

# Harmony

by Natalie Romeo

## Beijing 1956

“Wait for me!” May runs through the trees past broken cinderblock, following her friend Feng into the woods. She moves her way past the rubble of an old church and meets him in the middle of a clearing. Parts of it are still standing and Feng takes a seat on a bench. As May reaches him, she notices what is left of the building. Bookshelves are overturned, leaving thousands of broken books and loose papers strewn across the ground. May bends down and picks up a piece of paper.

“What is all this?” May asks aloud. Feng has his eyes closed and doesn’t respond. She walks over to him and giggles. Feng has been her closest friend for as long as she can remember but they couldn’t be more different. Where May is inquisitive and silly, Feng is serious and solemn. Still, they do everything together and today is like any other day, exploring parts of their neighborhood that have been destroyed before it becomes transformed. Chairman Mao Zedong recently decided to industrialize the neighborhoods of Beijing, making room for more factories and schools. The Communist government is being established in their home of Beijing.

May brings over the piece of paper to show Feng. “This must be something from ages ago!” Feng says as he takes it from her hands. He squints at it, trying to read its ancient script. “Read it to me please, Feng!” May pleads and jumps up and down. Part of what makes their friendship great is the fact that Feng can read now that he’s almost 10 years old and May, only 6 is always excited to listen and learn from him. “*Let the states of equilibrium and harmony exist in perfection, and a happy order will prevail throughout heaven and earth, and all things will be nourished and flourish*” Feng reads. “Huh. That’s deep,” he says. “Sounds beautiful”, May smiles. “It’s written by Confucius,” Feng

points at the sheet of paper. "I wonder who that is?" May grabs more papers and hands them to Feng. "Read more please!"

The two sit on the ground amongst the rubble for hours reading through pages of Confucius's texts. They pour through quotes and stories encouraging the importance of family and community and ways people can be more harmonious together. The kids had never heard of Confucius but of course his lessons had been passed down through the years; guiding government and individuals about how to exist in equilibrium.

## **Beijing 1966**

*"Harmony can take place between individuals at the level of family, the community, the nation, and the world"* May reads as she puts down the book. The three others who have joined her today clap their hands appreciatively. "Thank you for joining me, friends", says May as they leave. "Thank you, May, for helping us learn the virtues of Confucius", one girl says as she walks past May. "I feel much better in the current state of our country knowing we have Confucius's teachings to help us along". May smiles sadly, knowingly.

The Communist Party has fully taken over China and the Cultural Revolution is underway. Chairman Mao has been in the process of smashing the 'Four Olds': old customs, old habits, old culture, old ideas. This includes destroying temples, crushing any authority or capitalism and working to 'clear away the evil habits of the old society'. Teachings of Confucius are also considered among these evils since they evoke aspects of the old society that Mao

Zedong has been attempting to eradicate. Chairman Mao has emphasized to communist revolutionaries that the goal of literature is to inspire the masses by presenting positive examples of socialist idealism and should be written in the voice and style of the workers, peasants and soldiers-- not of intellectuals. Unfortunately, teachings of Confucius have been somewhat looked down upon at times throughout history, and anyone in support of him would be sentenced to life in prison or executed.

Ten years have passed since May found those papers of Confucian texts and has made it her mission to pass along his teachings. People come to May more and more these days, attempting to ease their minds with the words of Confucius as she reads to them.

She dreams of continuing her practice and teachings of Confucianism but the Revolution is not on their side. May has seen one too many intellectuals and friends in her community beaten or killed because of their preference for Old Customs. This is simply the way now, but May is determined to promote Confucius and his lessons on humanity to help her country.

As May is walking through town, she is saddened to see all the buildings in shambles. As part of the communist movement to clear away the Old, a group of Mao supporters known as the Red Guards would routinely attack anything considered conventional or bourgeois. May quickly hides her copy of *The Analects* as a group of men in red armbands hurry past her. Suddenly, she recognizes one of them.

“Feng?” May asks shyly. She hadn’t seen him in years, yet she could never forget their connection. He stops short but doesn’t turn around. The other men get a better look at May and squint at her book. “What have we here, Feng? An intellectual it seems”, one taunts. Another Red guard snatches her book. “What do you think you’re doing with this, girl?”. Gathering courage, May recites a quote from Confucius, “*War disappears with the guidance of humanness, love, and good deeds*’. Remember that, Feng?” Feng looks at her; he does remember. But then he looks back at his fellow Red Guards and takes May’s book from them. He throws the book as far as he can and it lands in the rubble of an abandoned house. “Feng, no!” May cries and pleads with him. “Why are you doing this?” Feng’s expression flickers for a moment, looking at his old friend. But it changes just as quickly and he replies robotically, “To protect Chairman Mao from the enemies of the revolution”. May looks at him, stunned and the Red Guards start to walk away. May calls after Feng. “Remember what Confucius taught? This is not the way! We should be coming together in this time of change, not destroying everything that is beautiful. Even though it is considered ‘old culture’, it’s not evil! We should be trying to live in harmony for the good of our country and for our people!”

She takes a deep breath. “*Let the states of equilibrium and harmony exist in perfection, and a happy order will prevail throughout heaven and earth, and all things will be nourished and flourish*”. Feng stops at that, recognizing the Confucian lesson on harmony they read when they were younger. He walks back over towards May. “I seem to have forgotten what really matters,” he says solemnly. “We can look to Confucius during this time of change, instead of trying to destroy the traditions of our country,” May replies hopefully. Most of the Red Guards keep walking away, but some stay behind. “Can you read more, May?” One asks, shyly. They all huddle in the rubble of the abandoned school, listening to the teachings of Confucius. Later, they remember these virtues and lessons when facing the changes of the revolution and try to continue living in harmony.

By the end of the Cultural Revolution, China had recognized the need for Confucian morals. Harmony is the value that officially linked the Communist Party to Confucius. It had been accepted that the harmonious ideology and society of the ancient people will have a positive influence on the construction of modern society. Over time, the Party came to realize that Confucian values have been utilized to stabilize other Asian countries and increase patriotism. Today, China is acknowledging Confucian teachings more and more, in hopes of adapting them to modern society.