that she might come for a visit in the near future. It was her younger son, a cousin who Chen barely knew, who answered the phone. He told her that his mother had been ill recently and was currently bed-ridden but that she was still alert and took a keen interest in the world around her.

"You know she was talking about you not long ago, wondering how you were doing after your loss and everything. I'm sure she would be happy to see you and your daughter again."

"And we will both be happy to see you all, too. I'm not sure exactly when we can get away. It's kind of hectic around here at the moment. Why don't I call you later in the week to give you a definite date?"

"There is no need for that. Just turn up any time. There is plenty of room at mother's house, so you can stay as long as you like."

Chen felt a pang of guilt that she had ignored her aunt for so long. She had not even realized that she was ill, and now she was about to use her as part of what the state security would no doubt label as an evil scheme to flee from justice. Her aunt had been badly treated by other members of the family in the past, and, if Chen was not careful, she would be responsible for landing her in trouble again.

Her Aunt Fang was part of what the Chens referred to as the forgotten branch of the family, those who were forced to stay behind in Hangzhou after Chen's grandfather moved the business to Shanghai in the late 1910s. Fang had stayed behind because, as a young teenager, she had been sold off as a concubine to a prominent local landlord.

The landlord was in his fifties at the time of the marriage and kept her as a virtual slave until his death in 1927, when she was turned out of the house by his first wife. The house technically belonged to the landlord's sons, but their mother, who had always hated the second wife, insisted that Fang be put out on the street. At that time, Chen's grandfather's silk business, after diversifying into manufacturing, trading and real estate, was booming, and the family was living very comfortably in a luxurious villa on the edge of the French Concession.

However, Fang could not join the rest of the family in Shanghai, and the other relatives who had remained in Hangzhou refused to take her in. She was forced to work as a domestic servant and a textile worker for two years before she met and married a kindly man whose family owned a small inn. She was still only 26 years old. They had two sons and lived a quiet and reasonably happy life together right up until the Cultural Revolution when Fang's past was uncovered and she was struggled against.

Her second husband, who was some 12 years older than her and in poor health, was persecuted as a petty bourgeois profiteer and died during one of his struggle sessions.

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Following the Cultural Revolution, Fang's late husband's inn, which had been confiscated, was returned and she went back to living on the top floor. The ground floor had been converted into shops. She lived alone, cared for mainly by her second son. The eldest boy, having joined the military, was hardly ever in Hangzhou until he retired from the army in 1990.

Chen did not even realize that she had an aunt in Hangzhou until the mid 1950s when Fang and her husband visited the rest of the family in Shanghai for the first time. Chen took an instant liking to her Aunt Fang. She had suffered a great deal and had experienced things Chen could not even dream of, but she never complained and always had a positive outlook on life. Chen spent many hours listening to her stories of life in pre-liberation Hangzhou, and she often went to visit her above the inn while she was studying at Shanghai Medical College.

Her visits became less frequent after she got married, and stopped altogether in the Cultural Revolution. Since then, Chen had only seen her aunt periodically. They did correspond by letter and she would call her from time to time on the phone, but she could certainly no longer claim to be as close as they once were.

After weighing her options, Chen decided to go ahead and talk to the hospital president, and she made an appointment for the following day. At the meeting, she told him exactly what she had learned on the phone, as she was sure that the call had been monitored. She told him that her aunt had been seriously ill and was confined to her bed and that she had been asking to see her. She said it had been several years since she had last visited and she was fearful that if she did not visit her soon it might be too late.

As expected, the president was sympathetic to the request, launching into a soliloquy about extended family values and the need to look out for one's elderly relatives. He promised he would make an immediate recommendation to the public security bureau and his superiors in the party committee that she be allowed to make a short visit to Hangzhou on humanitarian grounds.

Chen also mentioned the issue of her assistant's alleged transfer. The president shifted uneasily in his chair at this point but denied any knowledge of a transfer request or suggestions from other parties that Chen's assistant might be moved to another hospital. Chen took him at his word and did not press the issue.

The following Monday evening, there was yet another television special on Beijing's bid for the Olympics. The program was based on an interview with the co-secretary general of the Beijing Olympic bid committee, and deputy mayor, Wan Siquan. He was generally upbeat about the bid, but he lamented what he called the rudeness, incivility and xenophobia of the capital's residents, which, he said, might hamper Beijing's chances of getting the Olympics.

"It seems people nowadays are just concerned with making money and don't care about anything else. We are doing everything we can to improve the city's spiritual civilization, and we very much hope the situation will improve," he said.



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Astonishingly, the vice-mayor then went on to blame the Cultural Revolution for the problem: "This ten-year period had a tremendous impact on young people. Chairman Mao told them it was right to rebel and oppose foreign influences. As a result of this kind of instruction, the Cultural Revolution was perhaps the most xenophobic period in recent Chinese history."

Chen found it extraordinary that such a senior government official would talk so openly about the Cultural Revolution and the negative impact of Chairman Mao. But before she could fully digest this statement, there was a knock at the door and three state security officers marched uninvited into her living room. One she eventually recognized as the young sidekick of her chief interrogator in the black jail back in May; the others she had not seen before. It was the sidekick who now assumed command.

"I understand you have made a formal request to leave Shanghai in order to visit a person named Chen Fang in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. What is the purpose of this proposed visit?"

"Chen Fang is my elderly aunt. She is 90 years old and in very poor health. I am fearful that she might be close to the end of her life, so I want to see her now before it is too late."

"Why do you want to see her at this particular juncture? Why did you not visit her earlier, if you were so concerned about her alleged state of health?"

"I only discovered a few days ago when I called her home that she was ill, and her son told me that she had been in hospital and was now bedridden. He also told me that she had been asking about me and would like to see both me and my daughter again."

"I see. So, you are saying you were not aware of this person's illness until you telephoned them a few days ago? What caused you to make that phone call?"

"I don't know. She is my aunt, and I used to be very close to her, but I had not spoken to her in a long time, and I wanted to see how she was doing."

"How long do you propose to stay in Hangzhou with your aunt?"

"If possible, I would like to stay for a week, but my daughter will probably have to return somewhat earlier because of her business commitments in Shanghai."

"That will not be possible," the sidekick said. "The maximum period of time we would be willing to permit is four days."

"If that is all that can be allowed, I suppose I will have to accept that."

"That is correct. What dates are you proposing for this visit?"

"Oh, I hadn't really thought about it but as soon as possible. It will take a few days to get the train tickets, so, let me see, would Saturday be acceptable?"

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The sidekick flicked through a pocket calendar and then placed a printed sheet on top of his case. "Saturday, August 14. That would mean you will return on Tuesday, August 17." He filled in the dates on the printed sheet.

"As soon as you arrive in Hangzhou, you must report immediately to the public security bureau there and present this letter of introduction. On each subsequent day, you must report to the public security bureau at exactly 12 o'clock, midday. Do you understand this order?"

"Yes, but if we can only get an afternoon or evening train, the public security bureau would be closed by the time we got to Hangzhou."

"We will get tickets for you on the morning train. You need not concern yourself with that minor detail. Either myself or one of my colleagues will provide you with the tickets on the evening before your departure." He looked at his calendar again. "That is Friday the 13th. Make sure you are home at that time."

Hong, thinking on her feet as usual, spoke for first time. "Forgive me, but we can't leave early that morning because I have an important business appointment at 10 o'clock. We could only get a train that left after midday."

"That is not of any concern to me. If the train leaves before 10 o'clock you will just have to cancel your appointment."

"But it is a crucial meeting. If I am not there, the deal we have been working on for ages could fall through. That is why I can spend only a couple of days in Hangzhou because this deal is so important. Could you please accommodate us on this matter? I personally would be very grateful if you could help us," she smiled sweetly.

"Is that so? Well, Miss, I will see what I can do." He turned and winked at one of his accomplices. "However, before I grant you this request, perhaps you could answer a few questions?"

Hong's smile faded dramatically and she reached for a cigarette to calm her nerves. "Of course, sir. I will try to help in any way I can."

"On the evening of Thursday, June 3, you and your mother held a meeting with an Australian consular official named Jacob Heller and his wife, a Han Chinese woman named Wang Yunxia, at the Portman Hotel on Nanjing Road. What was the purpose of that meeting and what was discussed?"

"Well, let me see," she said, blowing out a huge cloud of smoke. "I don't think you can really call it a meeting as such, it was just a kind of get-together, you know, old friends who have not seen each other for a while."

"We have no record of you ever meeting these people before. You cannot possibly claim to be old friends."

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“Mr Heller is a very good friend of my brother, Xiaojun, so of course I am well-acquainted with him. Mr Heller was very helpful in seeing that my brother was able to go to Australia for his studies and as such has become a very good friend of the family. I don’t know why you have no records of us meeting before, because we met both Mr Heller and his wife only a couple of months previously at a reception for the East Asian Games.”

“Where was that reception held and at what time?”

“It was at the Garden Hotel, and, if you let me check my diary, I can tell you the date.” She delved into her briefcase and pulled out an expensive leather-bound personal organizer. “Here you are, March 24, Garden Hotel,” she said, presenting her diary to the sidekick with a flourish.

“This does not prove that the Australian Heller was also present, but, even if what you say is true, this meeting took place just a few months earlier, and you just said you had not seen these people for a long time.”

“I said we had not seen them in a while, not a long time, and besides the meeting at the reception was so brief we did not have sufficient time to talk in detail.”

“So, the second meeting was to discuss something in detail.”

Chen thought the sidekick was actually a better interrogator than his boss, but so far Hong was holding up well.

“Not really, just to catch up with family news, what Xiaojun was up to, that kind of thing.”

“Very well. On the evening of July 3, you had another meeting with Heller, was that to catch up on family news as well?” he said with a malicious smile.

Chen felt a lump in her throat. How had he found out? They had been so careful to avoid detection. She looked at her daughter who was now on her second cigarette.

“I don’t think so,” Hong said. “No, I am sure I have not seen either of them since the Portman Hotel.”

“Is that so. In that case, perhaps you can tell us where you were on that night?”

“I’m not sure, may I look at my diary again to refresh my memory?”

The sidekick did not answer but picked up the diary himself and flicked through the pages to July 3. He looked very disappointed.

“You have written Cathay Cinema, 8.15 p.m. under this date. What is the meaning of this?”

“Oh yes, that’s right,” she said, “I remember now. My mother and I went to see a movie that night, it was a Hong Kong movie. What was it called, Mom? *Crime Story*, that’s right.”

“I do not believe you. If you saw that film, who was in it and what was it about?”

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“Well, it was a new Jackie Chan movie. I think you would have liked it. It was about a cop who has to do battle with mobsters to track down a kidnapped businessman in Taiwan.”

“We will check with the cinema, and, if we find you are lying, you will be in very serious trouble,” the sidekick said. “Next item: last Friday, August 6, you had a lunch meeting with another foreigner. Who was that and what was the purpose of that meeting?”

“Friday? That was Mrs. Gifford. She is the representative of a foreign company we occasionally do business with. We are in the middle of negotiating a really interesting deal that involves...”

And she was off, going into every single aspect of the deal she was allegedly negotiating, the benefits that accrue to both sides and to the city of Shanghai. The sidekick listened for a while, becoming increasingly impatient as Hong’s monologue went on and on. After a while, he’d heard enough.

“This is your letter of introduction which you will present on arrival in Hangzhou. The public security bureau will supervise you during your stay in that city. If you fail to report to the bureau on arrival and at the specified times during your stay, or if you fail to return to Shanghai on the specified date, you will have violated legal regulations and will be made to suffer the consequences. Do you understand this order?”

“Yes, we both understand and we thank you for your kindness in granting our request,” Chen said.

The sidekick grunted, packed up his papers and walked to the door with his accomplices in tow. “Do not forget that you have to be present here all evening on the 13<sup>th</sup> in order to receive your tickets.”

When the front door closed, they both collapsed onto the sofa. “Fuck! That was close,” Hong laughed, exhaling another cloud of cigarette smoke. “I need a drink.”

Chen was immensely proud of her daughter, the calm and poise she maintained was amazing when it seemed for certain that their meeting had been uncovered. Chen had no idea that Hong had actually noted down their fictitious visit to the movies in her diary or that she had bothered to find out what the plot was. It was a such an impressive act of subterfuge that if Chen had not known any better, she would have sworn her daughter was telling the truth.

They concluded that the sidekick had just been fishing with his questions about July 3. Maybe state security had been tailing Jacob as well, and when they lost him at the same time as Chen and Hong that evening, they put two and two together and got the right answer. But they obviously could not prove it, so their only hope was to trick Chen or Hong into an admission. Chen was worried that she might have cracked under the pressure, but Hong was more than a match for the sidekick. She eventually convinced him, or perhaps had just worn him down.

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It was becoming clear to Chen that her daughter had quietly assumed much more of a leadership role in their relationship, and she was now happy to let her do so—within reason.

### **Saturday, August 14, 1993 – Day of Departure**

The sidekick returned as promised on the evening of August 13 with two tickets for the train departing at 12:44 p.m. That gave Chen ample time to pick up the money and for Hong to attend to her last-minute business before getting to the train station.

Unfortunately, he also brought some bad news with him. The 12:44 was the slow train terminating in Hangzhou soon after five o'clock. They would be met at the train station by officers from the Hangzhou public security bureau who would process their papers on the spot and supervise them throughout their time in the city.

