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QUARTERLY

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MOTHER WANG

Lo Pin-chi

I

In the hilly part of Southern Shantung Hu-lung Hill does not stand so very high, but its name is very well known, because the militia the people had set up for local defence there was well-organized and very efficient. The bandit-like troops of the Kuomintang, as well as the "Home Guards" hired by the landlords, gave the hill a wide berth. Even wolves did not dare show their noses in the date groves around the place. In the dead of winter, whether it was in the small town south of the hill, or in the market-place in the valley north of it, whenever one met a militiaman with a gun over his shoulder and a dead fox dangling from his grip, one would know without asking that this man was from Hu-lung Hill.

Nowadays Hu-lung Hill is known to everybody because the mutual-aid team at Big Stone Bay works so well. It owns the biggest flock of sheep, gathers the biggest harvests and its members lead the best life.

In the winter of 1951, when this team put up a building for a busy-season crèche, the tales about it among the people at the foot of the mountain were many. Some said this building was like one on a beautiful picture. Some said it was even grander than the Catholic church in the town south of the mountain.

In reality, the busy-season crèche of the Big Stone Bay mutual-aid team consists of two rooms only. The wall base is built of white stone. The upper part is made of red bricks that form a design. There are big windows facing south with glass panes to let in the sunlight. Though it has a thatched roof, in its environment it really does stand out.

II

People from the foot of Hu-lung Hill say that the building is nice; but the people from all the villages on the hill praise Mother Wang, who is the head, whenever the crèche is mentioned.

Everyone who passes Big Stone Bay on his way to market knows

Mother Wang. Mother Wang is always surrounded by a group of children, like a hen by her chicks. In spring, they play under the big locust trees. In summer, they gather mushrooms in the woods. Any child wandering away too far is immediately called back by Mother Wang, who treats her wards like a hen clucking away at her brood.

Mother Wang keeps the children of the crèche clean and tidy. Whoever sees them says they are very much like the nice little boys and girls on New Year pictures. Their cloth shoes are mended so that the patches look like specially embroidered patterns. Their apron frocks and split trousers are washed everyday. Mother Wang is not paid for all this extra work, but she does it anyway because she likes to work and takes pride in a job well done, and because she loves the children. When a young mother brings a child in tears to the crèche, Mother Wang will ask again and again: "Who has beaten the child? Why?" and be very unhappy until the child's mother promises to do better next time.

Needless to say, all the women in the mutual-aid team have the greatest respect for Mother Wang. When they go to the vegetable garden to dig up onions for their own use, they never forget to pull up a few more for Mother Wang. When they make cakes on festival days, a couple or three are set aside for Mother Wang. And, of course, Mother Wang doesn't have to grind the grain or fetch water herself.

Mother Wang often says: "Kindness can only be repaid with kindness! The members of the team do right by me, an old, poor widow, so I must do right by their children who are sent to this crèche. And we all must do right by our Chairman Mao Tse-tung who has been doing so much for us."

Mother Wang is close on sixty. Her hair is entirely white and her face is covered with wrinkles. But her teeth are in very good condition, and her eyes, like two pools among the rocks, shine clear and bright, and full of energy and spirit. When she laughs, she sounds like a young woman, and the ear-rings she wears, big as the knockers on a door, shake merrily.

III

Formerly, Mother Wang was quite a different person, rather like a frost-covered blade of grass, withered and drooping. Her pitch-black eyes were sullen and lustreless, like those of a clay idol. From her husband's death thirteen years ago, her only clothes, summer and winter alike, were a padded jacket and a pair of lined trousers, made of black cotton cloth and covered over with patches.

Mother Wang's only property was two *mou* of barren land banked up with stones on a slope of Big Stone Bay; her only family left was a daughter married to a young peasant in Gingko-tree Village, eight *li* away.

Mother Wang had to rely on her son-in-law to plough for her in the spring and to harvest for her in the autumn. For the one he had to bring his plough and animal, for the other push his wheelbarrow all the way from Gingko-tree Village to Big Stone Bay. While Mother Wang's husband was still alive, he used to go out of their hilly area to sell dates. When he died, all he left her from that trade were two pairs of big baskets. For the fodder for her son-in-law's mule, she had to rely on her neighbours to help her out.

