
BLACK LI AND WHITE LI

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Though love was not the central theme of the misunderstanding that arose between the two brothers, I must begin my discussion there.

Black Li was five years older than White Li. They were both schoolmates of mine, though Black Li and I graduated from middle school the same year White Li began his studies there. Black Li and I were good friends, and since I visited their home frequently, I also got to know White Li quite well. In this day and age, five years makes a big difference. The two brothers' characters were as different as their nicknames: Black Li was old-fashioned; White Li was very modern. They didn't argue about this specifically, though their points of view differed radically on every subject under the sun. Black Li wasn't really black. He was called Black Li on account of a big black mole over his left eyebrow. His younger brother had no such mark, so he became White Li. Their classmates in middle school, who had given them these names, thought this was quite logical. Actually, both brothers' complexions were rather pale, and they looked very much alike.

They were both chasing the same woman, pardon me for not mentioning her name. She herself couldn't decide which of the brothers she loved more, though at the same time she wouldn't admit that she didn't love either of them. We were all very worried about them on account of this. Though we knew that neither of them was looking for a fight, we also knew that the game of love wasn't always played according to the rules of friendship.

Finally, Black Li surrendered.

I recall what happened very clearly. On a drizzly night in early summer, I went to have a chat with him in his home. He was sitting alone in his room with four fine porcelain tea bowls decorated with red fish standing on the table before him. We were very informal whenever we got together. I sat down and lit a cigarette while he played with his tea bowls. He turned them around, one by one, until the fish designs painted on them were all facing him. Once they were arranged in this manner he leaned back, examining them like a painter who had just completed a section of a new painting. Next he rearranged them so that the fish on the other side of the bowls were all lined up neatly in front of him. Once again, he leaned back to get a better look, and then turned and smiled at me. His smile was as innocent as a child's.

He was fond of playing this sort of game. He had no great talents, yet he dabbled in many areas. He never pretended to be an expert in any field, but he believed that everything he did contributed to molding his temperament. There was no question about his being good-natured. If he had a hobby to pursue, such as repairing an old scroll painting, he could very easily while away an entire day at it.

Calling my name, he smiled and said, "I let Number Four have her." In terms of seniority in their family, White Li was number four, since an uncle on their father's side had two sons. "Brothers shouldn't become estranged on account of a woman."

"That's why they call you old-fashioned," I said with a chuckle.

"You're wrong, you can't teach an old bear new tricks. I couldn't handle a *menage d trois* anyway. So I said to her, no matter who she loves, I couldn't see her any more. You can't imagine how much better I felt after that."

"First time I've ever heard of a love affair like that."

"The first time? Then perhaps I shouldn't say any more. She can do as she pleases, but at least Number Four and I won't have any more arguments. If this sort of thing happened between us, I certainly hope one of us would give in the same way."

"Then there'd be peace on earth, right?"

We both laughed.

About ten days later, Black Li came to see me. I knew by now that whenever a gray shadow hovered over his forehead, there was something important on his mind. On occasions such as these, we'd always drink half a catty of Lotus brandy. I got the drinks ready quickly, since his forehead was looking unusually dim.

When he was drinking the second cup, his hands began trembling. It was hard for Black Li to conceal his feelings. If something was upsetting him, no matter how hard he tried to remain calm, it always showed on his face. He was such a kind and outgoing person.

"I went and had a talk with her," he said, smiling in a rather silly manner. But this was a genuine smile, since he was getting ready to pour out all his troubles to a close friend. If Black Li had no close friends, he wouldn't have survived for long.

I didn't press him, and there was no need for us to hurry anyway. Our feelings could very easily fill in the little silences that occurred in our conversations. We glanced at each other and grinned. Our facial expressions and intuitive understanding of each other were more important than anything we might say. For this reason White Li always called us "two bumps on a log."