This was not a complete disaster, because they did have backup tickets to Guangzhou bought by Yunxia, through a friend in the railway bureau, but they were for the train leaving Shanghai at 9:10 p.m. and getting to Hangzhou about one o'clock in the morning. That meant they would have about eight hours to kill in Hangzhou. They could not just hang around the station waiting for the train and would probably have to visit Aunt Fang anyway, because there was nowhere else to go.

Of more immediate concern that evening was what, if anything, they could take with them. The trip was supposed to last no more than four days, so they agreed to just take one suitcase each to avoid suspicion. Chen had a lifetime of memories in her apartment and it pained her to leave them behind. After much agonizing, she selected a few family photographs and small heirlooms, her medical and educational certificates and some other important documents. She packed a few of her favourite books, a couple of formal outfits, including the going-away outfit bought by her daughter, and filled the remaining space with casual clothes, jewellery, toiletries and makeup.

She spent a lot of time looking around her husband's study. Everything that was important to him, he kept there: books, papers, photographs, his music collection, certificates and awards; a lifetime of achievement.

"Hey, do you remember that one?" Hong said, pointing to an old photograph of her father at a reception with the then-mayor of Shanghai. "The mayor got up and sang that horrible old folk song. What was it?"

"*The Rose Flower*," Chen said. "I think it's the only one he knows off by heart."

"Yeah, that's right. What a racket. He shouldn't be allowed to sing in public like that, especially now that he is party general secretary. It's really embarrassing. Wasn't that also the time that old revolutionary got completely wasted on Moutai and fell off the podium? Everyone ignored it and just carried on as if nothing happened."

Chen smiled. All that seemed to be in another era, another universe now. There were so many memories in that room, but, in the end, she decided to leave it all there; her husband was gone, and it was time to make a clean break with the past.

Hong must have packed and repacked her bag a dozen times before finally coming up with a combination of clothes, personal mementos and important documents that she could just

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about live with. Her room looked like a bomb had hit it after she finished packing, and that is the way it stayed. She could not be bothered to tidy everything up; what was the point?

Hong's primary concern during that week had been liquidizing their assets without attracting the attention of the watchers. Her mother had transferred all but a few hundred yuan from her bank accounts to Hong's bank account. If asked, they would explain that since Hong had more experience in, and understanding of, the world of business and finance, she would be the one handling the family's money from now on.

Once she had her mother's 35,000 yuan in her account, she immediately invested it in a specially created portfolio of US dollar traded 'B' shares. She then sold off her own domestic 'A' shares, high yield 'legal person' shares and securities, and bought additional 'B' shares for the new portfolio. Working through the same broker, that portfolio would then be sold off at an agreed price of US\$6,950 to the account of Hong's friend and business associate Mrs. Gifford, who was managing a small experimental investment fund for a European finance company.

The papers had already been signed but they had agreed the deal would not actually go through until the Friday after they left Shanghai, so that hopefully it would only be on the following Monday or Tuesday that the regulators noticed, if they noticed anything at all. The stock market regulation process was so weak and ineffective that millions of yuan's worth of illegal trades went through every week without being detected. Although the deal was still technically in limbo, Mrs. Gifford had agreed to pay them in advance, transferring US\$6,000 to Xiaojun's bank account in Australia and paying the balance in cash directly to Hong. Xiaojun had been notified of the plan by Jacob through a secure communications channel. After exchanging the US\$950 on the black market, Hong had a grand total of 8,455 yuan for travel expenses.

Chen's final financial transaction was comparatively simple but involved a lot more money—more money, in fact, than she had ever seen in her life. She was understandably nervous. There was no way in the world she could explain having 200,000 yuan in cash in her possession. But as she locked up her apartment for what would be the last time and walked out on to Kangping Road with her suitcase that Saturday, she noticed that the watcher's car was not in its usual position. In fact, it was nowhere to be seen at all. Maybe, since they knew she would be getting on the train at midday, they decided it was not worth the effort to follow her in the morning. Whatever the reason, Chen breathed a huge sigh of relief as she climbed into the back of the cab she had ordered a few minutes earlier.

Miracle Trading occupied two small rooms in the Union Building, a cramped outer office—cluttered with desks, filing cabinets, photocopiers, fax machines and telephones—and Alice Peng's smaller inner office. Mrs. Peng was expecting her.

"You must be Director Chen Lan, please come in and sit down," she said in highly accented Mandarin.

"This is a highly unusual matter, and, if I am honest, it is not one I particularly approve of. However, since it stems from a personal request from Madam Luo herself, I have no choice

but to comply. Since we are dealing with a substantial sum of money, I'm afraid I must ask you to show me some form of identification before we proceed."

"Will this do?" Chen said, handing over her identification card. Mrs. Peng looked long and hard at the card and the photograph it contained before nodding and handing it back. She then knelt down by the small safe behind her desk, turned the combination lock, extracted a plastic shopping bag and placed it on the desk.

"This bag contains US\$35,000 in one-hundred-dollar bills. The money has been divided into seven bundles of 50-dollar bills. Please count each bundle to ensure they contain the correct number of bills."

Chen had expected to see a whole briefcase full of money and was slightly disappointed to be confronted with seven tightly packed bundles of anonymous green currency in a tattered plastic bag. But, on the other hand, it would be easier and less conspicuous to carry the cash around this way. As Chen counted the money, Mrs. Peng explained that the \$35,000 figure was based on the official exchange rate of 5.8 yuan to the dollar and rounded up to the nearest thousand dollars, which brought the value of the cash up to 203,000 yuan.

Chen was not really paying attention, focused as she was on counting the money. After Chen had checked the amount twice, Mrs. Peng placed a receipt form in front of her.

"Read this receipt carefully and then sign on the bottom line. This form will be faxed to my head office in Hong Kong, and, once the receipt has been confirmed, this copy will be destroyed. I do not wish to be implicated in whatever scheme you and Madam Luo have concocted so I will have to insist that you divulge to no one where you got this money. Are you agreeable to that condition?"

"Absolutely. I would not want to implicate you in any of our business." Chen was starting to dislike this woman immensely and was anxious to get out of her office as soon as possible.

"Good. There is one more thing. You will notice in the bag an envelope. That envelope contains some telephone numbers and contact names in Hong Kong. I am given to understand you are familiar with the significance of that information."

"Yes I am."

"Well in that case, I believe our business here is finished."

"Indeed, it is. Thank you for your cooperation. I'm sure my cousin will appreciate the efforts you have made on our behalf."

Chen put the money back in the plastic bag and carefully placed the package at the bottom of her shoulder bag and walked out without bothering to shake Mrs. Peng's proffered hand.

Chen's taxi driver had been waiting just around the corner from the Union Building with her suitcase in the back. They turned on to the Bund and headed north past the construction work on the new promenade and over the bridge to Shanghai Mansions where she was to meet Hong for an early lunch before getting on the train. The food at Shanghai Mansions



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was always terrible, but the location was convenient. It was just across the road from the Securities Exchange where Hong had been finalizing the details of the share transfer with her broker, and was only a ten-minute cab ride to the train station.

“Did you get it?” Hong said in an excited whisper, as her mother sat down at her table in the restaurant. “Quick, let me see it.”

“Are you crazy? I’m not going pull out US\$35,000 in a public place.”

“How much?” Hong said in a startled voice that caused more than a few heads to turn. “Did you say US\$35,000?” reverting to a whisper. “That’s far more than we need. Why did she send so much?”

“I don’t understand, the woman at the office said the amount was just rounded up to the nearest thousand dollars but it still only amounts to about 203,000 yuan.”

“At the official rate, maybe, but do you know what the black-market rate is now? It’s more than nine yuan to the dollar, and in Guangzhou it could be even higher. Mom, we’ve got about 320,000 yuan here.”

After getting over their shock, and quickly eating their unappetizing lunch, they hailed a cab on Huangpu Road. The driver at first refused to go the short distance to the station because he would have to wait hours in line for another fare but Hong was feeling generous and offered him 50 yuan. He accepted.

There were two watchers waiting for them at the head of platform. One of them nudged the other and pointed as they approached. They did not stop them or demand to inspect their luggage, as feared; they just followed them to their carriage, watched them get on and waited on the platform until the train pulled out.

The 12:44 did not have any soft sleeper compartments that would have provided them with some privacy. They were stuck in a hard seat carriage with no air conditioning, just an erratic electric fan, hemmed in by vacationing families and migrant workers. The window by their seats was stuck shut, and the carriage soon became unbearably hot and the air rank with the smell of their neighbours’ body odour. After more than four hours, they were relieved to disembark at Hangzhou and breathe some comparatively clean air.

As they approached the ticket barrier, Chen noticed two young uniformed public security bureau officers standing on the far side watching the passengers stream out on to the concourse in front of the station. They walked up to the officers and introduced themselves.

“I am Director Chen Lan from the Shanghai General Hospital, and this is my daughter, Li Hong. Are you waiting for us?”

The officers, more used to questioning people than being questioned, looked at each other for a second before one of them spoke.

“Yes, we are here to receive you. Please come this way.”

They picked up their suitcases again and slowly trailed the officers across the concourse.

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“May we help you with those cases? They look quite heavy,” the second officer said.

“That is very kind of you,” Chen said, setting down her case.

He took Chen’s suitcase and easily hoisted it on to his broad shoulders, while his partner grabbed Hong’s case, guiding it along the pavement by way of the small wheels attached to its bottom—a relatively new addition to luggage at the time.

“That one is really cute, don’t you think?” Hong said, nodding to the officer carrying Chen’s case. Chen ignored her daughter and silently followed the officers into the station security department office on the far side of the concourse. Once inside the small office she handed the officers the letter of introduction from state security. They took a cursory glance at the letter and then one of them took out another form, stamped it and handed both documents back to Chen.

“This is your temporary residence form, with your registered address. It has to be stamped every day. So please come to the main public security bureau on People's Road tomorrow and on each day of your stay here.”

“Thank you very much,” Hong said as Chen took back the form. “The people in Shanghai said we had to register at the bureau each day at exactly midday but tomorrow we were thinking of going boating on West Lake, so we might be late. Would that cause a problem?”

“Not at all,” the cute one said. “Everybody should go to West Lake when they are in Hangzhou. In fact, if you want to spend the whole day there we can simply stamp your form twice on the following day. We are fairly relaxed here and our primary concern is that you enjoy your stay in Hangzhou.”

“That is so kind of you,” Hong said. “Maybe if you are not busy tomorrow you would like to come boating with us?”

The officer blushed bright red and looked down at his feet. “I’m afraid that I am on duty tomorrow. But thank you for asking anyway. Perhaps I can offer you a ride to your destination.”

“That won’t be necessary,” Chen said rather more sternly than she’d intended and the officers backed off immediately. “We don’t want to put you to any trouble. The taxi rank is right outside. We can get a cab.”

“Of course, Madam, but at least let us carry your bags to the taxi.”

Not only did they carry their bags but they also opened the door and instructed the driver to take them to their registered address without charge. When the driver protested, the officer told him bluntly that they were guests of the public security bureau and he should do as he was told.

“What were you thinking of, asking a cop to go boating with us,” Chen said as they drove off.

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“Relax, Mom. I was just being playful. I knew he would not be able to accept. Besides it never hurts to have the police on your side for a change.”

It was only a short drive to her aunt’s house, but Chen felt she should pay the driver anyway. She gave him a ten yuan note for his trouble.

“So, what do we do now?” Hong asked, as they stood on the sidewalk below the apartment. That question was answered by Fang’s son, who emerged from one of the shop doorways and greeted them effusively before grabbing both suitcases and hauling them up the stairs.

“Mother will be so glad to see you. She has been talking about you non-stop since you called. She is especially anxious to see how Young Hong here has grown,” he said as he pushed the door open with his shoulder.

He placed the bags down in the frugally furnished living room and led them to his mother’s bedroom.

“Mom, are you awake? Look who is here.”

Chen’s immediate thought on entering the room and seeing her aunt for the first time in several years was that she had shrunk. Aunt Fang had always been a fairly small woman, but now she seemed positively tiny. Her face was wizened and creased deeply with age lines. What hair she had left was snow white and brushed back in thin wisps over her head.

“Chen Lan, is that you?” she croaked softly. “Come over here so that I can see you properly.” Chen walked over and sat on the edge of her aunt’s bed. “It is good to see you again. How have you been?” She slowly reached over and took Chen’s hand in her fragile, liver-spotted fingers. Her body may have withered away, but her spirit was still very much alive. Her eyes were sparkling and Chen could sense she was still very much in touch with the world around her.

“Let me see your pretty little daughter. I remember she was still in high school the last time I saw her.” Hong walked over apprehensively, not quite knowing what to make of this shrivelled creature before her. “Don’t be afraid, dear, I haven’t turned into a ghost yet,” Fang smiled, revealing the two dirty yellow teeth she had left.

“I’m cooking mother her dinner so I’ll make something for all of us. You must be hungry after your journey,” Chen’s cousin said from the doorway.

“Let me help you,” Chen offered.

“No, you stay there and talk to mother,” he insisted.

Fang was now sitting up in bed, anxious to hear all about their lives over the last few months. Not wanting to burden her with her troubles, Chen told her that life had been difficult since her husband passed away but that they were all trying to get on with their lives in his absence. She said her eldest son was still working in the United States and that his business practice was thriving and that her younger son had become quite a successful artist in Australia.

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“Young people today, always flying off to some part of the world or another. I could never see the attraction of going abroad myself. I have been very happy just staying here. And what about you, Young Hong? Are you going to desert your mother as well?”

“Me? Oh no, I’m going to stay with Mom, you can rest assured of that.”

“Hmm. I would have thought a pretty girl like you would have eligible bachelors knocking down the door trying to marry you.”