Year after year, her son-in-law could come to help her only after he had finished working on his own land; so, by the time Mother Wang began to sow, other people's fields had already put out shoots half an inch tall. Other families did their work in the fields according to wind and weather. Mother Wang had to do her work when man and animal power was available to her. Although Mother Wang was by no means lazy or extravagant, yet what she reaped from her plot of land every year was less than the persimmons one could get to dry and preserve from two trees, and she usually had to live in her daughter's family four months out of the year.

Kuei-chieh, Mother Wang's daughter, was intelligent; she had capable hands and a strong mind of her own. She did embroidery and all her other work so promptly and well that, in her father-in-law's sight, she was far above the other young women among his family relations. But he was very stingy. Every time Mother Wang came to stay with her daughter, there was oil neither for cooking nor for the lamp in the house, because the old man would not buy any when he went to market. Kuei-chieh had to embroider pillow cases and slippers at night to earn some extra money to buy these things; besides, she was afraid all the time that her mother might slip up on something and people would talk. So she kept watching the old man for every change of mood and went out of her way to curry his favour.

Mother Wang, being also of a strong mind, could not help noticing her daughter's worries. Therefore, as long as she could find at least some wild vegetables for food, she would not go to stay with her daughter; and when she did go, she worked hard all day long. In the daytime, she went out to gather firewood, carrying her small granddaughter on her back; in the evening, she washed clothes, cut hay and fed the horse. When she was so tired that she felt her back was breaking, she would say that she must have caught a chill but that it was really nothing of any importance. Still her daughter's father-in-law never turned to her, never listened to what she said. He seemed to be both blind and deaf to her existence.

"What do you think, Kuei-chieh?" Mother Wang sometimes asked her daughter secretly. "Shouldn't I better go back to Big Stone Bay?"

"What are you going to live on when you get back there?"

"Well, then I might stay here a few more days, I suppose. We'll see when it's time to cut the wheat."

"Why don't you want to stay?" Kuei-chieh would sigh and ask in a whisper: "What's the matter? What did my father-in-law say again?"

"Oh, nothing!" Mother Wang said, also with a sigh. But sometimes she would add, "If only he wouldn't sulk so much!"

"That's only because the weather has been so dry and we need rain. The old man is always moody and gloomy like that when the weather is not right."

But Kuei-chieh's husband was quite different from his father. Tall and big, he towered above people in a crowd, and was generous and straightforward.

He often said to Mother Wang when she was staying there: "Don't hurry home! Stay here a little longer. Especially when I go hunting, there'll be enough to eat."

Kuei-chieh's husband enjoyed climbing around the hills and mountains, but he was impatient of work in the fields. Mother Wang's two *mou* of stony land annoyed him especially.

"One little piece of land on top, another tiny strip down a hollow, how can you jump from one to the other? What a nuisance to work on such fields!"

It is easy to imagine what Mother Wang's feelings were in those days. Now, whenever someone mentions her past life, she says: "If I hadn't thought of my daughter and granddaughter, I would have hanged myself so long ago that the rope would by now have rotted away! What was there for me to live for?"

When the land reform was about to begin, Kuei-chieh's father-in-law spoke to Mother Wang for the first time: "Are you going to ask for land when you go back to Big Stone Bay? Do you think without anybody to help you, without any horse, with just your bare hands, you'll be able to reap anything?"

Mother Wang smiled as she answered: "Even if I don't ask for land, I'll get the two *mou* of fruit trees back. These trees were in the Wang family for generations. The landlord snatched them from us for interest payment. I can't go on living on my relatives the year round, all my life, can I?"

Anger shone in her eyes as she spoke. What she left unsaid was: "Don't you think I can work my land without your mule?"

For three years after that, Mother Wang did not set foot in Gingko-tree Village to see her daughter. Not because she had a grudge against Kuei-chieh's father-in-law, but because she had joined the local women's association and was kept busy with meetings and planning, making shoes for the army, and looking after the small children for the village women,

in exchange for the work others did for her. So busy all the time that she felt nearly out of breath!

