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China Lesson

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CHINA LESSON

What's he thinking, I'm thinking, the real live Panda Bear? As he rides his motor-bike around the ring in the Shanghai Acrobatic Theater where he's a featured performer. With a look, an air, of complacency about him. He's thinking private thoughts. More than his trainer knows, who turns in the center of the ring pointing approvingly at the Panda Bear. The trainer is completely taken in. He believes the applause is for him. But the Panda Bear is nobody's fool. He has an above average IQ and a diploma from Panda Bear School. He has learned his China lesson well. His eyes, and the expression on his face, reveal nothing. Give nothing away. He's keeping it all in, saving it for himself. The Panda Bear has a secret. One night—tonight?—he's going to break the circle with his trainer still pointing approvingly at him and ride his motor-bike out of the theater into the night. He knows exactly what he's doing. Who can stop him? The Panda Bear has done his homework. Has studied geography. The map of China is in his head as he rides south out of Shanghai toward the border crossing at Shenzhen. Panda Bears don't need passports to get into the New Territories and Hong Kong. They just go. He'll take up residence there in a small flat—in Stanley, say—and live a quiet life anonymously. Perhaps he'll have a stall on the waterfront where he'll sell small replicas of himself which he'll draw with brush and ink using his own right paw. Doing a tidy business. Smiling all the while. Never looking back.