

He forced open his swollen eyes. “You should draw a demarcation line with me. Save yourself.”

She refused.

When she stumbled home, she found the Red Guards waiting for her with ink and a piece of paper. My mother and her siblings shivered together in the corner.

“Draw a demarcation line and we’ll leave you be,” the Red Guards said.

“No.”

They splashed the black ink on her red wedding shirt and stormed out, punching the door on the way.

The next day, her school fired her and denounced her political status.

When she went to visit my grandfather again, he was gone. She begged the Red Guards to tell her what happened. They said, “Dead or banished back to his hometown. Who cares?”



She sent my mother and my uncle to my grandfather’s hometown to look for him. My grandmother, my mother said, considered her the smartest and strongest among all siblings. But, in that society, a girl could not travel alone without a male companion.

Early spring chilled them to the bones through their thin shirts and shoes. Without seats, they sat on the platform between train cars and warmed each other with body heat. Six corn buns were their only food for the three-day ride.

They found their father living in a duck coop. Duck keeping was his “Political Reformation” job, and they had him do it around-the-clock. His mother and then eighteen-year-old son still lived in a pigsty, having been denounced years earlier. She was old and blind and would die a few months later.

My mother and my uncle begged their father to come home. But he couldn’t, not without the Party’s permission.



At home, my grandmother knocked on the door of every party official she