Mother Wang was allotted eight *mou* of rocky land, four *mou* of fruit trees, five goats and two sheep. Under the labour exchange system, other members of the Big Stone Bay mutual-aid team till her land and tend her flock while she takes care of the children's crèche. This way she earns more than enough to pay for the use of draught animals and for all the work others do for her. People say that Mother Wang is happy because her life is so much better now. She feels that her happiness is due not so much to that, but because now she can do work worth exchanging for others'. She no longer has to ask anybody's favour for the use of his animal, and she is no longer under any obligation to anyone for working on her land. And yet, the grain stands on her eight *mou* just as tall, thick and heavy as on the fields of the well-to-do households of the village. She can hold up her head now! In the world she now lives in, she becomes more energetic as time goes on, and there is a measure of pride in her happiness.

When the crèche was formally opened, she said to all the people present at the ceremony: "I'm heart and soul for our mutual-aid team in Big Stone Bay. Before Chairman Mao's picture here I swear that, although I'm an old woman, I shall look after your children just as you take care of my land, and as I used to look after my own granddaughter. I promise I shan't favour some and neglect others. One and all, they are the children of our team!"

To this very day, she has kept her promise.

IV

One fine day after the autumn harvest, Mother Wang at last asked for two days' leave from the crèche to go to Gingko-tree Village to see her daughter. A few months ago, during the wheat harvest, Kuei-chieh had sent Mother Wang a message by word of mouth that she had had another child, a boy this time. Mother Wang was surprised at her own indifference. How did it happen that she had not once left Big Stone Bay in three years? For the past years, she had scarcely had a thought of her granddaughter. Her relationship with Kuei-chieh seemed to have cooled down, and yet she had no other close relation besides her daughter. But, at the time the message came, her mutual-aid team was kept busy with killing crop pests. Mother Wang did not find the time to go to Gingko-tree Village herself. So she asked someone else to take her daughter the usual gift of noodles and a basketful of eggs for the happy event. She was thinking of going when the ploughing and sowing for the autumn crops would be done. But then the mutual-aid team was busy sinking new wells to fight a sudden drought. There was never a

day when no child was sent to the crèche. When one unit of the team had some free time, another unit would be busier than ever. Only now, after the harvest, did people really have the time to look after their own children, so Mother Wang could get away.

The day before she went, she made some cakes of fine white flour in preparation for her visit. Also, she had asked someone to buy for her a piece of red cloth in the market-place. In twenty years this was the first time that she went to Gingko-tree Village carrying gifts. No wonder she covered the wicker basket which held the cakes very solemnly with the red cloth and put on her blue cotton jacket which she usually wore only on the Spring Festival.

One of the village women teased her: "Why, Auntie, the older you grow, the fonder you grow of decking yourself out!"

But Mother Wang answered her rather tartly: "After Kuei-chieh's father died, I wore the same black jacket for thirteen years, patched and torn again, torn and patched again. Now I just can't stand the sight of black cloth!"

But then it seemed that this one remark dispelled all the annoyance stored up through the years. Her eyes began to twinkle and she laughed out loud.

Big Stone Bay is situated at the top of Hu-lung Hill, but the top is sunk in, so that the village resembles a magpie's nest. The sky above appears as a disk, like the rim of a well. Fruit trees grow here and there around the edges.

Mother Wang walked through a grove of date-trees till she came to a rocky stretch. A flock of sheep were cropping the grass among the rocks. The father of one of her wards in the crèche, a veteran guerrilla fighter with a bullet wound in his leg, was sitting on a rock, with a newborn lamb in his arms.

Mother Wang hailed him, smilingly, asking him whose ewe had lambed and learned it was her own.

"Really?" Mother Wang shouted with joy. "If you hadn't taken such good care of my ewe, there would be no lamb now. How can I thank you enough?"

"Just thank the ewe for lambing! She really is doing well. Anyway, you take such good care of my little boy. For two whole years he hasn't had the slightest thing wrong with him. That squares us, doesn't it? You're on your way to Gingko-tree Village now, eh?"

"Yes, I haven't been there for three whole years!" Mother Wang said: "Who knows me knows I really didn't have time to go. But who doesn't know me may say I'm looking down my nose at my relatives because I am better off now."

"Now things are different for you. Now you can afford to have Kuei-chieh and your granddaughter come and stay with you for a while. Kuei-

chieh hasn't been home in a dozen years! I'm not sure I'll know her when I see her."