“Oh, I did get married last year. I thought you knew. He is a very nice man, a successful businessman. But I’m going to stay in Shanghai, that is what I meant.”

“And where is this husband of yours? I would have liked to have met him.”

“He’s busy with his work, so he could not come. Maybe next time.”

“Yes, that would be nice.”

Over dinner, they managed to change the subject, with Hong asking question after question about her great aunt’s long life. This may have initially been a diversionary tactic, but it soon became clear that Hong, just like her mother when she was her age, was genuinely fascinated with Fang’s stories. Hong listened with a horrified expression on her face as Fang relayed the details of her life as a landlord’s concubine and the moment when she was thrown out by the landlord’s first wife.

“Do you want to see my feet?” Fang said, after the dishes had been cleared away. “You girls today have no idea what we had to go through before the People’s Republic was founded, so this will give you some idea.” They pulled back the covers to reveal a pair of gnarled, horribly deformed stumps no more than ten centimetres long. Hong gasped and reeled back from the shock. She had seen elderly women in Shanghai with bound feet but never without shoes or slippers. Now she was beginning to understand the torture young girls had to endure in order to transform their feet into what were referred to back then as tiny golden lilies.

“My nanny started to bind my feet when I was only two years old,” Fang explained as Hong sat, transfixed by the little stumps. “She bent my toes under my feet and crushed them flat with a large rock. I cannot describe the pain I went through in those years but in a way, it made everything else I went through later in life more bearable.”

Fang’s son left about nine o’clock to return to his own family nearby. He said he would return in the morning to cook his mother’s breakfast. The women stayed in the bedroom listening to Fang’s stories and gossiping about other family members until Fang started to get tired and asked to be left alone to sleep.

“Aunt Fang?” Chen said. “There is something I have to tell you. We have to leave tonight, and I’m sorry, but we can’t stay here.”

Fang opened her eyes and stared intently at Chen for what seemed an eternity. “You are in some kind of trouble, aren’t you?” she said softly. “It’s alright; I don’t want to know about it.”

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You just do what you have to do. I've always had faith in your ability to know what is the right course. Don't worry about me. My sons are good boys, and they will look after me."

She took Chen's hand again and held it as tightly as she could before she drifted off to asleep.

**Sunday, August 15, 1993 – Midnight Train to Guangzhou**

They left the apartment shortly after midnight. The streets were virtually deserted, a stark contrast to downtown Shanghai, where even in the small hours of the morning there was always something going on. There was no point waiting in the street for a taxi, so they picked up their bags and slowly made their way to the station on foot, all the time looking around to see if they were being followed. The station was less than a kilometre away, and they got there with about half an hour to spare before boarding.

The waiting room was already quite full, but they managed to find a space on a bench next to a family from the countryside laden down with what appeared to be all their worldly possessions. They had two small children. The smaller one was asleep, but the eldest one was wide awake and soon became fascinated with Hong.

The child walked up and stood motionless in front of her, her little hand wiping her grubby face as she stared at this expensively tailored young woman with perfect hair and makeup. Hong did not appreciate the attention. She pulled out a fashion magazine and held it up in front of her face. This did nothing to deter the little girl, who climbed up onto the bench beside her and looked over Hong's shoulder at the magazine.

Normally, Hong would have sternly ignored her presence, but perhaps spending the evening with her great aunt had softened her a little. When the train was called, she turned and smiled at the little girl. "Here you go, sweetie. Would you like to have this?" The girl hesitated for a while and then extended her arms to take the magazine.

"Thank you, miss," the girl's mother, who was about Hong's age, said. "That is very kind of you."

They let the crowd push and shove its way to the hard-seat carriages before they walked to the soft sleeper section at the other end of the platform. When they clambered on board, the carriage attendant was not pleased to see them. She took one look at their tickets and, in that haughty voice all rail attendants seem to cultivate, said. "These berths have already been allocated. You should have got on in Shanghai. These tickets are no longer valid."

"I'm sorry," Hong said, "but our plans changed suddenly and we had to come to Hangzhou first before going on to Guangzhou. Surely the tickets are still valid. If these berths are taken, could you find us an empty compartment?"

"No, that is not possible. There are no berths available," she said, looking off into the distance.

"My mother here is very ill and we have to get to Guangzhou as soon as possible because the only hospital that can cure her is there." The attendant looked suspiciously at Chen. She had obviously heard that one before and wasn't buying it.

"Look," Hong continued, "if you can help us I will be very grateful."

"How grateful?" the attendant said, turning around to see if anybody was watching.

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She took out her purse and slipped a hundred yuan note into the attendant's hand. It was a somewhat excessive bribe, but worth it under the circumstances. They both wanted to get some sleep. The attendant pocketed the money, took the tickets and exchanged them for two tokens. "Berths 23 and 24, halfway down the carriage."

The compartment was empty, and, after stashing their baggage on the overhead shelf and making the beds, they sat down and made some tea from the piping hot thermos provided by the now excessively friendly and helpful attendant. By two o'clock they were both sound asleep. They were jolted awake at 6:30 a.m., however, by the public-address system blasting out the national anthem. Chen reached over and turned the volume switch down and went back to sleep. It was one of the perks of soft sleeper class that customers could actually mute the public-address system. Passengers in hard-sleeper and hard-seat class had to endure it for the entirety of the journey.

It was late morning when they eventually got up. The train was already making its way through the rugged countryside of Jiangxi; less than 24 hours to go before they reached Guangzhou. About midday, after checking that they had not left any valuables behind in the compartment, they made their way down the carriage to the restaurant car for lunch. Railway food was never the best, but the fatty pork, cabbage and fried noodles on offer was at least acceptable.

When they returned to their compartment, they found two uniformed police officers apparently going through their luggage.

"Oh, hello," one of them said. "I hope you don't mind us moving your cases over to the side. Just trying to make a little more room up here."

"No, not at all, please go ahead," Hong said, staring at her mother in disbelief. Who were these people? What were they doing in the compartment? Did they know who Chen and Hong were? It was about the time they were supposed to report to the Hangzhou public security bureau. Surely, they could not have acted that fast?

"Going all the way to Guangzhou?" the taller of the two officers asked.

"Yes, we're going to Guangzhou," Hong ventured. "Visiting relatives."

"Ah, that's good. We have to work, but hopefully we will be able to get some sightseeing in at the same time."

"What kind of work do you do?" Hong asked, prompting an outbreak of laughter from the two officers.

"Can't you tell?" the shorter one said, touching the insignia on the upper sleeve of his tunic. "We are the Nanchang public security bureau. We are attending a criminal law conference in Guangzhou."

"You sound as though you are from Shanghai," the taller man interjected. "I've always wanted to visit that city but have not had the opportunity so far."

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“We are both Shanghai-born and -bred,” Chen said. There was no point in lying. Their accents gave them away. “You really should visit our city if you get the chance. It is developing very fast now. It is a very exciting time to be there.”

“Yes, I heard about that,” the tall one said. “That Pudong district is supposed to be the hot new investment zone, right? Don’t really get much investment in Jiangxi, though. I guess we will just have to wait for you rich Shanghai folks to give us a hand.”

“You don’t need our help. Jiangxi has a proud tradition of struggle and self-reliance. I’m sure you will be wealthier than we are before too long.”

“I don’t know about that,” he laughed. “We may be good at fighting Chiang Kai-shek and the Japanese, but when it comes to making money, we are not so successful.”

The more they talked, the more it became apparent that these two officers had no idea who they were. Still, they had to be careful. Even if they were not reported missing in Hangzhou until the next day, there was a good chance that these officers might remember them if a nationwide alert was issued.

Chen told them she worked for the Shanghai municipal public health bureau and that her daughter was still at university. Luckily, at no point did they ask to exchange business cards or in any other way seek to verify their identities. They asked a lot of questions about Shanghai, the best places to go sightseeing, good restaurants and the like, and talked *ad nauseam* about their hometown, an unremarkable provincial capital that Chen had never visited nor had any desire to visit.

“You, of course, know that Nanchang has a very strong historical connection to Shanghai,” the shorter one said. “Our military uprising was the party’s direct response to the Shanghai massacre ordered by Chiang Kai-shek. I was thinking we should definitely visit the martyrs’ memorial there if we make it to Shanghai. Do you know where it is?”

“Yes,” said Chen. “It is in Longhua district in the south. Not too far from downtown.”

It was, in fact, right next to the Longhua funeral home where her husband’s memorial had taken place four long months ago. She changed the subject.

They discussed the recent increase in the cost of living, the economic reform program, new investment opportunities and, of course, Beijing’s bid for the Olympics, which the policemen were very excited by. There was an awkward moment when the discussion moved on to the subject of profiteering, economic crime and corruption. It was clear that the two policemen were uncomfortable with that particular topic and the subject was quickly dropped.

The officers had the habit of disembarking at just about every stop and buying food from the platform vendors, which they would then bring back to the compartment. There was a constant parade of peanuts, oranges, sunflower seeds, pickled vegetables and at one point a whole pressed duck, all of which were offered to their travelling companions. It would have been rude to refuse these offerings out of hand, so Chen and Hong accepted a little of each



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and ate very slowly. By ten o'clock, everyone was either too full or too tired to keep on talking and they retired to their respective bunks to sleep.

Chen woke up a couple of hours before they were due to arrive in Guangzhou and—after washing her face, folding up the bed sheets and ordering a boxed breakfast from the trolley—sat down to watch the landscape passing by.

The first thing visitors from the north notice about the southern plains of Guangdong is how remarkably green everything is, a stark contrast to the dull greys and browns of the northern plains. Even Shanghai seemed dull by comparison. The trees and rice fields shimmered in the summer heat, giving off a bright verdant light. Hong, who never went anywhere without her sunglasses, was able to enjoy the view without squinting. Chen had neglected to pack hers and sat back in the shade of the bunk.

As they were pulling into the station, the shorter police officer asked, “Do you have far to go to your relatives’ home?”

“No, it’s close to the city centre, so it’s not very far at all,” Chen said.

“We are being met by the conference organizers, so we could arrange a car for you if you like.”

“Thank you very much, but our relatives will be picking us up at the station.”

Chen wondered to herself why all the police officers they had met outside of Shanghai were excessively friendly. It was a bizarre contrast with the city they had left behind. They waited until the officers had been greeted by their colleagues and led away off the platform before disembarking themselves.

They walked slowly to the ticket barrier and into the arrivals hall, which was teeming with thousands of passengers. If someone was looking out for them, it would be virtually impossible to find them in this crowd. The concourse in front of the station was equally packed with passengers and migrant workers, many of whom appeared to be camped out there, and they had to fight their way through the crowd to the taxi rank. After bundling their luggage into the back of a cab, they headed off on the 20-minute drive to Shamian Island on the banks of the Pearl River.

### **Monday, August 16, 1993 – Money Exchange**

The hotel they had been told to go to was a small, rundown travellers' hostel located behind the White Swan Hotel. There were plenty of rooms available. As instructed, they paid cash in advance for a twin room and wrote false names and addresses on the registration forms. The receptionist did not ask for any identification. In fact, he hardly looked up from his desk the entire time. His only movement was to hand them the key and point in the general direction of the room. After taking a shower in the public bathroom at the end of the hall and changing out of her sweaty clothes, Chen took out the piece of paper she'd been handed in Jing'an Park and called the number.

The phone rang about a dozen times before a female voice answered.

"My name is Chen, I wish to speak to Mr. Yue."

"What is your business with Mr. Yue," the woman said.

"I have just arrived in Guangzhou from Shanghai and I am looking for a tour guide," she replied, reading from the instructions on the piece of paper.

"Wait a moment." There was a long pause, and Chen could hear people talking in the background before a man got on the phone. "This is Mr. Yue. I understand that you wish to hire a tour guide."

"That is correct."

"How many are there in your party?"

"There are two of us."

"And have you been appraised of our fee?"

"I have, and that will not be a problem."

"Good. I will come to see you this evening about eight o'clock. Are you residing at the guest house we recommended?"

"Yes. Room 216."

The first thing they had to do before the appropriately named tour guide arrived that evening was to count out the money and make sure they had the correct amount. Hong wanted to find out exactly what the black-market rate in Guangzhou was that day, so she took \$500 from one of the bundles and walked out on to the street. She had not gone more than twenty metres before she was approached by a money changer who, after haggling for a moment, agreed to exchange her \$500 for 4,550 yuan.

Exchanging money on the black market was technically illegal and could have led to problems if there had been police around, but given the blatant approaches of the money changers in that district, it was clear to Hong that the danger was minimal. Based on the exchange rate of 9.1 yuan to the dollar, Hong calculated they would need just \$21,978 to

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pay the tour guide's fee. They had just over 12,000 yuan in cash at that time, so they decided to use some of that up in payment of the fee. They kept about 3,000 yuan, which they figured would be more than enough to keep them going in their remaining time in the mainland. Once they got to Hong Kong, it would be next to useless. The \$14,000 left over from the original \$35,000 was put in a separate paper bag and placed in Hong's combination lock briefcase for safekeeping.

It would have been sensible to stay in the hotel while they were waiting for Mr. Yue to arrive, but it was a small, dark room with no air-conditioning. By mid-afternoon, Chen was feeling confined and restless. They had also run out of food and were starting to get hungry. Hong agreed to stay in the room and guard the money while her mother went out to get some supplies.