"Number Four got nice and upset with me," he said. I knew exactly what he meant by "nice": First, he didn't want to admit that they had an argument; and second, he didn't want to put all the blame on his younger brother, even though it was White Li who was in the wrong. The word "nice" was a complex expression of his unwillingness to say what was really on his mind. "It was all because of her. It's my fault, I don't know anything about feminine psychology. Remember the other day I told you that I had surrendered? I had no qualms about that whatsoever, but she took it very differently. She thought I was trying to humiliate her. You're right when you say I'm old-fashioned. For me, love is a matter of doing what's right. Little did I know that our lady-friend's out to get the whole world chasing after her. Now she hates me. So what does she do to get her revenge? I rejected her, so she stops seeing Number Four. Number Four blew up in front of me. So today I went to apologize to her. If she had just cursed me and let off some steam, maybe she and Number Four could get back together again. Anyway, that's what I was hoping. But you know what? She didn't curse me at all. She said she wanted Number Four and I to be her friends. Of course that's impossible for me, though I didn't tell that to her directly. I came over here to talk to you about it. Problem is, if I don't do as she says, she'll ignore Number Four, and he'll start up with me all over again."

"A very difficult situation." I tacked this on for his benefit. A few moments passed. Then I said, "Why don't I go explain everything to Number Four?"

"That would be fine," he said, holding up his wine-cup, "but it might not do any good. Anyway, I'm finished with her. If Number Four wants to make an issue of it with me, I just won't say anything, that's all there is to it."

We shifted the topic of our conversation onto some other subjects. He told me he'd been reading about religion the last few days. I knew that his studying religion was purely a whim; Black Li wasn't the type to take up religion out of pessimism, or because he was undergoing some spiritual crisis.

Shortly after Black Li left, White Li came in. He rarely came to visit me, so I guessed that something important had happened. Though still a college student, White Li looked much more astute than his older brother. He gave you the immediate impression that he was capable of being a great leader. The things he said would either lead you down the very path he wanted

you to follow or strap you to the guillotine. His manner was extremely direct, the very opposite of his brother. I was also quite direct with him, lest he call me a "bump on a log."

"Number Two came to see you of course." Black Li was the second oldest in their extended family. "And of course he's been telling you all about what's going on." Naturally, there was no need for me to reply in a hurry, since he said "of course" twice. But before I even had a chance to open my mouth, he went on, "You know, I just did it to make a point."

I told him I didn't know that.

"You think I'm really after that woman?" He smiled at me with Black Li's smile, except that Black Li's smiles were never so disdainful. "The only reason I got involved with her at all was to cause trouble for Number Two; otherwise, why would I want to waste my time with her? Aren't all relations between men and women based purely on animal desire? What do I need her for then? Number Two believes that animal desire is sacred, so he went out of his way to kowtow to her. Now that she's rejected him, he thinks it's my turn to kowtow to her. I'm sorry, that's not my style." He laughed loudly.

I didn't smile, nor did I dare interrupt him. I listened carefully to what he had to say and paid even closer attention to his facial expression. Black Li and White Li's faces were similar in every respect, except for the fact that Black Li's demeanor was so totally different from his brother's. For this reason, one moment I felt I was talking to a very close friend, and the next as if I were sitting across from a complete stranger. This was quite discomfiting; the face before me was familiar, but I was unable to find its familiar expression.

"You see, I didn't even kowtow to her once. At the proper moment, I kissed her. She really liked that, a whole lot more than all that kowtowing. But that's not the main point. What I mean is, do you think Number Two and I ought to go on living together?"

I couldn't answer this question immediately.

He smiled-probably he was thinking to himself how I was just a "bump on a log." "I've got my own life to live, my own plans; the same is true for him. The best thing would be for both of us to go our own ways, don't you think?"

"Yes. What are your plans then?" It was no easy task coming up with this question; I already felt extremely awkward.

"This is no time to talk about my plans. Once we divide our family property and start living apart, you'll find out what my plans are."

"You started an argument with Number Two just because you want to move out? Is that the point you're getting to?" Now I was being clever.

He nodded with a smile but said nothing, knowing I probably had more to say. I continued, "Why didn't you discuss it with him peacefully instead of having an argument?"