"Ask them over—Kuei-chieh has a daughter and a son now. What shall I do, then? Still take care of the children at the crèche or stay at home to look after my own daughter and grandchildren? Let's wait until the next Spring Festival when I'll have time."

While she was talking, she took the lamb and, weighing it in her hands, said: "It's less than five catties!"

The veteran guerrilla fighter, however, was certain it weighed more than six.

Mother Wang asked him then: "Your boy is big enough now. Won't you send him to winter school?"

But the boy's father replied: "He is just a peasant boy. What need has he for going to winter school?"

Mother Wang was highly displeased and reproached him: "How can you be so backward in your ideas! I think you are all wrong. Our mutual-aid team will develop into a producers' cooperative and we'll go on to socialism then. I won't allow you to hinder the boy's progress!"

Finally the veteran guerrilla fighter smiled and said: "All right, we'll see next year."

Mother Wang said: "That's sensible too. If he begins going to school when he is a little older, it may be better for him, so he won't tire himself out and get ill."

She left him then and walked on, thinking that, since she had five goats, two sheep and now two lambs born within one year, next time she went to Gingko-tree Village she would take one of the ewes as a present to her daughter, so that Kuei-chieh could start a flock of her own and put some extra money by.

Gingko-tree Village lies on the southern slope of Hu-lung Hill, facing the sun. Villagers go from there to market in the little town on the plain on one side of the mountain, while the people from Big Stone Bay and several other villages on the northern slope of Hu-lung Hill go to market in the valley on the other side of the mountain. Though Gingko-tree Village and Big Stone Bay are only eight *li* apart, the two villages belong to different counties, so the villagers seldom meet.

Mother Wang really had no idea how things had turned out these three years for her daughter, what had happened in Kuei-chieh's village, whether her father-in-law was still making long faces all the time, grumbling even because his granddaughter ate too much for his liking. But she was pulled out of her thoughts by a little boy who was helping his grandfather dig up peanuts. The six-year-old, the oldest child in the crèche, ran up to her, insisting on carrying her basket for her a little way towards the other side of Hu-lung Hill.

There, the sky opened wide over their heads, and the plain at the foot of the mountain stretched as far as they could see. The pine-trees

on the plain looked like small mushrooms from where they stood, and the river running through it reflected the sunlight dazzlingly. The shadow of the mountain lay across the ground. How free and happy Mother Wang felt! She promised the little boy that, next spring, she would take all the children of the crèche to the persimmon grove beyond their village to pick herbs. Then she gave the boy one of the cakes in her basket, told him not to play around but to help his grandfather, and went on her way, without stopping for a rest. The distance of eight *li* seemed to have shortened to only four. She hadn't been on this road for three years. Now the small hawthorn shrubs she remembered were fully grown. The stone walls banking up the fields on the hilly land, which had been crumbling for the past twenty years, were newly repaired. This proved to Mother Wang's satisfaction that the mutual-aid teams of other villages were also working well. Walking along, she soon caught sight of the gingko tree after which her daughter's village was named midway on the slope of Hu-lung Hill.

V

The courtyard was very quiet within its stone wall enclosure; Mother Wang looked in vain to see her daughter around. A cock was perching on the millstone on one leg. Several hens were roosting under the eaves, sunning themselves. Kuei-chieh's father-in-law was alone in the yard, while Kuei-chieh and the old man's other daughter-in-law were at a meeting of their unit in the mutual-aid team. The old man was fixing up a harness, crouching on the ground. The stone walls and the mill were exactly the same as they had been three years before. But Mother Wang now felt that the yard seemed to have become smaller.