Shamian Island was packed with Chinese and foreign tourists, so it was quite easy to blend into the crowds. In many ways, the island reminded her of the old French Concession in Shanghai, although there was much more commercial activity in Shamian: restaurants, shops, even a roller-skating disco. Chen walked around soaking up the atmosphere for about half an hour, all the time on the lookout for people who might be following her but, apart from the money changers, no one paid any attention whatsoever. On the way back to the hotel, she stopped off to buy some instant noodles, fruit and a packet of cookies as well as a pair of cheap sunglasses from a roadside vendor.

Mr. Yue arrived as promised soon after eight in the evening. He was a young man, still in his twenties, with a thick mane of hair swept back over his forehead and dressed in light coloured summer slacks and a black cotton short-sleeved shirt. He carried a small attaché case in one hand and a bulky mobile phone in the other. A pager was attached to his belt. He placed his phone down on the bedside table, opened his attaché case and got right down to business.

"You indicated you had the money. Could you let me check it before we proceed any further?"

"Yes, certainly. Hong, can you get the money for Mr. Yue?"

Hong retrieved the plastic bag containing the money and handed it over.

"As you will see, most of it has already been converted into US dollars. We thought you would prefer it that way," Hong explained as Yue took the bag. "There is \$21,000 there plus 8,900 yuan, which I think you will find adds up to 200,000 yuan as agreed."

Mr. Yue nonchalantly flicked through the bundles of money before placing them back in the bag.

"I see. And what exchange rate did you use to calculate this conversion?"

"I understand the rate on the street here is about 9.1 yuan to the dollar, so I used that rate. I presume you do not object, since if you want to change it back, you will most certainly get a much better rate for such a large amount," Hong said, launching into negotiation mode.

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"That is not necessarily the case, Miss Li," he said, taking out a packet of Marlboros and offering them around. Hong accepted, and Yue produced a gold-plated lighter with which he lit her cigarette before lighting his own.

"For a start, down here in Guangdong we usually deal in Hong Kong dollars rather than US dollars, and swaps are negotiated according to that market rate. So, let us make a quick calculation." He reached into his case and pulled out an electronic calculator. "Today's rate is 1.05 yuan to the Hong Kong dollar so 200,000 yuan would work out at HK\$190,476. Now, if we divide that by the Hong Kong dollar to US dollar rate of 7.74, that comes to US \$24,609, and that does not even take into account transaction fees which would be at least two percent."

"That seems a very complicated way of working out what should be a very simple currency swap," Hong said. "You may prefer Hong Kong dollars, but I got a rate of 9.1 for my US dollars just by walking out the door here this morning, so there is clearly a market for US dollars in this city."

"I am not denying there is a market for US dollars. It is just that there is a bigger market for Hong Kong dollars. Let me make a compromise suggestion." His fingers flicked across his calculator. "We have an apparent discrepancy of about US\$2,600. Would you be willing to go half way to correct the balance? Under the circumstances, I think I am being very generous."

Hong looked at her mother for assent. Chen had no idea if the exchange rates quoted by Mr. Yue were accurate or not. The only thing she knew for sure was that they could afford to pay the extra he had suggested, and that if they did not pay him, the whole deal might be called off.

"Mr. Yue," Hong said, "we would be willing to correct the balance as you put it, but in return I would like to suggest we only hand over the money once we arrive safely in Hong Kong. It is not that we do not trust you, it is just that we would feel more secure if that were the arrangement."

"You Shanghai people certainly drive a tough bargain, don't you," he laughed. "That is not our normal practice, but in this case, I might be willing to make an exception. There is just one problem."

"What problem?"

"Well you see there is a lot of counterfeit foreign currency floating around at the moment. So, we really need to check to see that your money is genuine before we take any more action. It is not that we don't trust you, it is just that we would feel more secure if that were the arrangement."

"You southerners are pretty good at business, as well," Hong said. Mr. Yue shrugged modestly. "Okay, how about we give you US\$10,000 now so that you can check it properly and then the balance when we get our tickets and visas in Hong Kong."

"That would be the balance of \$13,300, correct?"

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“Yes, provided part of that can be paid with whatever Chinese currency we have left over when we get there.”

“I don’t believe that would be a problem,” he said. “So, we have a deal?”

Mr. Yue took two of the \$5,000 bundles and casually tossed them into his case. He then briefly outlined the plan his people had devised for their transport. They would have to check out of the hotel at six o’clock in the morning, to be met by two men who would be identified only as Wang the elder and Wang the younger. They would then take them by car to a safe house near the Hong Kong border where they would wait for transport to be arranged. Mr. Yue instructed them not go outside and not to make any telephone calls or in another way alert others to their presence in Guangzhou.

“If you want to watch a movie or something, the guy at reception has a stash of pirated video tapes you can borrow.”

He picked up his case and telephone, walked to the door and wished them a pleasant journey before disappearing down the dark corridor with US\$10,000 of their money in his possession.

**Tuesday, August 17, 1993 – The Safe House**

The two Wangs were waiting in the lobby by the main door just as Mr. Yue said they would be. They were easy to spot. Wang the Elder was a huge man, at least 1.80 metres tall and almost as wide. His neck was as thick as a tree trunk and formed a solid, seamless link between his broad shoulders and enormous dome-like head. Wang the Younger seemed positively minuscule in comparison to his partner. He was a short and sinewy individual with a prominent scar on the left side of his face.

“I’m glad they are on our side,” Hong whispered, as Chen handed the room key back to the dozing clerk at the desk. “I certainly wouldn’t want to get on the wrong side of those two.”

The two Wangs did not say anything when Chen and Hong approached. They simply turned and led their guests outside onto the street where a dark blue S-class Mercedes with a red light on the roof and People’s Armed Police license plates was waiting.

Chen was alarmed. “You are with the armed police?” she asked timidly.

“No, don’t be ridiculous,” Young Wang laughed. “All this stuff was bought on the black market from cops doing a little bit of business on the side. We use the plates and the light to get out of trouble when we need to.”

“It is also good for getting through traffic jams. We can give a little demonstration on the way, if you like,” Old Wang added.

Chen was not totally convinced by their explanation, but Hong was much more trusting and walked to the open trunk with her suitcase. “Nice car,” she said, as Old Wang took her bags. “How fast does it go?”

“I’ve gotten it up to over 200 kph. Do want to drive some of the way?”

“No, she does not,” Chen said firmly.

“Better listen to your Mom,” Old Wang said. “We don’t want to get into any trouble.”

After packing the bags in the trunk, they set off down the narrow street, over the stone bridge and turned right on to June 23rd Road. The road was named after the Shaji Massacre of June 23, 1925, when British troops based on Shamian Island killed dozens of strikers and protesters who were demanding an end to colonial oppression.

It was one of those incidents Chen knew all about from her political study classes, but she had never really given it much thought until she saw the road sign. She pointed it out to Hong, who peered over the top of her sunglasses.

“A bit early in the morning for a history lesson, Mom.”

They headed east along the highway leading out of the city. There was not much traffic at that time of the morning, and they were soon hurtling through the new factory townships of Dongguan, which, in the early 90s, were still interspersed by patches of farmland and villages. Old Wang drove swiftly, overtaking just about every vehicle in his path on the

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narrow country roads. His huge frame took up the entire front seat and his arms never seemed to move as he steered the big car through the road's sharp twists and turns.

A tape of Hong Kong pop music was playing at full blast on the stereo, and Young Wang sang along to the words in between drags on his cigarette. The music was too loud for a proper conversation, so the passengers just sat back in the soft leather seats and enjoyed the ride. At one point, Old Wang did in fact turn on the flashing red light and the siren, causing several pedestrians and cyclists to take cover as they roared by. The two Wangs found this display highly amusing.

After a couple of hours, they arrived at their destination, a modern villa complex in the south of Huizhou county. The complex was set off the main road in a wide expanse of countryside. The only other buildings in sight were a few old farm structures. No one appeared to be working in the fields.

Old Wang pulled up at the main gate to the complex and waited for a security guard to walk over from the gate house. He mumbled something in Cantonese to the guard, who then returned to the gate house, opened the wrought iron gate and saluted as they went past. The complex consisted of about two dozen European-style villas surrounded by newly planted lawns, trees and shrubbery. They drove past a small ornamental lake with a fountain, turned into a dead-end road and pulled up in the driveway of a large, detached two-story villa.

"This will be your home for a while. I hope it is satisfactory," Young Wang said.

"It's beautiful." Hong jumped out of the car and walked out on to the road to get a better view of the palatial residence.

"It's open, so go on in. We'll get your bags," Old Wang said.

Hong ran inside like an excited child and was already exploring the upstairs area when Chen stepped through the front door and into the spacious living room. It was like a show home, appointed with brand new European style furniture, deep pile carpets, a wide screen colour television, hi-fi system, potted plants, *objet d'art* and paintings on the walls. The kitchen, leading off the living room, was larger than many Shanghai apartments and contained just about every convenience a homeowner could want. There was even a microwave oven, not that Chen had any idea how to use it. The house was perfectly clean, almost sterile, not a speck of dirt or dust anywhere.

"Mom! Isn't this wonderful?" Hong shouted out as she bounded down the stairs. "It is a real mansion, there are televisions in every bedroom and there are three separate bathrooms, can you believe it?"

Chen was becoming suspicious. "Who exactly owns this house?" she asked Old Wang as he walked in with the baggage under his arms.

"To tell you the truth," he said, dumping the bags down in the living room, "I have no idea, and what is more I have no interest in finding out."

“But you must have some idea,” Hong said.

“We don’t know and we don’t ask,” Young Wang interjected. “It’s best that way. All I can tell you is that the owner is someone in Hong Kong who allows our boss to use it. There is no need for you to worry. You will be perfectly safe here. No one else lives on this street, and in fact there are only a couple of other people living in the whole compound, and they are way over the other side. If you stay in and around the house, no one will ever know you are here.”

“How come there is no one else here? It is like a ghost town.”

“Most of the houses are bought by people in Hong Kong and Taiwan as speculative positions. They just hang on to them in the hope that the price will go up sooner or later, and hardly anyone actually bothers to use them as homes.”

“How long will we have to stay here?” Chen asked.

“That depends on when we can arrange for your transfer to Hong Kong,” Young Wang said. “It might be just a few days if you’re lucky, or it could be a week or even a month if things are difficult. The people who will be moving you have to determine when it is safe and that depends on border patrols on both sides, the availability of transport, the weather, all sorts of things. We can’t just put you in a car and drive you across the border.”

“I understand that you have a lot of logistics to take into consideration, but a week sounds like a long time just to sit around and wait, let alone a whole month.”

“That is why you are staying at a luxury residence, so that you will at least be comfortable during your stay. You can watch television, listen to music or read. Anything you want, but you must remember to never leave the immediate surroundings of the house. In fact, it would be best for you not to go outside at all. There is a gym in the basement if you want to do some exercise. We will come back every day so if you have any requests for food, drinks or anything else, just let us know the day before. There is plenty of food in the refrigerator already, so just help yourselves. We will let you know as soon as possible when you will be moved, but you will just have to be patient until then. Do you have any questions before we leave you for the day?”

“Are you sure it is safe here?” Chen asked again. “That security guard saw us come in, he could report us if the police came here.”

“Listen, first of all, the police never come out here, and second, he is paid not to ask questions. He certainly would not dare tell anybody about what goes on here. The owners of these villas demand privacy, and that is what they get. So, don’t worry about him or anyone else, just relax and enjoy your stay, and we will see you tomorrow morning.”

The two Wangs exited through the front door, got back into their vehicle and drove off. The house was deathly quiet, and the only sound was the occasional chirping of birds and insects in the trees outside.



“Well, it looks like we are going to be here for a while,” Hong said. “We might as well get unpacked and get settled in. Which bedroom do you want? We’ve got three to choose from.”

“I don’t mind. You pick the room you want.”

“Okay,” Hong grinned. She picked up her suitcase and bounded off upstairs to the master bedroom, which had one of the biggest beds either of them had ever seen, a walk-in closet and a spacious, marble-tiled bathroom next door. The other bedrooms were somewhat smaller but still perfectly comfortable, and Chen was happy enough with her lot. After unpacking, she walked over to the master bedroom to find Hong watching television—Hong Kong television.

“Look at this, Mom,” she said without taking her eyes off the set, “we must be really close to Hong Kong, we can pick up all four stations.”

There were two Cantonese stations and two English language stations, all of which Chen had difficulty understanding and none of which seemed to have anything worth watching. She left Hong to her viewing and set off to explore the rest of the house. In addition to the living room and kitchen downstairs, there was a large dining room and a bar area with an extensive selection of brandy and other spirits. Chen still could not imagine what kind of person would own a luxurious residence in the middle of the countryside, several kilometres from the nearest town. She guessed the owner only used it as an occasional weekend getaway from Hong Kong, in which case he or she would have to be an extremely wealthy individual. She knew the two Wangs would never tell her the identity of the owner, but Chen could not help but wonder who her mysterious benefactor might be.

Much later, it was alleged that the owner was a well-known garment industry entrepreneur who had diversified into the media sector, but that was never confirmed.

### **An Extended Stay/Marking Time**

The two Wangs arrived, regular as clockwork at ten each morning, bringing food, videos, newspapers and magazines. But at no time did either of them give Chen and Hong any indication of when they might be leaving the villa. At least they provided some distraction from what was becoming an increasingly boring and restless existence. The Wangs would sit around and talk or fix things around the house, and they even allowed Hong drive the Mercedes around the compound on a few occasions, although they drew the line at letting her try out the flashing light and siren. When the Wangs were not there, the women were largely confined to the house, and a leisurely stroll around the ornamental pond was all the outdoor exercise they were permitted.

