The Hunt

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by Dingxi Lu

"Are they heading this way?" the man asks. He throws another chunk of wood in the fireplace.

"I don't know, Dad." The boy glances through the window. "I think they are still breaking into houses... couple blocks away from us."

"Now, listen." The man turns his face toward the boy. "Promise me you will remember what to tell them when they reach you—tell them I went to your uncle's place, and where is that?"

"Peking, but Dad..."

"Yes, I went to Peking with your mother. We went to your uncle's funeral. Now say it again."

"I know what to tell them, but..."

"No. No. You have no clue." The man grabs his son's shoulders. "You have no idea what these people want from you, and that's exactly what I need you to remember. Now say it again, where did I go?"

"You went to uncle's funeral. Peking."

"Exactly. Now give me that last chunk of wood."

"But, where did Mom go?"

The man stares at his son for a second, and then looks away. He settles his eyes outside the window. Some specks of light seem to glow along the horizon. He assumes the red guards have lit some nearby houses on fire.

"Your mother left," the man says. "And I need to get in the cave now."

The man walks away from the window. He comes up to the wardrobe in the corner and opens it. There is a hole on the back, attached to the brick wall. He sweeps some dusty clothes aside and squeezes himself inside.

"That's Mom's coat," the boy says.

"That's right." The man curls himself in the hole. It fits him perfectly.

"Shut the wardrobe doors," the man says.

"No."

"Boy, I said shut the doors."

"That's Mom's only coat." The boy looks squarely at his father. "It's below zero out there."

There is a short silence.

"Listen," the man says. "You don't have to know everything."

"I need to know about her," the boy says. "She would never leave us—at least not like this."

"Do you know what's happening out there?"

"Dad, just tell me what happened to her—"

"They're hunting us," the man says, not looking at his son. "And they won't stop unless we give them what they want."

"I know what the guards are supposed to do. But why does it concern Mom—"

"To do what? They are supposed to safeguard the purity of the party? Your mother also said she had faith in the commune—she is a terrible liar."

The man pauses. At the end of his street he hears sounds of people marching.

"You have no clue, do you?" The man clutches his hair. "She couldn't teach any more.

The sounds are down the street.

The man says. "They are still after you, Dad."

"They're coming," the man says. "You know what to tell them."

"To tell them that you gave up on us. They are still after you, Dad."

"I gave them what they wanted," the man says. "She neither had to bear the torment nor the pain if she—"

"If she had confessed?"

"Yes."

The fire is out. Both the boy and his father hear the crowd approaching, shouting something about Chairman Mao.

"Revolution is no crime!" The sounds are down the street.

"They're coming," the man says. "You know what to tell them."

"To tell them that you gave up on Mom?"

"What are you talking about? I did this for us—you don't know what I undertake to protect this family."

"Neither do you. They are still after you, Dad."

"The students promised to pardon us if—"

"Dad, you kill Mom."

"This is absurd, boy. She is safe behind bars. We'll see each other again when this is over."

"They'll beat her to death there."

"No, you don't know that."

"Revolution is no crime! Rebellion is justified!" The sounds are near.

"Shut the doors now, boy. Don't worry, they won't do anything to you as long as they don't find me."

"Revolution is no crime! Rebellion is justified! Long live Chairman Mao!" The sounds are at their porch.
“I’ll tell them what you said.” The boy shuts the wardrobe doors.

“Open the door! Open the fucking door!”

The boy walks up and opens the door.