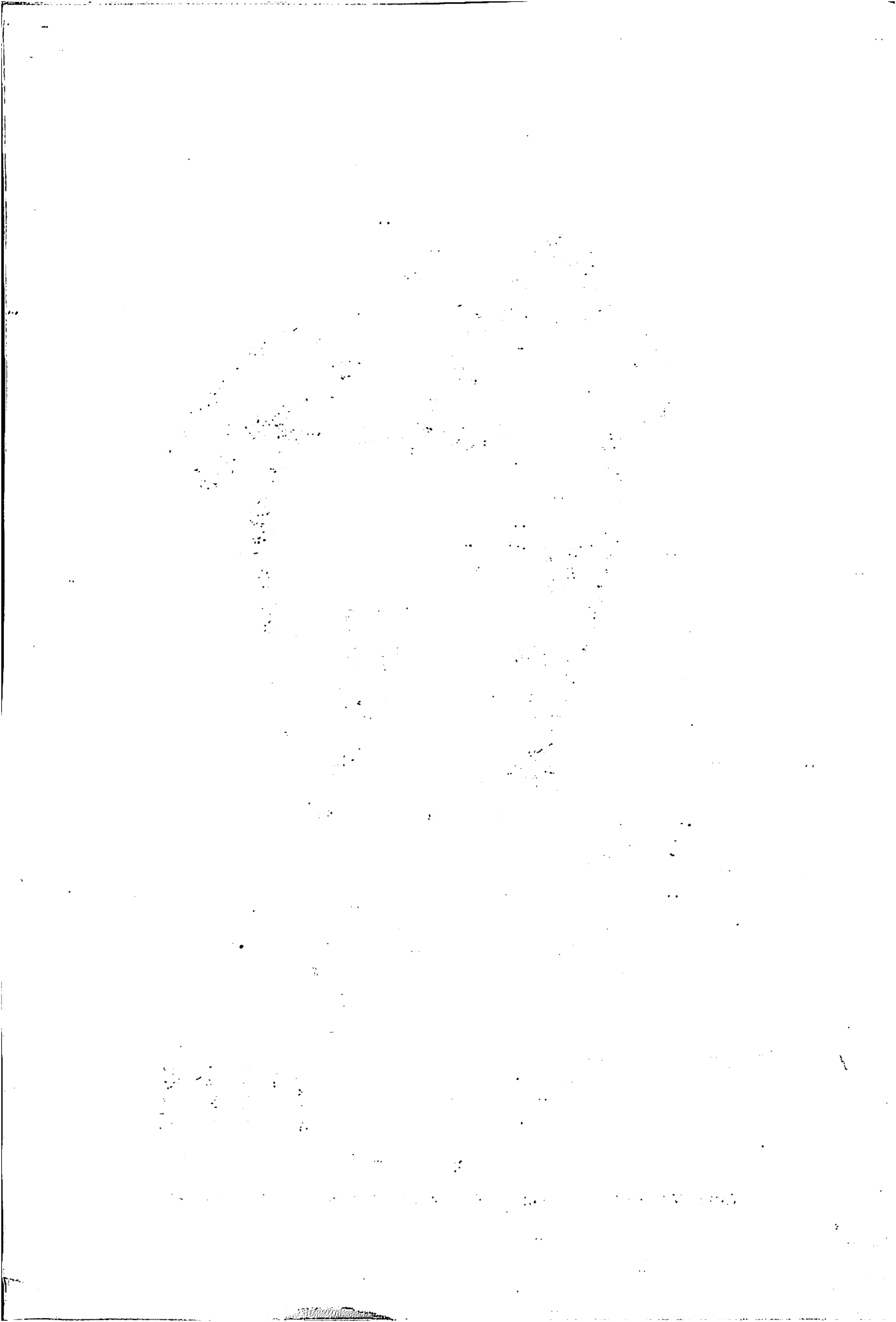
When the old man recognized Mother Wang, he greeted her with such obvious pleasure and sincerity, as if she were a very special guest. Mother Wang's first impression of him was that he seemed to have shrunk in size, although he did not appear any older. There were holes in his sleeves and a blue patch showed on his black trousers. Mother Wang gathered that the old man was still as stingy as ever and that her daughter was not taking very good care of him.

"Mother Wang!" he called, as soon as he had taken the nails out of his mouth with which he was repairing the harness. When she offered the basket with wheat-cakes, he said: "Why did you take all this trouble? Isn't your coming to see us enough? Why bother to bring presents?"

But Mother Wang replied: "These few cakes I made myself, they're nothing to talk about. How have you been getting on these three years?"

"Quite well really," said the old man. Then he sighed and added:

TANG WEN-HSUAN: Going to Winter School with Her Mother-in-law



"What else can I say? We did have a drought last year. The old man up there in heaven didn't give us a harvest, so what could we do?"

"Didn't your mutual-aid team sink wells?"