After several days had passed, Chen decided to put their extended stay in the safe house to productive use. She asked the Young Wang to purchase a blank journal notebook for her. The dining room looked out over the garden, so she made that her office and sat down to write. She began on March 8, the day her husband died. She still had a vivid memory of that awful meeting at the car plant and wanted to record it in as much detail as possible. Next came the events leading up to the funeral, the rumours surrounding her husband’s death

and the mysterious disappearance of her son in America. Hong encouraged her mother in this endeavour and made additions and corrections when prompted. Having studied literature, Hong wanted her mother to reveal more about her feelings and changing emotions during their six-month ordeal. Chen was reluctant at first. She wanted just to get the facts straight so that she had a record of everything. Besides, she was not ready to put into words how she really felt in the days immediately after Li's death.

But later, as she had more time for reflection, Chen began to think more about the course of events that had led a comfortably off, and well-respected hospital administrator to become a wanted criminal on the run and hiding out near the Hong Kong border with her daughter. Could things have worked out differently had she made different choices or were they, as Jacob suggested, simply victims of powerful and inevitable forces beyond their control? If she had just kept her mouth shut and obeyed all the instructions she'd been given by the car company, the police, even her own sister, she might have been left alone. But Chen knew she could not have lived with herself if she had meekly laid down and let them walk all over her. She had tolerated a lot in life but there was a limit.

It was possible, she reasoned, that eventually she could have come to terms with the scandal surrounding her husband's death, assuming of course that the scandal involved him alone. After all, she was eligible for retirement and could have quietly retreated from public life if that is what it took. But once her son was implicated in the scandal, and then arrested, she could not just stand by. The thought of her eldest son spending the next 15 years in jail was unbearable. She hoped that in the fullness of time he would be able to forgive her, and understand that she had done everything she could before she herself was at risk of imminent arrest.

She felt guilty about bringing her aunt into her escape plan but was confident Aunt Fang understood and had given her blessing. Besides, what could they possibly do to a 90-year-old woman who had already lived through so much? Chen was not at all worried about her sister. She would be more than willing to disown and condemn Chen if that was what it took to save her own skin.

Chen began to think about the other people she had encountered on this journey. What had happened to them? How had their lives been affected by this drama?

She felt sorry for the two young policemen in Hangzhou who had been so courteous and helpful. They were probably in a lot of trouble. The interrogator's sidekick was for sure in even more trouble for letting them escape, but she did not care about him.

She thought about Gu Lianhua. She had not heard anything about her since the night she'd stumbled across the police at Gu's apartment, and assumed she must have made it safely out of the country. But where would she go? Did she have family or friends abroad? Chen had to admit that she really knew very little about the woman who had been her husband's secretary for close to a decade.

She thought about Ma Guoqiang and his warning of her impending arrest. Why would he take such a risk? Why was he so indebted to her husband? There were so many unanswered questions about both Gu and Ma.

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Jacob and Yunxia had provided invaluable help and she hoped that one day she could express her gratitude in person. As a consular official Jacob was protected. Chen just hoped that he would see the light and allow his wife to start the new life away from China that she wanted all along.

And then there was Attorney Huang. He was a survivor. He would be fine. Chen thought about the last words he had said to her at the hotel coffee shop, how he would certainly have remembered her if they had met when they were students. It was a cheesy line but she could not help but wonder what her life would have been like had they actually met. Would she have ended up as the wife of an idealistic young lawyer rather than a success-driven businessman? How would that have played out over the last three decades of China's turbulent history? It would have been difficult for sure, but at least she would have been with someone who shared her values about social justice and had a strong desire to make China a better place for everyone, not just for themselves. After all, she had studied medicine because she wanted to improve the lives and well-being of her compatriots. In retrospect, she conceded, her tenure as a hospital administrator had been of limited benefit to the people of Shanghai; still, she was happy that, on occasion, she had been able to help those in need.

She thought about Qionghua, the young woman she had looked after briefly following the minivan taxi crash at the hospital. Chen hoped that she'd made a full recovery and had resumed her studies at university. She hoped that she would emulate her namesake, and rise through the ranks and attain a position of prominence in society, but she knew from bitter experience that no matter how high you rise in China, you can be cut down again in an instant.

Chen felt immensely sad at the thought of leaving everything and everyone in her homeland behind, but also tremendous relief that the crushing weight that had borne down on her for the last six months would soon be lifted.

Every morning, Chen and Hong scanned the newspapers and every evening watched the television news to see if there was anything about them, Dajun or anyone else connected to the case. There was not. Judging from the television news reports, the only thing that people were concerned about was the final preparations being made in the run-up to the decision on which city would host the Olympic Games in 2000: Beijing, Sydney or Manchester. The announcement would come on September 23. Despite everything that had happened to them, Chen and Hong still wanted Beijing to win. A deeply inculcated national pride cannot be eradicated overnight.

A key part of China's preparations was the 12-day National Games, which opened in Beijing's Workers' Stadium on September 4 with a ceremony even more lavish and over-the-top than the one laid on for the International Olympic Committee during the East Asian Games in Shanghai. There were giant chickens, break-dancing terracotta warriors and an extraordinary exhibition of precision marching by the People's Liberation Army. All this was topped off by one of the biggest firework displays seen in the capital in decades.

Everyone seemed confident that Beijing would be awarded the Games. The city had the best venues, the best infrastructure, and the enthusiastic support of more than one billion

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patriotic Chinese people. Even China's athletes were now world beaters. The women of the Ma Family Army just kept on breaking world records. The most remarkable performance came from "Super Girl" Wang Junxia, who smashed the 10,000-metres world record by more than 40 seconds and then, just a couple of days later, broke the 3,000-metres record in the heats. By the time the 3,000-metres final came around towards the end of the Games, it seemed that the whole country was crazy for athletics.

Chen never had the slightest interest in athletics, but even she was intrigued by these incredible performances. The race was broadcast live on national television, so they joined one billion other viewers on the edge of their seats. Sure enough, Wang won the event easily, breaking her new world record again by six seconds.

"How can she do that?" Hong said. "Come on, Mom, you are the doctor. How is it medically possible for someone to smash a world record and hardly look out of breath? I mean, if I ran as fast as that for one lap of the track, I would be exhausted. In fact, I probably would not even get around one lap."

"Well, for a start, you smoke and drink too much and have never done a day of physical exercise in your life, and secondly, she trains every day just for this. Also, you can tell just by looking at her that she is in perfect shape."

"Gee, thanks for the support, Mom. But look, all the other athletes in the race are in great shape as well but they are nowhere in sight. There must be something else going on here, and it is not just traditional Chinese medicine."

There had been a lot of speculation about the training methods used by Coach Ma Junren to get his athletes to perform these remarkable feats, but Chen was prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt and put it down to scientific training and hard work. Hong, with good reason, was less convinced.

"Look, even if it is all legit as you say, it just looks suspicious. If they were smart, they would make gradual improvements, not have three athletes break records in three events in the space of a week.

"They probably think this kind of thing will help Beijing get the Olympics, but, I'm telling you, foreigners watching this will just think China is so desperate to win the Olympics that it will stop at nothing."

Hong had been reading a lot of the Hong Kong newspapers that the two Wangs delivered from time to time. She had also discovered she could listen to the BBC and VOA on the radio, so she had a rather different perspective on Beijing's Olympic bid than her mother.

"The Americans are doing everything they can to discredit China's bid, so we really should not give them any ammunition.

"Do you remember that independent trade union guy, Han something, who was like public enemy number one after June 4? Well, he is now in Hong Kong for some reason and the government has taken away his passport so he can't travel anywhere. The Americans are

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now saying this is a gross violation of his human rights, and that the International Olympic Committee should take it into account when deciding who gets the Games.”

“Listen to this,” Hong said, fishing for an old copy of the *International Herald Tribune* that was lying on the floor. “Robin Munro, the Hong Kong director of the human rights group Asia Watch, said China’s treatment of Mr. Han showed that the Chinese should not get the Olympics until ‘they clean up their human rights act.’”

“That is ridiculous,” Chen said. “What has human rights got to do with the Olympics?”

“I know, right? But all the newspapers are saying the whole thing has become really political, so it is no longer about whether or not we have the ability to hold the Olympics. It is more about whether we deserve to host them.”

“I really don’t understand. Australia and England have both hosted the Games before, so it is only fair that China is given the opportunity now.”

“I agree, Mom, but I would not get too optimistic.”

**Thursday, September 16, 1993 – New Moon**

Chen Lan was just dozing off to sleep when she heard a car pull up in the driveway and soon after that the sound of the front door opening and muffled voices downstairs. She turned on her bedside lamp and got out of bed to look out the window. There was a knock on the door and Hong entered.

“Mom, it’s time to go. We have to pack now and leave straight away. Old Wang said we should dress in something warm and comfortable. It could be a rough ride.”

She left to begin her own packing and Chen searched for something suitable to wear. She had no idea what was meant by a rough ride so she picked out the loosest fitting, most comfortable outfit she could find, a pair of old slacks, a thick woollen pullover and a pair of flat heeled shoes. Young Wang approved of her choice.

“Dressed for action, I see. That’s good. Are you sure you have packed everything you need?”

“Yes, I looked through all my drawers and cabinets, and I’m sure nothing has been left behind.”

Hong was in charge of the money and the passports, but Chen double checked with her to make sure everything was in order before they set off. Hong was taking this excursion very seriously, dressed in jeans, black sweater, black leather jacket, running shoes and her hair bunched up under her father’s old Detroit Pistons cap, the one memento she refused to leave behind.

They packed the bags into the Mercedes and drove off down a series of narrow country roads. This time the radio was not playing, Old Wang was driving a lot slower and Young Wang was constantly looking out the window, straining his eyes against the blackness for any sign of other people or vehicles. After about 30 minutes, they slowed down to a crawl, and Old Wang dimmed the lights and coasted to a halt behind another vehicle parked by the side of the road.

“This as far as you go with us,” Young Wang said. “Our brothers will take you on from here.”

The two Wangs got out of the car. The younger went up and greeted the men beside the other vehicle, an old military jeep, while the elder went around the back to get the bags out of the trunk.

“The only access to the beach is by dirt road, so you will have to go by jeep from here on,” Young Wang said as the women were introduced to their brothers. “It may be a bit bumpy, but it is only a short ride.”

“The beach,” Hong said. “You mean we are going by boat?”

The men looked at each other. “Certainly,” Young Wang said, “How else did you think we were going to get you across.”

“I don’t know, I guess I just didn’t think about it too much.”

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"I guess not. But don't worry about a thing, these guys know the waters around here like their own backyard. You will be in good hands."

They said their goodbyes to the two Wangs and thanked them for their help. Hong, who had grown quite fond of their protectors over the last few weeks, gave them both a gentle kiss on the cheek. Chen was more reserved but just as appreciative of their help over the last month.

Just as Young Wang had warned, it was a very bumpy and uncomfortable ride crammed into the back of the jeep, a marked contrast to the smooth, effortless ride of the Mercedes. There were potholes every few metres that caused the jeep to bounce around, throwing them and the luggage from one side of the vehicle to the other.

They eventually came to a halt by a rocky beach. It was the night of the new moon: pitch black. They could hardly see their hands in front of their faces, and they had to be guided slowly across the beach until they reached a small group of men standing around an inflatable dinghy not far from the shore. They were told to wait.

The men were all dressed from head to foot in black clothing and wore balaclavas over their heads. As her eyes grew accustomed to the dark, Chen noticed at least two of the men were carrying semi-automatic rifles, while others had handguns attached to their belts. She told herself that the weapons were for their protection, but she was terrified nonetheless. Even during the Cultural Revolution, she had never been around so many guns and she didn't like it one little bit. She reached over and grabbed her daughter's hand for comfort. Hong's hand was trembling even more than her own.

They had been waiting for about half an hour when one of the men suddenly pointed out to sea and trained his binoculars on a faint light flashing just below the horizon.

"Get ready," one of the men whispered as the others quickly pushed the dinghy down to the water's edge. Their luggage was placed in the dinghy and they were helped aboard. One of the men sat in front with his weapon at the ready, while another sat in the rear guiding the small motor that slowly, quietly propelled the dinghy out into the bay towards the light.

Before long they came up alongside a monstrous black power boat. A rope was thrown up to the boat to secure the dinghy and a short rope ladder was let down. Chen was frozen with fear. Hong knew it was time for her to take charge.

"Look, Mom, I'll show you how easy it is," she said, taking one of the men's hands and swiftly climbing on board the powerboat in two graceful strides. "See, no problem at all. These guys will hold you steady all the way and as soon as you reach the top of the ladder I'll grab your hand, okay?"

Chen inched her way to the ladder, and, with the two men behind her, gradually pulled herself up. "Look at me, look at me," Hong was saying as Chen reached the top of the ladder. She reached over and held her mother's hand securely as she gingerly climbed over the guardrail and collapsed from nervous exhaustion on the floor of the boat.

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After their bags were thrown on board and the dinghy released from its moorings, they were told to crouch down in the cargo area of the boat and pull a thick sheet of plastic over their bodies for protection against the spray.

After the three armed men on board were satisfied that they were secured in place, a tremendous roar shook the night as four outboard engines screamed into life. The front of the boat lifted almost vertically upwards and they were pushed violently back against the wall of the cargo area. The noise was deafening—not only the engines but also the wind whistling past and the sickening thumps as the boat crashed into the waves on the open sea.