"Do you think he's capable of understanding me? You may be able to hold a reasonable dialogue with him, but not me. As soon as I mention living apart to him, he starts crying. Then it's the same old thing-'What did Mother say before she died? Didn't she tell us we should always be good to each other?' He brings that up every time, as if the dead were supposed to run the lives of the living. Not only that, if I mention dividing up the estate, he'll disagree, I swear to you, and tell me how he wants to sign everything over to me. But I don't want to take advantage of him like that. He always treats me like a little brother. He thinks he can control other people's behavior. He pretends to understand me, but actually he's just a big anachronism. The present belongs to me; why do I need him to tell me what to do?" His expression suddenly became very serious.

Looking at his face, I gradually began to see things in a different light. White Li "as a proud young man who looked down on us two "bumps on a log." All he really wanted

was to stand on his own two feet. I also realized that if the two of them tried to talk over their differences, they'd get carried away for hours discussing the whole range of fraternal obligations. If White Li didn't bring this up, Black Li certainly would. A quick argument was preferable to all of this, lest their conflict drag out indefinitely. White Li wanted a clean break, after which each of them could go their own way. Furthermore, if they held a proper discussion on the matter, Black Li would never respond in a straightforward manner. If White Li kicked up a storm first and Black Li offered a lot of resistance, Black Li would appear to be trying to appropriate White Li's share of the estate. At this point I suddenly felt enlightened.

"So you want me to go and talk to Number Two about it, right?" "That's right. This way we can avoid a big argument." He smiled again. "Of course you shouldn't put him on the spot. We're still brothers." It seemed he felt very uncomfortable with the word "brothers." I agreed to do as he said.

"The more insistent you are the better. I propose that he and I have nothing to do with each other for the next twenty years." He paused for a moment, forcing a grin. "You can tell him that if he wants to forget about me, he should get married and have a nice fat baby as soon as possible. In twenty years, I'll be old-fashioned myself. If I'm still alive then, I'll come home and play uncle. Make sure you tell him that when he's courting his future wife, he should kiss more and kowtow less; he should spend his energy chasing her rather than kneeling down before her." He stood up, paused for a moment, and then said, "Thank you." It was evident that these last two words were intended for me, but also that he really didn't want to bear the responsibility for having said them.

I discussed this matter nearly every day with Black Li. Every time I went to visit him he had the Lotus wine ready. We'd eat, drink, and talk a lot together, but never came up with any conclusions. This went on for at least two weeks. He understood and appreciated everything I said and even expressed the hope that his younger brother would go out in the world and make a name for himself. But his last words always were: "How c I get along without him?"

"What could Nir.FQur's plans possibly be?" He asked himself this question pacing back and forth in his room. His black mole sunk into the creases on his forehead and seemed to have shrunk somewhat. "What are his plans? Why don't you ask him. If you could find out, I could stop worrying so much."

"He won't tell me." I must have told him that at least fifty times.

"That's dangerous though. He's my only brother. Let him come and argue it out with me; there's nothing wrong with two brothers having an argument. He was never this way with me before. We only started disagreeing with each other very recently. It must be on account of that woman. He wants me to get married? I didn't get married, and look what happened. I'll get married then! What could his plans possibly be? Really! He wants to divide up the family property? Let him take whatever he wants. I probably offended him in some way. Though I never wanted to start a fight with him, I know I have my own opinions on things. So what are his plans then? He can do as he pleases. Why do we have to divide up the estate?"

Once he started on this topic, you could be sure he would drone on for more than an hour. His hobbies increased in number day by day: divination by tossing coins or using the Eight Trigrams, analyzing Chinese -characters, reading about religion ... But none of these hobbies helped him to figure out what Number Four's plans were; on the contrary, they only increased his anxiety. This is not to say that he appeared any more nervous than usual. Actually, he was his usual maudlin self. It seemed as if his actions could never keep up

with his emotions. No matter how agitated he was inside, he always moved slowly; he seemed to be playing with his life as if it were a toy.

I told him that Number Four's plans involved his future career and had nothing to do with the present. But he only shook his head.

In this manner, more than a month went by.

"You know," I said, appealing to reason, "Number Four isn't pressing me, so it must be that he has some long range plans. He's not about to run off and do anything big right now."