"We hadn't joined the team last year, Mother Wang. All through the winter, your daughter and granddaughter kept blaming me. This year, I told them I would not make any decisions for the family. I didn't run things well, did I? All the young people are doing their best to go ahead. I cannot catch up with them, but at least I shouldn't be a stumbling-block in their way, should I, Mother Wang?"

For the first time in thirteen years since her husband's death, Mother Wang heard the old man speak to her in such friendly tones. She thought, "How nice it would be, if Kuei-chieh's father were still alive now!"

The old man went even further. "You are well known on Hu-lung Hill for your ability, Mother Wang!" he said.

But Mother Wang just laughed at him: "An old woman like me? What ability have I got? Isn't it the mutual-aid team in my village that makes life happier for me?"

"Your daughter heard long ago how much better your life had become and wanted to go and live with you, especially when we didn't have enough to eat this spring! But I said as long as we could manage somehow; she'd better not. You get your crops through labour exchange, don't you? So they are not easily gotten, either."

Mother Wang said: "I had no idea that you were short of food this spring. I had eight *tou* of wheat and about thirty catties of cotton to spare." Then she added: "Let them come to my place at the Spring Festival. Our mutual-aid team has reared thirteen pigs. We'll kill one at the end of this year and divide it, so they can have some of the meat, too."

Mother Wang kept a look-out for her daughter while she was talking. Every time there was a noise in the yard, she thought it was Kuei-chieh coming back, and she was getting more impatient to see her all the time. But Kuei-chieh did not appear until it was almost noon, carrying her baby in her arms. Kuei-chieh, more matronly now, looked as neat and tidy as ever. The black jacket and blue trousers she wore were very plain. When she entered the yard, her high spirits shone in her bright, black eyes.

"Oh! I've been wondering who is here!" she cried out with joy and surprise at the sight of her mother. "Did you lose your way and get here by mistake? Otherwise how come you remember me and my children?"

Mother Wang looked at Kuei-chieh's father-in-law while she said: "Listen to my daughter talking! How lucky I have only one. If she had two or three sisters, I wonder what she would think of me." And, turning to Kuei-chieh, she added: "You know we're all members of a

mutual-aid team. So how could I run off on my own, as in the old days? Where is my granddaughter?"

Then she took her grandson in her arms, asked what his name was and whether Kuei-chieh had enough milk to feed him. But, somehow, Mother Wang suddenly remembered the little boy who had carried her basket part of her way. He was too fond of playing, of climbing trees and catching birds. Wouldn't he lose his way outside the village?

"What good wind blew Mother Wang here, at last?" Kuei-chieh's sister-in-law had just come into the yard too. "No wonder the magpie cried early this morning, here is the guest!"

"Just look at my mother!" Kuei-chieh said to the women of the neighbourhood who had followed her sister-in-law into the yard. "Putting on light-blue clothes at her age!"

Mother Wang protested: "Since it's neither bright red nor light green, what's so strange about it? Is light blue for you young people only? In Big Stone Bay we aren't old-fashioned like you people in Gingko-tree Village!"

Kuei-chieh said: "Of course, we've all heard that my mother's village is a model to all others! Your crèche is supposed to look like a palace!"

Mother Wang chuckled. "Isn't that the truth? Even newspapers have written about us. And our young women don't go around in black cotton jackets any more like you do."

It was Kuei-chieh's turn now to protest. "These are just my work clothes. I am not going visiting like this. You needn't think we here haven't got dresses made of light-blue cloth as well!"

But Mother Wang explained to them: "Our young women wear blue cotton jackets at home only. When they go out to visit, they all wear coloured prints."

Kuei-chieh's father-in-law interrupted here to say: "Your daughter has a good pair of hands, Mother Wang! This year she earned more than anyone else in our mutual-aid team. You needn't blame her just because she likes plain colours better than gaudy ones with designs."