They covered their ears and tried to sink even further down on to the cargo floor. The three men were sitting up in the front section of the boat, separated by a thick metal plate that looked as though it could stop a rocket if it was fired at them. After what seemed like an eternity, the engines were cut and they drifted slowly in the darkness for about twenty minutes before they heard another dinghy approaching. It was still very dark but they could just about make out some dim lights in the distance.

“Is that Hong Kong?” Chen asked the man who was signalling the dinghy.

“Yes, it is. The New Territories.”

This time, when the dinghy came up alongside them, Chen was so anxious to get off the powerboat and head toward dry land that she went down the ladder first. There were two men on the dinghy, an elderly fisherman and his son. They said very little on the short ride to the shore, taking it very slowly, all the time looking out for other vessels in the area until they reached a small wooden dock with a couple of other boats tied up beside it. The fisherman’s son leapt onto a rusty metal ladder and quickly tied the boat up before helping them on to the dock and hauling their bags out of the boat.

“There is a car waiting for you at the end of the dock. Please follow me,” he said in a thick Cantonese accent.

They picked up their bags and edged down the narrow walkway towards a battered old Toyota by the dock.

“This is my brother,” the fisherman’s son said, introducing them to the driver of the car. “He will take you to our village where you will be safe.”



**Friday, September 17, 1993 – Hong Kong**

As they drove up a narrow winding road to the village, Chen could just make out the first rays of the morning sun above the horizon, casting a faint orange glow over the sea behind them. She looked to see if the powerboat was still out there, but there was no sign of it. It was as if it had just vanished into the night. The village was still asleep as they drove down the main street and turned into a side road and up a slight incline to an old walled compound.

“This is the headman’s compound,” the driver said, as they pulled into the courtyard. “You will be staying in the guest quarters over there on the left.”

The guest quarters were in a small stone-built bungalow separate from the main building. There was another bungalow off to the right. The only light came from a room in the guest quarters, otherwise the compound appeared deserted. Chen was cold, tired and hungry, and her bones were aching. It took a tremendous effort for her just to climb out of the car and walk the few paces over to the bungalow. She just wanted to find a bed and sleep for the rest of the day, but that would have to wait.

“Welcome to Hong Kong. I hope you had a pleasant journey.” Mr. Yue was standing in the hallway of the bungalow with his arms open in a gesture of welcome. He was dressed in a dark grey pinstriped business suit and looked as though he had already been up for a couple of hours.

“What a surprise,” Chen said, “I did not expect to find you here.”

“Well, it is my responsibility to ensure that you both arrive safe and sound, and I take that responsibility very seriously,” he said.

“I’m glad to hear it. I take it that means our money passed your inspection test.”

“With flying colours, no problem at all,” he said, guiding them into a small, sparsely furnished living room. “I apologize for the long delay in getting you here. The main problem was the weather. As you probably noticed, it is typhoon season now. So, we had to wait for all conditions to be right. Plus, we had a slight mishap with the boat on another mission. Did the two Wangs look after you satisfactorily?”

“Yes, they were very helpful, but what do you mean by mishap?” Chen asked.

“Nothing to be concerned about. The main thing is that you are here now. You should try and get some rest, but, before that, we still have some business to conclude. I will need your passports so that we can get the necessary visas, entry and exit stamps and collect your airline tickets. It should not take more than a few days. We have a very good forger who does all our work. He is quick and very professional. When everything is ready, I’ll return here for the balance of the fee we agreed on, and you will be on your way. I promise there will be no extended delay this time. Typhoons permitting. Any questions?”

“What do we do while we are waiting here?” Chen asked. “Are we allowed to go outside this time?”

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"You can go outside, but do not leave the village. The villagers know that you are the guests of the headman, so you will be safe here, but I cannot vouch for your safety outside the village."

"But this is Hong Kong, not the mainland," Hong protested. "What have we got to be worried about? Surely it wouldn't be a problem to go shopping in Central or Causeway Bay."

"That is the worst place you could go. There are mainland agents all over Hong Kong Island. The New Territories is safer, but still not immune from spies. Just stay here, and I promise you will not have to wait for more than a few days."

"Can we at least make some telephone calls to let my family know we are safe?" Chen asked.

"Only essential calls. There is a payphone in the village you can use. We don't want any calls traced to this number. There is also a bank where you can change money if you need Hong Kong dollars. You will have the compound to yourselves. The headman lives in Kowloon Tong and hardly ever uses this place. So, make yourselves at home."

Chen was too tired to argue. Like Hong, she had been looking forward to visiting Hong Kong Island, but if it was true that mainland spies were everywhere, then she did not want to risk it. A few days in this village would be tolerable.

Her first priority was to call Xiaojun and the number Ailing had given her to assure everyone they were safe. Xiaojun was immensely relieved. Chen had not given him an exact date when they would get to Hong Kong, but it clearly took a lot longer than he was expecting. She assured him everything was fine now and that she would call again when the flight was confirmed.

After hanging up, Chen took a quick look around the village. It was basically just a main street lined with a few shops, a restaurant, a small bank and a couple of doctors' offices and herbal pharmacies. Most of the houses were located on small side-roads leading off up the hill. There could not have been more than about one hundred households in the entire village. For the most part, the villagers left them alone but were perfectly friendly and polite when approached and were always around when they were needed. On the third day, Chen was buying fruit and vegetables from one of the stores on the main road when the stall holder frantically gestured her to go inside.

"Quickly, Madam, it's dangerous," she said, grabbing her arm and pulling her behind a concrete pillar. Just then, a police car rolled slowly past, paused briefly by the bank and went on its way.

"They are looking for illegals," the woman said. "Cops from Shatin; you can't trust them."

On a second occasion, they were taking an afternoon walk in the old bamboo grove above the village when one of the clansmen appeared from nowhere and warned them not to follow the path any further because it led to a rival village on the other side of the hill.

"Bad blood," he said, pointing with his walking stick down the path.

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They turned and walked quickly back to the headman's house. It wasn't just the clansman's warning that made them nervous. There was something about that bamboo forest. It was very dark, and the way the wind rustled through the bamboo was distinctly eerie. Hong said it reminded her of scenes from those Hong Kong ghost and demon movies. In fact, she thought, many of those movies might have been shot in that very forest.

Mr. Yue was waiting for them when they returned.

"Everything is ready. You will be leaving on the overnight flight to Sydney."

Chen and Hong looked at each other. Neither could really believe that they were actually leaving. They were filled with a sense of relief, tempered with trepidation and doubts that they really were doing the right thing. But Mr. Yue did not let them ponder the situation for too long.

"There is just the matter of the remaining US\$13,300 to conclude, and I will give you your instructions concerning the flight."

"The money is here," Hong said flicking open her brief case. "We agreed that we could use up our Chinese currency in the final payment, correct?" Mr. Yue nodded. "We have exactly 11,643 yuan left, which luckily enough comes to about US \$1,300, wouldn't you agree?"

"Slightly less than that, according to my calculations, but not significantly under, so that would be an acceptable exchange."

"Good, Hong said, carefully counting out the dollar bills. "Here is the 11,643 yuan and here is the balance of US \$12,000. Do you wish to count it?"

Again, Mr. Yue just flicked through the thick bundles of notes before dropping them into his attaché case.

"Everything appears to be in order. Here are your passports. You will see that we have placed a Chinese exit stamp, a Hong Kong one-week transit visa and entry stamp on these pages. You will also see your departure card stapled on the opposite page. The departure card has already been filled in, and all you have to do is sign it on the bottom. Read the exit and entry stamps carefully. There is a four-digit code on the entry stamp, this indicates that you entered Hong Kong on foot from Luo Hu on the afternoon of Saturday September 18. If the immigration people at the airport ask you how and when you came into the territory, remember to tell them that exact time, date and place."

"Why should they ask us about that?" Chen asked.

"Sometimes they like to hassle mainlanders," Mr. Yue said with a shrug. "It's no big deal, just remember to stick to your story. Now these are your tickets. Your plane leaves at 9:45 p.m., check-in is about 8:15 p.m. at the Qantas desk. That gives you, let me see, just over two hours to pack and get everything ready before someone comes to take you to the airport. I hope you enjoy your flight." He closed his attaché case and headed to the door.

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“Mr. Yue,” Hong said. “Just one more thing before you go. Could you remind me of the cost of the departure tax at Kai Tak?”

“Oh yes, its HK\$150 per person. Do you have enough?” Hong looked through her purse and shook her head. “Okay, here’s HK\$500,” he said, producing a single bill from his wallet. “Get some duty-free goods while you’re waiting to board.”

Two hours was more than enough time to pack all of her stuff up, so Chen walked down to the payphone in the village and placed a collect call to Xiaojun. It was Susan who accepted the call.

“That’s wonderful news, Madam Chen,” she said. “I’ll tell Xiaojun as soon as he gets back. He will be delighted. We will both be at the airport to pick you up when you arrive in Sydney tomorrow morning. I can’t wait to see you again; it has been far too long.”

**Thursday, September 23, 1993 – Decision Day**

It was dusk when they began their descent into Kowloon. The lights of Hong Kong Island were clearly visible, glimmering in the distance. It was a magical sight: the mammoth skyscrapers illuminated against the backdrop of that black, cloud-covered mountain. Unfortunately, after just a few minutes, the scenic view vanished and they were travelling through the crowded neon-lit streets of Kowloon City towards the airport. The battered old Toyota turned a corner and they found themselves at the head of the runway just as an enormous jumbo jet roared overhead. The plane was so low, they could almost reach out the window and touch it as it came in for its landing.

Kai Tak was a sea of activity. Airplanes were taking off and landing just about every minute, and the departure hall on the upper level was packed with travellers and their luggage carts. But unlike Hongqiao Airport in Shanghai, there appeared to be some order to this chaos. There were information boards and signs everywhere, the public-address system blared out constant announcements in English, Cantonese, Mandarin and Japanese, and, as a result, everybody seemed to know where they were going.

The fisherman's son took their passports and tickets and checked in their suitcases at the Qantas desk and returned with two boarding passes.

"I managed to get you seats by one of the emergency exits so you can stretch out during the flight. Make sure you don't lose these baggage numbers on the back of the ticket. You will need them to claim your suitcases again in Sydney. Security check and passport control is over there," he said, pointing to gap in the far wall where a group of people were saying their last farewells.

"The departure tax receipt is on the boarding pass, just hand it to the officers waiting inside, then join one of the lines waiting to go through the security check." He handed over their passports, tickets and boarding passes and led them over to the far wall. "Okay, this is the point of no return. Good luck and have pleasant trip."

He turned and soon vanished into the crowd. Chen and Hong took a deep breath and headed into the restricted area. The security check went off without a hitch, but when they got to passport control, there were dozens of lines of people waiting in front of the inspection booths and none of the lines appeared to be moving very fast. They walked down until they found what appeared to be a slightly shorter queue, set their hand baggage down and waited.

It was already nine o'clock by the time they reached the head of the queue, and by then Chen was convinced the two lines on either side of them had been moving a lot faster. They walked up to the window together and were abruptly told by the young clerk to hand in their documents one person at a time. Hong shuffled back to the yellow line, cursing under her breath. The clerk took Chen's documents and punched up something on the computer. He stared at the screen for a long time, looked at her passport, then back at the screen.

"At which port did you enter Hong Kong?" he said, raising his eyes for the first time to look at her directly.

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“My daughter and I came through Luo Hu in Shenzhen,” she replied, remembering Mr. Yue’s instructions.

He flicked through Chen’s passport again, frowned and then picked up the phone in his booth and called someone over.

“Is there a problem?” Chen asked, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible.

“Just wait here for a minute,” he said.

The people in the line behind started to sigh in exasperation and murmur complaints about mainlanders always holding other people up. Hong, who was just as nervous as her mother at this point, spun on her heel and loudly cursed out the Taiwanese couple behind her who had been making the loudest comments. The Taiwanese couple were too stunned to reply. They just backed up a little in case Hong let her fists as well as her tongue fly.

The young clerk was then joined by a female supervisor who bore an uncanny resemblance to the woman who’d attended Chen’s interrogation in Shanghai: same dumpy figure and same mean face. Surely, Chen thought, she couldn’t have a sister in Hong Kong.

“There appears to be discrepancy in our records. Could you come with me and we will try to sort it out?” she said.

“But our plane leaves in 40 minutes. Can’t we sort it out here?” Chen said, thinking that she would kill Mr. Yue if she ever got her hands on him again.

“If everything is in order, this should not take long.”

They followed the woman to a small office off to the side of the passport control booths and sat down.

“Here is the problem, Mrs. Chen,” she said in stilted Mandarin. “We do not have a record in our computer of you ever entering the territory. Could you explain why that may be?”

“I have no idea, but you can see from the stamp that we did indeed enter Hong Kong on Saturday.”

“Yes, I can see that. And you say you came in from Shenzhen. Was that on foot, on the train or by car?”

“On foot.”

“If that was the case there would certainly be an entry in the computer. We are very careful to log all entries because there are so many illegal immigrants trying to get into the territory from Shenzhen.”

“Are you suggesting that we are illegal immigrants?” Chen said indignantly. “If that were the case, why would we be leaving just a few days after we arrived? That is just ridiculous.”

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"Maybe, but I can assure you I have seen stranger things in my career. Do you have any other form of identification?" Chen looked into her purse and handed the woman her identity card. She compared it with the passport and handed it back. "Thank you. Did this person with you come into Hong Kong at the same time as you?"

"Yes, this my daughter."

"Okay, Miss, can I see your documentation? Maybe there is a record under your name."

Hong handed over her passport and the dumpy woman looked through the computer on the desk in front of her.

"You are both from Shanghai, I see. Why did you enter via Shenzhen when there are flights every day direct to Hong Kong?"