He just shook his head again.

As time passed, the number of stories about him increased. One Sunday morning I happened to see him entering a church, where I assumed he was looking for a friend. I waited for him outside, but he didn't come out. I had to go somewhere, and as I walked away I thought about how the recent events in his life must have been upsetting for him-his broken love affair, his falling out with his brother, and perhaps there were more things I didn't know about. But two things alone seemed to be too much for him to bear. His actions revealed that life was just a game for him, but this -was because he was so preoccupied with the most trivial matters. It made him uncomfortable if the patterns on tea bowls were out of line. Similarly, he arranged things neatly in his mind to soothe his conscience. Perhaps by going to church and praying he could put his mind at rest. While his conscience had been provided to him by the wise sages of yore, at the same time he didn't reject all modern things and modern thinking. As a result, his own "way of thinking" was never quite as coherent as "the way things really were," making it difficult for him to know how to act properly. He was probably in love with her, but he had to reject her for his brother's sake; he certainly never mentioned falling out of love with her to me. He often said, "Let's take a ride in an airplane." Then he'd laugh, but it wasn't really him laughing, it was "the flesh and bones he'd inherited from his parents" that were laughing.

One afternoon I went to see him. It was our custom to begin talking about Number Four immediately-at least this had been the pattern over the last month or so. But that day he looked like an entirely different person. His eyes were bright and he had an expression of great contentment on his face. It was as if he'd just purchased a fine edition of a rare book.

I began the conversation. "What's the good news?"

He nodded, smiling. "Very interesting!" He always said this after experiencing something for the first time. If someone told him an old ghost story, you could be sure he would respond with "Very interesting!" He wouldn't argue with you about whether ghosts existed or not since he believed in the supernatural. "Who knows, there must be stranger things in the world than that," he would say. In his mind, anything was possible. Thus he accepted new things quite readily, but without understanding them very thoroughly. It wasn't that he lacked the desire to understand things, but when he should have used his brain, he used his emotions.

"The principle is the same," he said, "people should make sacrifices for others."

"Didn't you sacrifice your girlfriend for him already?" I was trying to remain rational.

"That doesn't count. That was a passive separation; I wasn't giving up anything that belonged to me. I've spent the last two weeks reading the Four Gospels, and I've made up my mind. I ought to support Number Four, it's wrong for me to try to stop him from moving out. Think about it for a moment. If it's only a matter of dividing up our estate, why can't he just come and talk to me about it?"

"He's afraid you'll disagree with him," I said.

"No. The last few days, I've been thinking about it. He must have something specific in mind, probably something very dangerous, but he wants to make a clean break with me so that I won't get implicated if he gets in trouble. You think he's just young and impulsive? He acts that way just to fool us. He's actually going out of his way for my benefit, since he

doesn't want me to suffer unjustly on account of anything he does. He wants to make sure I'm safe first, so he can do whatever he wants on his own with a clear conscience. I'm sure that's it. But I can't let him go now; I've got to make sacrifices for him too. Right before Mother died, she ... " He stopped there, knowing I'd heard it all before.

I never thought he would take it so far, and I still didn't believe everything he said. Perhaps under the influence of religion he was giving vent to some previously hidden emotions.

I decided to speak to White Li about it on the very slim chance that Black Li was right. Though I didn't believe that what he said was true, I couldn't afford to take any chances.

I looked everywhere for White Li, but he was nowhere to be found. There was no trace of him on the campus, in the dormitories, in the library, on the tennis courts or in any of the little restaurants he frequented. No one I asked had seen him for days. White Li was like that. If Black Li went away for a few days, he would have notified all of his friends. But White Li would disappear like a puff of smoke. I came up with a possible solution: I asked "her" if she knew anything about his whereabouts.

Since I spent so much time with Black Li, she already knew who I was. But she hadn't seen White Li for a long time either. She seemed to be quite disappointed in both of them, especially Black Li. When I asked her specifically about White Li, she directed the conversation back to Black Li. I could see that she cared a lot about-or perhaps even loved-Black Li. She seemed to want to capture Black Li and preserve him like a specimen. If she could find someone better than him, she would let Black Li go; in the event she failed, she'd probably marry him after all. Since I was only guessing, I chose not to play matchmaker for the two of them. On principle I should have done that, but I was much too fond of Black Li and believed that he deserved to many nothing less than an angel.