This talk and banter was carried on amidst the laughter of all the women of the neighbourhood. Mother Wang in her new clothes talked to them all cheerfully, with a happy, contented, and joyful light in her eyes. She forgot her worry about the little boy she had met on the road. She forgot that she hadn't yet seen her granddaughter. She was wrapped up in all the merry, friendly warmth around her, a feeling entirely different from any she had ever had in Gingko-tree Village before, but quite similar to how she felt among the members of her own mutual-aid team at Big Stone Bay. She was content. Before she came, it had seemed to her she had a lot of urgent things to do at her daughter's place. But now, so soon after her arrival, she felt all her business here was done. She had seen her daughter and grandson. There was only

one more thing to do—to have a private talk with Kuei-chieh. But the neighbours seemed in no mood to leave to give Mother Wang such a chance. On the contrary, more and more curious people crowded into the yard. Some lifted the red cloth from the basket and admired Mother Wang's skill in making these cakes. Some were amazed at the good life she was now obviously leading. They praised her for her ability to work, and said that she had become quite a different person, so that they nearly did not know her. Mother Wang had to remind them again and again: "It's only because the mutual-aid team gives us the chance to plan, all of us together, otherwise how could I even dream of having a blue cotton jacket like this!"

And so it went on till late in the evening, when finally Mother Wang could have her heart-to-heart talk with Kuei-chieh.

Hsiang-hsiang, a girl of nine now, tried to make her grandmother tell her a story. But although Mother Wang liked the child so very much, she did not heed this request. Mother Wang had more important things on her mind. For instance: Did Kuei-chieh get along with her sister-in-law? How did the mutual-aid team in Gingko-tree Village work? How did they figure their workdays and pay? Why hadn't Kuei-chieh come out in the land reform and done her part? Kuei-chieh told her, to her amazement, that the chairman of the women's association of Gingko-tree Village was a woman who had suffered the usual cruelty and oppression meted out to a child-bride, a woman who used to be dumb in the presence of any stranger, and was now able to hold her own in making a report to a meeting of district delegates. The chairman of the women's association in Big Stone Bay was the same type of person, but that this was true also of another village astonished Mother Wang. When they finally blew out the lamp, the little girl Hsiang-hsiang had been asleep for hours, leaning against Mother Wang. The autumn moon shone brightly through the window. But Mother Wang was still full of questions, about her son-in-law who had gone to Korea with the Chinese People's Volunteers to fight U.S. aggression, and whether he wrote home often.

At last, Mother Wang asked in a whisper: "Is your father-in-law fond of the baby? Does he show his feelings?"

"He often takes the baby in his arms," Kuei-chieh replied. "Since you didn't ask any more for the use of his mule after the land reform, and when he heard that you had joined the mutual-aid team, he has been treating me quite differently."

Mother Wang said: "His mind is that of a rich peasant, though the life he leads is only that of a middle peasant! He only cares for himself and never thinks about others. After all, I worked for the food he gave me, cutting grass, gathering firewood. . . . Did I ever rest a single day? Of course, before the Communists came, I didn't know that I was living

by my own labour, I believed myself I was eating his food and giving nothing in return!"

"Last year we hadn't joined the mutual-aid team. Then we heard that your village had a very good harvest, so the old man hinted I should take the little girl and go to live with you. But I told him: 'My mother has suffered enough during half of her life. Just now she's only beginning to have some grain in her bins. How can I rob her of that?' I would have liked to tell him, too: 'In a year or two, I'll certainly take my child and go live at my mother's place for a while, without your telling me to.' The old man surely has the ideas of a rich peasant in his head!"

Mother Wang sighed. She felt she knew now all she wanted to know, as if she had come on this visit just to learn all this. But even so, she didn't sleep well the rest of the night. She had the crèche in Big Stone Bay on her mind and she was also afraid the little boy she had met on the road might have played around too long and lost his way.

She tossed and turned till Kuei-chieh asked her: "What are you worrying about so?"

Mother Wang told her and added: "As the head of the crèche, shouldn't I worry?"

The cock crowed twice. But it was still dark outside. The wind was blowing hard. Mother Wang could hear dry branches being blown off and falling to the ground.

"I hope it's not going to rain!"

"Why won't you stay for a few days longer? You don't really mean to go back today?"

But Mother Wang said: "The persimmons are all dried by now. I don't know what our team has decided to do about them. If the men want to take the dried persimmons down the mountain, we women must get busy to prepare the flax for stringing the fruit. How can I stay away and delay the work?"

Kuei-chieh showed herself annoyed with her mother for the first time. "But you asked for two days' leave, didn't you?"

Mother Wang said: "If it rains, it'll be difficult for me to walk back."

