

The Day the Red Guards Came

I slammed the door behind me and ran to hide underneath my bed! Chairman Mao's Red Guards were coming. I knew they were, or otherwise why was everybody else being escorted out of their homes? I heard a loud knock on our door and held my breath. I waited to hear my mother answer the door, but no door was unlocked in that whole minute. Suddenly, 'Bang!' the door was kicked down, and the guards walked in with rifles and sticks. They all looked so young but had eyes as hard as steel! Heart pounding, knees shaking, I ran all the way into my mother's room to find her sobbing silently in her wardrobe.

"Mama, what's happening?" I questioned.

"They have come to take us away!" she answered.

That evening was the worst evening of my life. I got dragged into a truck by what I thought was a Red Guard, as he had a bright red band on his arm. We were taken away to a dirty, poor commune out in the country, all because my father had been a lawyer and said something against Chairman Mao, when he was younger. I knew it wasn't fair and I knew that something bad would happen to my mother and me.

In a small village near where we would be staying, I saw people lying on the streets begging for food and people who had been beaten up and left to die. I was shocked at how many people were homeless and starving. It was devastating. As we entered the farm, I saw a scrawny little girl carrying what looked like water, but the water was dirty and who knows what diseases it contained. My mouth dropped but no noise came out. I was scared.

We were thrown out of the truck, with a tarpaulin, two litres of water, a sack full of rice and two ragged, old blankets, supposedly to keep us warm. I cried all night long and my mother tried to comfort me, but I was too sad to listen. What had happened to my comfy bed, what had happened to all my toys and what had happened to all our food and water? This wasn't the life I expected when Mao became leader.

In the morning it was bleak and humid. We had to ration all our food, because this was all that we had to eat. I took my cap off, but my mother demanded I put it back on,

"Pull your cap back on your head, or they might cut off your beautiful, long hair and I don't want that!"

My mother and I climbed into the little truck which would take us to our work space, and in the evening, it would take us back to what was now our home. It was dusty and stuffy in the back of the truck. There were no lights and the windows were black.

The driver threw us out and threw rakes out as well. As I turned to face the field I saw a girl crying over her mother, who was lifeless and pale. I went to go and comfort her, but my mother pulled me back,

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“We don’t know these people, DO NOT go helping them out, they could be carrying diseases around with them or worse still they could be spies for Mao. We can’t trust anyone around here.”

And that was that!

We worked all day long ploughing fields that had once contained fresh rice. Now the fields were drenched in water which made my socks soggy. There were many other families ploughing the same field as us. Occasionally, when the Red Guards were not watching, some of the men would try and cheer up the children by lifting them up and throwing them around. This made me miss my father.

My father was a good man and did nothing wrong, but when Chairman Mao became leader he was attacked by the Red Guard for being educated. He had tried to reason with the Red Guard, but they wouldn’t listen, and when he refused to hand over his precious books, the Red Guard threw his books out of the window and burned them in the street. They slapped him with sticks and dragged him along the road by a rope, but my father still disobeyed them, refusing to read the Little Red Book, saying he could never be loyal to Chairman Mao. They took him away and we never saw him again. I remember that day, I came back from school to find my mother crying in our living room. I had asked her what was wrong, and she had explained to me everything that had happened to him. Now he is dead.

As we waded through the sodden paddy field, I trod on something hard. I looked down to pick it up, only to realise that it was a gleaming, diamond bracelet. I ran all the way to my mother, when suddenly somebody grabbed my wrist and threw me to the ground.

“Thief, thief!” they shouted.

“I’m not a thief I found it on the ground, I promise I would never steal” I trembled.

“Oh, a likely story, tell that to the Red Guards!” the cruel man declared, as he dragged me to the side of the field. They beckoned for my mother to come, but she refused and stood still, glaring at me. What did I do wrong and why was she angry with me?

“Dirty capitalist, tell me what you were doing with this bracelet NOW!”

Hand quivering, eyes lowered to the floor, I held out the bracelet “I, I, I was just bringing it to you,” I managed to say in the most high-pitched voice. After what seemed like the longest silence, the Red Guard snatched the bracelet out of my hand, slapped me hard across my face and barked,

“Go back to the field!”

Luckily the Red Guard let me off with a warning, but my mother was still cross with me. I think she knew that I had never intended to give it to them and I had put us both in danger.

Emily Jones

That evening I couldn't eat my cold rice. I had blisters and cuts all over my hands and I couldn't even lift my arms they were so sore. My face was swollen, and I couldn't open my jaw (I knew where that had come from for sure.)

"You have to eat Nien. You need to keep your strength up. This is what it will be like for us now." My mother spoke in the softest but somehow sternest voice ever. I knew she was right, but I couldn't survive like this, could I?

I was to stay in this community for 10 years, until the 9th of September 1976, when some of the Red Guards came along and gathered up the people near where we were staying and told us solemnly, "Today Chairman Mao died of a heart attack."