By the time I left her place, my heart was pounding. Where was White Li? I couldn't tell Black Li about it, since as soon as he found out he'd put a notice in the newspaper and stay up all night divining with his coins and poring over his characters. But if I didn't tell him, I wouldn't be able to think about anything else. Why couldn't I just forget about the whole thing? No, that wouldn't work either.

From outside his study, I could hear Black Li humming. He only hummed when he was very happy about something. He hummed on a more or less regular basis when he recited poetry or sang those famous lines, "deep in the boudoir, there lies a piece of flawless jade," though this was not what he was humming now. Listening carefully, I discovered he was reciting the Psalms over and over. He didn't have a very musical ear, so all music sounded the same to him. Likewise, everything he sang came out sounding the same. In any case, I could tell that he was extremely happy now. What brought this about?

The moment I walked in, he put down his book of Psalms. He looked ecstatic. "You're here at just the right time. I was just about to go and see you. Number Four just left. He asked me to give him a thousand dollars. He didn't mention dividing the estate, not even once."

It was evident that he hadn't asked his brother why he needed the money, otherwise he wouldn't have been in such a good mood. He probably had begged his brother to keep living with him, and promised him not to meddle in his affairs. It seemed now that even if White Li had a dangerous mission to accomplish, as long as they didn't split up the family estate, Black Li would have nothing to be afraid about. I could see this quite clearly.

"Praying really works," he said quite seriously. "I've been praying for the last few days, and it turned out that Number Four didn't bring up that old business. Even if he throws away the money I gave him, at least I still have a brother."

I suggested we drink our customary pot of Lotus wine, but he smiled and shook his head. "Go ahead, I'll have something to eat instead. I'm giving up drinking."

I didn't drink either, nor did I tell him how I'd searched everywhere for White Li. Now that White Li was back, why bring it up again? I mentioned "her" to him, but he didn't say a word, and only smiled.

We have very little to say about White Li's relationship with "her," so he told me some Bible stories. While listening to him, I thought there was something a little strange about the way Black Li behaved towards his brother and his girlfriend, though I couldn't put my finger on it. I felt very uneasy about this and continued to feel this way when I got home.

Four or five days passed, but this matter remained on my mind. One evening, Wang Five came to see me. Wang, the Li's rickshaw puller, had been working for them for four years.

Wang Five was as straightforward and reliable as they come. A man in his early thirties, he had a prominent scar on his head. It was said that this was the result of a donkey bite when he was a child. Wang's only weakness was that he enjoyed a drink once in a while.

He'd drunk a bit too much on the night he visited me, which made the scar on his head appear somewhat redder than usual.

"Wang Five, what brings you here this evening?" I was on good terms with him; whenever I left the Li's home late at night, they always got him to take me home, and I always gave him a little money to buy drinks with.

"I've come to see you," he said, taking a seat.

I knew he'd come to tell me something. "I just made a pot of tea. Would you like some?"

"That would be very nice. I'll pour it myself. I'm really thirsty."

I offered him a cigarette and started off the conversation by asking him, "What's on your mind?"

"Ah.... I just finished off two pots of wine, but there's something I can't get off my mind. It's something I really shouldn't be talking about at all." He took a long drag on his cigarette.

"If it's anything to do with the Li's, it's perfectly all right for you to tell me."