Chen was starting to panic; they had not discussed any cover stories for this kind of eventuality but, once again, Hong stepped in.

"It's cheaper to fly to Guangzhou and get the train to Shenzhen than fly direct to Hong Kong, everybody knows that."

"I see, and how long did you spend in Guangzhou before going to Shenzhen?"

"We spent a couple of days with relatives then got the train about midday on Saturday and walked straight from Shenzhen Station to the border."

"Really? I'm afraid I have no record of you entering Hong Kong, either, Miss Li. You are going to have to remain here until we sort this problem out."

"But we will miss our plane if we don't leave now," Hong said.

"That is not my problem. You will just have to catch a later flight."

"Look," Hong said. "It is probably just a problem with your computer, so why don't you phone the immigration station in Shenzhen and ask them if their computer was working properly on that day."

"We would have been informed already if there was a malfunction or breakdown on that day."

"Please, you have a telephone right there. Why don't you just call and check for yourself. It will only take a minute."

"I've told you, there is no point," the dumpy woman said, looking over her shoulder to make sure the door was closed. "As far as I can see, there is only one way you can get on that flight in time. Coming from the mainland, you should know what I am talking about."

Hong knew exactly what she meant.

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“Leave this to me, Mom,” she said. “If I understand you correctly, I think your Independent Commission Against Corruption here would be very interested in what you are suggesting.”

This was not the response the dumpy woman had been expecting. She glared at Hong and leaned forward.

“Listen to me very carefully, young lady. You are not in a position to bargain here, okay! If we send you back to the mainland, and believe me we will, there will be no ICAC for you to report to, just the public security bureau, and I don’t suppose you want to do that, do you?”

“Alright, you win,” Hong said. “What kind of, shall we say, administrative fee will it take to get that exit stamp?”

“That is entirely up to you, but for two people it will not be cheap.”

Hong glared back at the woman as she placed her briefcase on the desk, clicked it open so that the lid hid its contents from view and produced four one-hundred US dollar bills from one of the bundles.

“Will that be satisfactory?”

The woman fanned out the dollar bills and held them up to the light before putting them inside her jacket pocket.

“For one person, but not for two.”

“This is daylight robbery. I’ll make you regret this one day,” Hong hissed.

“The clock is ticking. You have less than ten minutes before the doors close,” she said, completely unfazed by Hong’s threats. Hong picked out another four bills and slammed them down on the table. The dumpy woman pocketed them straight away, then reached over and stamped their passports.

“Go out that door and into the departure terminal.”

They grabbed their documents and hand baggage and hurried out, only to be confronted with massive sea of travellers. The boarding gate was way over on the other side of the terminal. “Fuck!” Hong screamed, pushing her way through the crowd. “I’ll run ahead and hold the plane. It’s gate number eight, off to the right.”

Chen looked at her watch, it was 9.35pm. She ran as fast as she could to the departure gate and let out a huge sigh of relief when she saw Hong waiting there with a broad smile on her face.

“We just made it. Come on, Mom, it’s time to go to Australia.”

They were so exhausted by the tension and relief of getting through passport control that they both fell asleep soon after take-off.



**Friday, September 24, 1993 – Celebration Day**

Sydney's red-tiled roofs were glowing in the early morning light as the airplane descended over the southern suburbs, swung out over the ocean and back across Botany Bay towards the runway. Chen sat with her face pressed against the window, her daughter looking over her shoulder, trying to absorb as much of that breathtaking scene as possible. Chen, who had lived in relative comfort in Shanghai, found it amazing that just about every house they passed over had its own private swimming pool in the backyard. This was a luxury she could never have imagined.

After touching down and walking into the terminal building, they were confronted by what seemed to be a wild party. There were balloons and streamers everywhere and the public-address system was playing Waltzing Matilda. People were screaming and hollering with joy, hugging each other and punching the air. A tanned and muscular man with long blond hair rushed up and picked up Hong, twirled her around and kissed her on the cheek and ran off toward the arrivals area. They were both stunned and stood frozen to the spot wondering what on earth they had stumbled upon. Was this the way Australians greeted all visitors to their country?

Eventually it dawned on them that, just as Hong had predicted, it was Sydney, and not Beijing, that had been awarded the Olympic Games for the year 2000. The announcement had been made by the president of the International Olympic Committee in Monte Carlo just a few hours earlier.

Chen's immediate reaction was one of disappointment that China had not been chosen, but that soon dissipated with the realization that she had finally left China behind and that from now on Australia would be her new home.

As they lined up for passport control again her nerves were on edge and her hands were sweating, but within a matter of seconds the clerk had stamped her passport and wished her a pleasant stay. At long last, everything was working out. Their suitcases were already on the baggage carousel, the customs officials just waved them through and there was Xiaojun running through the crowd in the arrivals hall to greet them.

## EPILOGUE

### **Sunday, October 15, 2017. A Bolt from the Blue**

*Hi. You probably don't remember me, but we met briefly at a reception in the Shanghai Hilton in 1992, after you published that very flattering profile of my father, Li Heng, in the California Chronicle. As you may have heard, my father died soon afterwards and my mother and I were forced into exile. We have never told our story to anyone, but my mother is quite frail now and wants the truth to be told before it is too late. We would like you to tell it. Of course, you will be well compensated for your time and effort.*

Li Hong's message was difficult to ignore, so in December 2017, I flew to Sydney, checked into the downtown hotel she'd specified and waited for her call. She turned up the next morning driving a bright blue Porsche Cayenne, wearing a vivid floral-print summer dress and Chanel sunglasses. She was almost the same age as her mother had been when I'd last met them, and once she removed her sunglasses, the resemblance was striking.

We went to the hotel coffee shop and sat a quiet table by the window overlooking the harbour. Speaking in perfect Australian-accented English, Li Hong gave me a brief outline of the events following her father's death, her brother's arrest, and how she and her mother had escaped to Sydney. Her mother, she said, would provide all the details I needed. During their month-long stay at the safe house in Huizhou, she explained, they had made meticulous notes of everything that had transpired, and devised several theories about who was involved and why. "My mother has an incredible memory," she said, "even now she can recall events from the past as clear as yesterday. But she is concerned that sooner or later her memory will fail and she wants to make sure you hear what she has to say. One condition, though. You can't publish anything until she passes away."

"No problem. Aren't you concerned about what will happen when the does story get out," I asked.

"Nah, it was so long ago, I doubt anyone really cares anymore."

"So, I can use your real names?"

"You can use our old names. We all have new identities now."

"OK. But I have to ask. Why does your mother want me to write the story? I'm hardly a famous author. Why not just publish it yourself?"

"Simple! You were the one to write the first half of Dad's story in the newspaper. So, Mum wants you to finish the second half. It will be his legacy, and our family's legacy."

We drove through the city centre for a about 15 minutes before reaching the genteel suburb of Glebe, where Chan Lan lived in a modest terraced house with a green corrugated

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iron roof, shaded by trees. Li Hong opened the front door without knocking and, reverting to Chinese, announced to her mother that “the journalist is here.”

Chen Lan was sitting back in an armchair that seemed far too big for her. Chen’s hair was completely white and thinning and she wore thick glasses. On the coffee table in front of her were half a dozen notebooks and folders crammed with documents and photographs. She stared at me for a long time, making sure I was indeed the person she had met 25 years earlier, and gestured for me to sit down.

She told me that everything I needed to know was in her diaries but that, of course, she would be willing to answer any questions I had. The only thing was, I could not take the documents away or make copies. I would have to work in her living room, reading through her notes, translating into English as I went, and seeking clarification when needed. For the next month or so, I commuted every day from my hotel to Chen Lan’s house and worked there until late afternoon when she got too tired to talk. At midday, her helper came in to cook us lunch and do the household chores, and at the weekends Li Hong came by with her two teenage children, who were intrigued to meet their grandmother’s biographer. As was Li Xiaojun and his partner, who took me out to dinner just to make sure I was completely trustworthy.

I returned to Sydney on three more occasions over the next few years to double check the source material. On my final visit, Chen Lan was in a hospice dying of cancer. The only possessions in her room were family photographs and her diaries that were kept locked in her bedside drawer.

I told her what I had already told Li Hong and Xiaojun, that after talking to some old security service contacts in China and the United States, I had uncovered two additional documents which were directly related to her husband’s case. She listened intently as I read the documents out, she smiled, nodded and said nothing.

Chen Lan died peacefully in her sleep on March 8, 2023, exactly 30 years after the death of her husband. She was 86-years-old.

The two following documents were issued by China’s Ministry of State Security and the American Central Intelligence Agency towards the end of 1993.

**TOP SECRET: For distribution to cadres of Level Three and above.**

**EXPOSURE AND SMASHING OF A COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY CLIQUE SPYING ON AND SELLING STATE SECRETS TO A FOREIGN POWER.**

The Ministry of State Security recently uncovered a very small but highly dangerous clique of counter-revolutionary elements dedicated to subverting the Chinese Communist Party and the government of the People's Republic of China by spying on, stealing and selling state secrets for profit to agents of a foreign power known to be hostile to the People's Republic.

Before it was smashed, this clique set about in a systematic and deliberate manner to spy out state secrets relating to the development of China's automotive industry, trade policies, economic and financial reform policies and then sell those state secrets to agents of the government of the United States of America and privately-owned companies acting at the behest of that government. These heinous and traitorous acts were designed to provide the American government with an unfair and illegal advantage in its campaign to exploit the economy of China for its own gain and undermine the authority of the legitimate government of the People's Republic.

We believe the actions of this counter-revolutionary clique have already resulted in economic losses to the Chinese economy in excess of one billion yuan and will undoubtedly seriously affect the development of the Chinese economy in the future. We urge that all party members take serious note of this case, as and when it is distributed to the lower levels, learn from it and be on their guard and maintain a heightened level of vigilance to root out any similar cliques and prevent the formation of others.

**Origins and development of the counter-revolutionary clique led by Li Heng**

Li Heng (1936-1993), Male, Han Nationality, Shanghai native, began his spying activities in 1984 when, as a junior member of the Shanghai Automotive Company's joint venture negotiation team, he visited the U.S. to conduct negotiations with representatives of the United Automotive Corporation in the city of Detroit. During that trip, Li Heng was seduced by representatives of the United Auto Corp with the promise of monetary and other rewards into providing them with sensitive information concerning the Chinese side and aiding them in their desire to exploit the economic potential of the Chinese automotive industry. It is a matter of record that Li Heng, on numerous occasions, argued with other negotiation team members, trying to persuade them to grant the American side more favourable terms in the final joint venture contract. This clearly showed his bias and favouritism towards the Americans at an early stage.

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Between 1985 and 1990, in his capacity as deputy director of the Shanghai Foreign Investment Commission, Li Heng continued to provide agents of the American United Auto Corp in Shanghai with classified documents relating to the Chinese side's plans for the development of the joint venture and wider information on the national automotive industry. These agents later introduced Li Heng to agents of other American companies seeking to exploit the economic potential of Shanghai and China as a whole. The record clearly shows that Li Heng entertained these agents and provided them with classified information relating to a wide range of industries and internal regulations on trade, taxation, investment and financial policies in return for substantial monetary rewards. It is estimated that by 1990, Li Heng had amassed a personal fortune of 350,000 yuan, most of which was hidden in foreign bank accounts.

In 1990, Li Heng's spying activities expanded to dangerous levels when he was erroneously appointed general manager of the Shanghai United Automotive Company. This appointment gave Li Heng much greater access to classified information on not only economic issues but domestic and foreign policy issues. It was at this point that Li Heng was formally recruited as a spy for the American government to provide it with as much information as possible concerning China's economic development.

To assist in this traitorous scheme, Li Heng recruited others to his clique.

Li Dajun (1964- ), Male, Han Nationality, Shanghai native, the eldest son of Li Heng, was recruited into the clique following the completion of his studies at an American university in 1989. Rather than return to his homeland like many patriotic students at that time, Li Dajun stayed in America to set up an elaborate network of small companies which could be used as conduit for Li Heng to transmit the state secrets he had stolen to the agents of the American government he was working for. The same network was used to transfer payments from those agents back to Li Heng for concealment in his numerous foreign bank accounts.

Gu Lianhua (1963- ), Female, Han Nationality, Beijing native, was recruited into the clique in 1986 while acting as Li Heng's personal secretary in the Foreign Investment Commission. In 1990, she was transferred by Li Heng to act as his personal secretary at the Shanghai United Automotive Co. Her role in the clique was to act as a liaison between Li Heng and the American agents and handle many of the financial transactions involved. In addition, Gu Lianhua used her feminine wiles to lure officials into revealing classified information and then passing that information on to the American agents in return for her own financial rewards. Gu Lianhua had a particularly heinous role in this scandal, becoming a traitor in an already traitorous clique, spying on her co-conspirators on behalf of her American masters and ultimately attempting to break up the clique when discovery by the security organs became inevitable.

Chen Lan (1937- ), Female, Han Nationality, Shanghai native, the wife of Li Heng, did not play an active role in the clique until January 1993 when a full-scale investigation was launched by the Ministry of State Security into the counter-revolutionary crimes

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of Li Heng. When the clique discovered it was under investigation, Chen Lan, with the assistance of her daughter Li Hong, son-in-law Gao Haiqing, and a Chinese American relative, Luo Ailing, launched a vicious propaganda campaign to disrupt the investigation and prevent the authorities from uncovering evidence of the clique's crimes.