"That's what I was thinking too." He paused for a moment, but due to the effects of the wine could not remain silent for long. "I've been working for the Li's for a total of four years and thirty-five days. I'm in a very difficult position now. Second Master treats me very kindly and all, but Fourth Master, well, he's my friend. So it's hard for me to know what to do. I can't tell Second Master what Fourth Master's been up to, but Second Master's such a nice guy. If I told Second Master, I would be unworthy of Fourth Master's trust he's my friend. But when I try not to think about it I get all confused inside. In principle, you know, I ought to be on Fourth Master's side. Second Master's a nice guy, there's no doubt about it. But in the end he's a master. No matter how good a master he is, he's still a master. There's no way we can treat each other as brothers. He's good to me. For instance, on really hot days, when I'm pulling Second Master around, he'll always find some place along the way to stop for a little while to buy a box of matches or take a look at a book stall. Why does he do that? So I can rest and catch my breath. That's what I mean when I say he's a good boss. And since he's good to me, I've got to treat him with respect too. Like they say, one good turn deserves another. You learn that when you pull a rickshaw for a few years."

I offered him another bowl of tea as a way of demonstrating I wasn't ignorant of the proper etiquette. When he finished his tea, he pointed to his chest with his cigarette. "Here, it's right here where I feel for Fourth Master. Why is that? Because Fourth Master is young and doesn't treat me like a rickshaw puller. Those two guys-I mean their personalities-are very different. On hot days, Second Master always gives me time to rest, but that would never occur to Fourth Master. No matter how hot it is he's always telling me to run like the wind. But when Fourth Master and I sit around talking, he'll say, 'Who says that some people have to be rickshaw pullers?' He's talking about how unfair things are for us-I mean all the rickshaw

pullers in the world. Second Master treats me well, but he doesn't give a damn about the rest of us rickshaw men. You see what I mean? Second Master is narrow-minded while Fourth Master looks at the bigger picture. Fourth Master doesn't give a damn about my legs, but he cares about my heart. Second Master cares about the little things, he takes pity on my legs-but he doesn't give a damn about this here." He pointed to his heart again.

I knew he had more to say, but I was really afraid that the tongue loosening effects of the wine he drank would be diluted by the strong tea, so I encouraged him a little, "Go on, Wang. Tell me everything. I'm not an old lady who's going to give all your secrets away."

He rubbed his scar and lowered his head for a few moments of contemplation. Then he pulled his chair up close to mine and lowered his voice. "Have you heard they've almost finished installing, the new streetcar line? When that starts operating, we rickshaw pullers are done for. I'm not worried about myself; I'm talking about everybody." He looked up at me.

I nodded to him.

"Fourth Master knows all about it; we're close friends, right? He said to me, 'Wang, you've got to find a way out.' I said, 'Fourth Master, I've got an idea. We'll destroy them!' He said, 'Wang, that's the right idea, we'll destroy them!' So we worked it all out then and there. I can't tell you the details. This is what I came here to tell you." He lowered his voice again. "There's someone following Fourth Master around. It doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the streetcar business, but it's bad having someone tailing you all the time. The worst thing is, if I tell Second Master, how can I face Fourth Master? But if I don't tell him, he might get dragged in for no reason at all. I don't know what to do."

After seeing Wang Five out, I thought it all over carefully.

Black Li surmised correctly that White Li was involved in something dangerous. Beyond wrecking trolley cars, he probably had something even more formidable in mind. Thus his desire to move away from his brother was to avoid implicating him. White Li was not afraid of sacrificing his' own life, or the lives of others, but he was unwilling to sacrifice his brother unless there were a good reason for it such an act would come to no avail. And with the action against the streetcar company about to take place, he had no time to worry about Black Li anyway.

Where was I to turn? Warning Black Li would only stir up a wave of warm feelings in him for his brother. Speaking to White Li was not only useless; it would incriminate Wang Five as well.

The situation grew tenser day by day. The streetcar company announced the opening of the new line. I couldn't wait any longer. I had to go and tell Black Li.

He wasn't home, but Wang Five was still there.

"Where's Number Two?"

"He went out."

"You didn't take him?"

"He hasn't taken the rickshaw for a long time."

From the expression on his face, I knew the answer to my question: "Wang, did you tell him?"

Wang Five's scar turned a bright purple. "I drank too much. I couldn't help it."

"What did he say?"

"He started crying."

"What did he say?"

"He asked me one question: 'Wang, what are you going to do?' I said, 'I'll do whatever Fourth Master says.' All he said was, 'O.K.' He goes out every day now, but he never rides in the rickshaw."

I waited there for three hours. After sunset, he finally came back. "What's up?" These two words summed up everything I wanted to know.

He smiled. "Not much." I never expected him to answer me this way. There was no need for me to ask him any more questions, since I knew his mind was already made up. I felt I needed a drink, but it's no fun drinking alone. I decided to go. Before leaving, I said to him, "Why don't the two of us go away for a couple of days."

"Let's discuss that in a few days, shall we?" That was all he said.

Passionate men are capable of acting with great indifference. I never imagined him treating me this way.

The night before the opening of the trolley line, I went to his house again, but he wasn't in. I waited until midnight, but he didn't come back. He was probably trying to avoid me.

Wang Five came in and smiled at me. "Tomorrow's the big day!" "Where's Number Two?"

"I haven't seen him. After you left the other day, he used some strange chemical and burned off the black mole over his eyebrow. Then he just sat there staring at himself in the mirror."

It was all over now. Without his black mole, there was no more Black Li. I didn't have to wait for him any longer. When I walked out, Wang Five called to me, "If anything happens to me tomorrow," he said, scratching his scar, "take care of my mother for me."

About five o'clock the next afternoon Wang Five rushed into my room. His pants were soaked through with sweat. "We smashed all the trolley cars to bits." After that he said nothing and just sat there panting for several minutes. When he recovered his breath, he picked up the teapot and took a long drink directly from the spout.

"We destroyed everything! No one left till they brought in the cavalry troops. They took Little Ma Six away, I saw it with my own eyes. If only we had guns! But all we had was bricks. Little Ma Six is done for."

"What about Number Four?"

"I didn't see him at all." He bit his lower lip and thought for a moment. "There was a hell of a lot of excitement there. If they caught anyone else, I guess Fourth Master would have to be among them. He was one of the people in charge. Don't forget though, Fourth Master's no fool, even though he's very young. Little Ma Six is done for, but I'm not so sure about Fourth Master."

"You didn't see Number Two?"

"He didn't come home last night." He thought for a moment. "I'm going to lay low here for a couple of days."

"That's fine."

The next day, the papers carried the following news:

The ringleader of a bunch of violent hooligans who destroyed the trolley cars, a Mr. Li, was arrested on the spot. A student and five rickshaw pullers were taken into custody as well.

Wang Five could only recognize one word in the headline: the surname Li. "Fourth Master is done for! Fourth Master is done for!" He lowered his head and pretended to be scratching his scar, while his tears dropped onto the newspaper.

The news spread quickly through the city-Li and Little Ma Six were going to be paraded through the streets and shot.

The cruel sun beat down on the cobblestone streets, heating them to the point where you could feel the heat through your shoes, yet the streets were lined with huge crowds of spectators. The two men were seated in a large open wagon with their hands tied behind their backs. They were guarded on either side by policemen in khaki uniforms and soldiers dressed in gray. As the wagon drew near, the two blades of their bayonets reflected the sunlight with a chilling brilliance. The wooden placards announcing their crimes could be seen swaying back and forth above their heads. The man seated in front had his eyes closed; his forehead was

dotted with beads of sweat and his lips were moving as if he were mouthing a prayer. The wagon was very close, and I watched him sway past me. I broke down and cried, stopping only after he had gone past. I followed the wagon all the way to the execution ground. Not once did he raise his head.

His eyebrows were knitted; his mouth hung open. The blood spurted forth from his chest, as if he were praying the moment he died. I took his body away.

Two months later, I ran into White Li in Shanghai. If I hadn't called to him, he probably would have walked right past me. "Number Four!" I called out to him.

"Huh?" He appeared startled. "Hey, is that you? Sounded just like Number Two."

Maybe the way I called to him reminded him of Black Li's voice, but this was totally unintentional on my part. Or maybe it was Black Li himself, alive somewhere inside me, who called out on my behalf.

White Li seemed to have aged, and looked more like his older brother than ever. We said very little to each other. He didn't have much to say to me anyway.

I remember two things he did say though:

"Number Two must have gone to heaven; that's a perfect place for him. But I'm still here smashing the gates of hell."