Ma Guoqiang (1936- ), Male, Hui Nationality, Lanzhou native, former Deputy Prosecutor General of Shanghai. Ma was a classmate of Li Heng's at Jiaotong University. Ma was aware of Li Heng's traitorous activities for many years but accepted bribes from Li Heng to keep quiet. At the end of February 1993, however, as the noose tightened around the neck of Li Heng and his clique, Ma Guoqiang finally convinced Li Heng that it was in his interest to confess his crimes and those of his accomplices and to reveal the names of the American agents operating in China and America. Following the death of Li Heng, however, Ma refused to cooperate with the authorities; he remained loyal to the clique and continued to assist Chen Lan in her propaganda campaign and to aid her in her escape.

In early March 1993, the American masters of the clique got wind of Li Heng's plan to confess and ordered Gu Lianhua to silence him. On March 8, 1993, Gu Lianhua entered Li Heng's office on the fifth floor of the Shanghai United Auto Co Executive Building and forced him to jump to his death from an open window. Gu Lianhua then fled the country with the help of her American masters and is believed to be living under an assumed identity in America. Substantial amounts of incriminating evidence were recovered from her apartment after she left the country. The former Deputy General Manager of Shanghai United Auto, Peter Shelomov, suddenly left China and returned to the United States soon after Gu's disappearance. We believe these two events are directly linked, and that Shelomov helped to facilitate Gu's murderous actions.

On March 25, after receiving direct instructions from the American Central Intelligence Agency, Li Dajun returned to Shanghai in an attempt to recover as much money as possible from Li Heng's accounts while Chen Lan and her band of propagandists attempted to obstruct the investigation through their web of lies and disinformation. After recovering the money, Li Dajun attempted to flee the country and return to America, but the quick work of security agents in Shanghai prevented this plot and he was arrested at Hongqiao International Airport on April 10, 1993. After a full and intensive investigation, Li Dajun was tried according to law and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment for spying and selling state secrets to a foreign power and a wide-range of economic crimes.

Gao Haiqing was arrested in Beijing on August 15, 1993, tried according to the law and sentenced to five years' imprisonment for counter-revolutionary conspiracy and propaganda.

Chen Lan and Li Hong fled the country before they could be arrested and are believed to be living in Taiwan Province under the protection of the illegal Nationalist regime and its puppet master, the American Government.

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Ma Guoqiang is being investigated by the Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and will be appropriately punished when the full extent of his crimes is revealed.

Luo Ailing is a well-known American citizen living in San Francisco and as such is beyond our jurisdiction. However, we believe her role in this counter-revolutionary clique was limited and perhaps unwitting and as such we recommend no action be taken if she returns to China unless and until further evidence is uncovered.

It is unfortunate that three of the chief conspirators managed to evade arrest by fleeing the country. However, we can take heart from the fact that this evil and highly dangerous counter-revolutionary clique has been completely and utterly smashed as a result of the tireless efforts of the State Security Ministry in the search for truth and justice.

Although this particular counter-revolutionary clique has been destroyed, it is important to note that American agents and those of other hostile foreign powers are constantly recruiting others to spy on and steal our state secrets. Urgent action must be taken to prevent such a clique from being formed again.

We recommend that all business executives undergo even more stringent vetting procedures before being allowed to go abroad so that no one like Li Heng, who outwardly appeared to be a model cadre, can ever slip through the net again. We also recommend that all business executives, party members and government officials be required to truthfully report all meetings with foreign business executives, diplomats and other government representatives as foreign experts, journalists and students who are residents in China. We also recommend that the State Security Ministry be given greater powers and greater resources to effectively carry out the important task of guarding state secrets from counter-revolutionary elements and their foreign masters.

**Ministry of State Security**

**November 1, 1993.**

**TOP SECRET: CHINATECH**

Report on the illegal transfer of restricted missile guidance technology to the People's Republic of China; implications for national security and recommendations on response options.

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

On November 11, 1992, the government of the People's Republic of China, through its state controlled news agency, the New China News Agency (NCNA), announced that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had, quote: "developed a new missile guidance system superior to the 'smart bomb technology' used by the United States during the Gulf War conflict [of 1991]." No details of this so-called smart bomb technology were revealed in this three-paragraph news item.

Immediate notification of this news item was made to the State Department by our embassy in Beijing. Subsequent notification was made to the Defense Department and the CIA. Acting on instructions from Washington, D.C., military attaches and CIA personnel in our embassy made further investigations into the nature of the technology described in the NCNA article.

On January 2, 1993, our embassy in Beijing issued a classified report (codeword: SmartPRC), which indicated the technology previously mentioned was remarkably similar to the TS14, a prototype automated guidance system developed by the United Dynamics Corporation (UDC) of Palo Alto, CA in June 1992 and currently undergoing the final stages of testing by the US Air Force. This determination was based on formal contacts by our military attaches with their counterparts in the PLA, which yielded general information as to the qualities and abilities of this technology in a combat situation, and documentation acquired by our agents on the ground which indicated the technology utilized computer systems far in advance of anything the PRC has developed to date and were in fact only available in the TS14.

SmartPRC also indicated that this technology had not, as the NCNA article alleged, already been developed but was still in the stage of preliminary testing and that the PLA had encountered numerous difficulties in applying it and utilizing it in air-to-surface missiles. This suggests that the technology had only recently been acquired and was almost certainly acquired from an outside source, since there is nothing in our intelligence reports to indicate the PLA had been researching or developing anything remotely similar to the technology described above. There is no evidence of evolutionary development. On the contrary, all indications are that this represents a radical departure from the Chinese military's previous R&D.

One month prior to the issuance of the NCNA article, the Federal Bureau of Investigation had been called in to investigate allegations by the board of UDC that a former board member and vice president in charge of R&D, Robert B. Simpson,



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who—along with several associates—left the corporation in July 1992 to join the rival German-owned Seidlitz Enterprises, had systematically plundered industrial secrets prior their departure. Following its investigation of these allegations, the FBI determined that while there was not sufficient evidence to indict Mr. Simpson or any of his associates, there was clear evidence that many sensitive UDC documents had either been removed or tampered with. A full list of these documents is contained in the FBI report of December 4, 1992 and includes three files relating to the computer system used in the TS14.

Armed with the information outlined above, on January 15, 1993, the CIA and the FBI launched a joint investigation into the possible involvement of PRC agents or personnel in the theft of the three files concerned with the TS14 computer system and any other classified documents from UDC. The investigation revealed that two Chinese nationals, a father and son, not only had a direct connection to UDC but had the means, motive and opportunity to acquire industrial secrets from UDC on behalf of both the PRC government and military.

The father, Li Heng, born 1936, was, until March 8, 1993, the General Manager of the Shanghai United Automotive Corporation, a joint venture established in 1986 between the Shanghai Automotive Corp and the United Auto Corp (UAC) of Detroit, MI, the parent company of UDC. Mr. Li's involvement with UAC dates back to the early 1980s when, as a representative of the Shanghai municipal government, he was instrumental in negotiating the above-mentioned joint venture deal. Mr. Li visited UAC's head office in Detroit on eight separate occasions, during which time he appeared overtly friendly and conciliatory towards his US partners, in marked contrast to his fellow representatives. Mr. Li went so far as to ingratiate himself into American life and culture, feigning an interest in blues and jazz music and claiming to have become an avid fan of the Detroit Pistons basketball team. Through his amiable demeanor, Mr. Li gained the confidence of many UAC executives and on three separate occasions was taken as a guest of UAC to the main offices and laboratories of UDC in Palo Alto. During these three visits Mr. Li went out of his way to "make friends," as the Chinese say, with UDC personnel.

During two of these visits to UDC in 1991 and 1992, Mr. Li brought his eldest son, Li Dajun, aged 29, along to meet his new American friends. Mr. Li junior was then living in Los Angeles posing as a consultant for US companies interested in doing business in the PRC. Mr. Li junior, who completed an MBA at the University of Southern California in 1989, specialized in arranging technology transfer deals, primarily for California-based electronics companies, hoping to gain a foothold in the booming Chinese electronics market. By 1992, Mr. Li junior had established a wide range of contacts in the Californian business community and at the same time devised a web of companies in Hong Kong, Singapore and the PRC by which goods, information and money could be transferred from his base in Los Angeles to his father back in Shanghai.

It is critical to note that while Mr. Li senior and Mr. Li junior claimed to be admirers of America and American values (Li junior even applied for and was granted a green card in 1989), they were, in reality, staunch communists, completely loyal to the

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Chinese Communist Party and the government of the PRC. Mr. Li senior joined the Communist Youth League in 1950, just after the communists took over Shanghai, and, after graduating from Shanghai's Jiaotong University in 1958, was appointed to several important positions in the Shanghai government.

It should be noted that even during the Cultural Revolution when all but the most loyal communists were purged, Mr. Li not only retained his position but was actually promoted. We believe it was because of the absolute loyalty demonstrated by Mr. Li senior that he was chosen in the early 1980s to represent the Shanghai government in the joint venture negotiations with UAC and was subsequently appointed as deputy head of the city's foreign investment commission, a high-profile body charged with attracting foreign companies to set up ventures in Shanghai. Mr. Li demonstrated a consistent pattern: outwardly appearing conciliatory to foreign businesses while inwardly maintaining strict party discipline. There is strong evidence that while Mr. Li junior was not appointed to any formal government position, he shared his father's strong sense of loyalty and duty to his motherland.

This behavior pattern (exhibited by the both men) is the classic modus operandi of the PRC's State Security Ministry's (SSM) agents. Nearly all the SSM agents uncovered by the agency in the last decade have either had legitimate business interests in the US, all spoke good English and affected an interest in American life and culture. Li Heng and Li Dajun fit the mold exactly.

On March 6, 1993, Mr. Li junior was taken in for questioning by FBI agents in Los Angeles County in connection with evidence of illegal business dealings, tax fraud and mail fraud. The interrogation, which lasted 15 days, was attended by two CIA agents who questioned the suspect on his father's activities in the US.

We later discovered that just two days after Mr. Li junior was taken in for questioning, his father disappeared from view in an elaborately staged suicide at his Shanghai United Auto Corp office. Within hours of his alleged death, a cover story had been put out by the local communist party propaganda apparatus. However, there is no concrete evidence that Mr. Li senior actually died. No one saw the body and, in a well-orchestrated funeral service, a sealed casket was placed in the funeral hall prior to cremation.

We are confident that Mr. Li senior was taken out of public circulation when the SSM discovered his son was undergoing interrogation by the FBI and CIA. This ruse also gave Mr. Li junior an excuse to return home to Shanghai as soon as he was released from custody, which was exactly what happened. The FBI agents attempted to persuade Mr. Li Junior to return to the US as soon as possible, promising his legal rights would be protected, and he did in fact send a facsimile notification that he would return in the second week of April, 1993.

Mr. Li junior did not return. Instead, the SSM staged another charade in which Mr. Li junior was arrested in public at Shanghai's international airport and later charged with counter-revolutionary offenses and sentenced to 20 years in jail. Again, there is no evidence that Mr. Li junior was even arrested, let alone charged and sentenced.

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We believe both Mr. Li Senior and his son were simply taken out of action and hidden from view until new identities could be provided for them. This theory is backed up by the fact that sometime in August 1993, Mr. Li senior's wife and daughter also disappeared from view and have not been seen since.

It should also be noted that Mr. Li senior is the cousin of the well-known Chinese American philanthropist Rachel Luo-White, wife of the former Congressman from San Francisco, Mr. Charles White. While there is no direct evidence to implicate either Mr. White or Mrs. Luo-White in the espionage activities of the Mr. Li senior and Mr. Li junior, we recommend that their security status be reviewed and adjusted accordingly.

In parenthesis, another US citizen, the former deputy general manager of Shanghai United Auto, Peter Shelomov, was only tangentially involved in this case, but his behavior subsequent to the staged suicide of Li Heng has raised concerns. Mr. Shelomov was recalled to Detroit in early April, but, within a month, he had relocated again to Saint Petersburg, in the newly created Russian Federation. On arrival, Mr. Shelomov took up a well-paid consultancy position in the Committee for Foreign Investment and External Relations in the Mayor's Office. This body is headed by a former KGB Lieutenant Colonel, who has been identified by our Moscow office as a person of interest. Further, it is understood that Mr. Shelomov is distantly related to this former KGB operative. As such, we will continue to monitor his activities very closely. Please see the relevant file—VP91, for more details.

Returning to the main threat discussed in this document, we are certain that before long either or both Mr. Lis will reappear under new identities and resume their espionage activities in the US and or other western countries. As such, an alert has been issued to all agents specializing in PRC espionage providing photographs and relevant information pertaining to Li Heng and Li Dajun.

The CIA has determined that the theft of documents relating to the TS14 system and other as yet unknown thefts by Li Heng and Li Dajun represent a serious threat to our national security and recommends consideration by the administration of the following courses of action:

1. A strengthening of the CIA's resources, in terms both of manpower and of financing, to concentrate our fight against PRC espionage in this country;
2. Tighter restrictions and supervision by the Department of Justice's Immigration and Naturalization Service on Chinese nationals entering the US either on business or for the purpose of study, and special scrutiny to be given to any Chinese national's application for permanent residency of immigrant status;
3. A greater CIA presence to be stationed in our embassies in Beijing and consulates in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenyang and Chengdu, in order to counteract SSM agents in the PRC;

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4. A warning to be issued by the Department of Commerce to all US firms doing or considering doing business in the PRC to be on the alert and to guard against any contact with Chinese partners which might, in any way, lead to a compromising situation.

**Office of the Director of the CIA**

**November 1, 1993.**