But Kuei-chieh had an answer to that, too: "If it rains, our mutual-aid team will find a way to get you back to Big Stone Bay, even if we have to carry you in a sedan-chair all the way!"

Mother Wang still was fussing: "I just came to see how you people were. There is nothing for me to do here. But everyone in our team is busy right now. I'm so used to my work at the crèche, I'm restless when I'm idle."

In the morning, the old man wanted to go to market to buy some meat in honour of Mother Wang. But she insisted on going back to

Big Stone Bay right then and there, no matter how Kuei-chieh and her little girl tried to keep her a little longer.

Before she left, Mother Wang told Kuei-chieh she should talk her father-in-law over a bit more and also that she should mend his torn clothes and take better care of him. Kuei-chieh said: "I've just been too busy with other things to get around to that, that's all."

Finally, Mother Wang told Kuei-chieh to send the little girl Hsiang-hsiang to winter school and that she would provide the money for her granddaughter's schooling.

So Mother Wang left. But for quite a long time she remained the topic of conversation between Kuei-chieh and all the women around her. They kept talking about her clothes, how youthful she sounded when she laughed. . . . They were all agreed:

"She's like a fresh peony, just in bloom, at sixty years of age!"

Translated by Tso Cheng

TEMPEST

SHIH KUO

There was only one inch left of the last of the incense sticks by which time was measured in the village night school. Yang Chun-mei, seated in the rear row, was quite upset when she saw how little remained. From its red glowing tip, soft ashes dropped continually. . . . She hadn't heard anything in tonight's class. The teacher's slow tones sounded to her only like so much droning. Every once in a while, she tried to listen, but after a few sentences, the tangled skein of her own thoughts drove all else from her mind. Then the droning went on. . . .

In her studies, as in her farm work, usually she was right up on top. But ever since that talk with her mother a few evenings ago, she hadn't been able to concentrate. It affected everything she did. Hoeing weeds, she kept hitting the rape-seed sprouts. A few times she nearly hoed her toes off. At night school, the teacher's words had become a meaningless buzz.

The incense stick burned out. Chun-mei was startled to hear the class reciting in loud unison the whole evening's lesson. They'd be dismissed in a minute. She sat up straight. First I'll get this much clear, then we'll see! she said to herself firmly, cutting the tangled skein clean through with one sharp chop. She tore a strip of paper from her notebook and scribbled rapidly: "Must talk to you. Will wait at the big cedar." While the other students were busy getting their books together, preparing their torches and lanterns, she rolled the note into a ball and tossed it on to the desk of Chu Hsiao-chang, two rows ahead. Without giving him another glance, she slipped out of the classroom door.

Night school was conducted in the wings of the ancestral temple of the Yang clan, to which Chun-mei belonged. The temple compound—one storey buildings arranged in a hollow square around a courtyard—was always dark. Even at the height of the day, it was dim and gloomy. Recently, after the wings were given to the night school, they were fixed up a little. Their intricately carved wooden window lattices were changed to a simple design of large squares to allow more light. But the main building was kept locked. Inside were tablets bearing the names of deceased family members. On certain holidays, the departed ancestors

were commemorated by sacrifices and prayers. No one cleaned this building, or looked after it. Abandoned to the rats and the sparrows, to the dust and the spider webs, it stank to high heaven of mildew and damp. An earthen wall, surrounding the compound, had collapsed in several places. Through some openings, paths had already been worn smooth.

It was through one of these breaches that Chun-mei left the compound. She shut her eyes tight, opened them again, then groped her way through a dark thicket. On the other side was a barren slope, and beyond that a stretch of bushes and brambles extending all the way to the top of the hill. At the halfway point stood a big cedar, rearing up among the bushes like an old man surrounded by a flock of children. Here, Chun-mei stopped. Straight down the slope was the big open flat that served as the village market-place. Seating herself on a boulder beneath the tree, she could see torches, in groups of three and four, crossing the flat into the village. A few single torches were sailing like stars through the paddy fields.

Gradually, the torch lights disappeared into the darkness. Chun-mei raised her head and gazed at the star-filled sky. But she wasn't looking at the stars, she was thinking hard—How can a girl say what I want to tell Hsiao-chang. . . . She shivered. These early spring nights were really cold.

Probably about one incense stick later, Hsiao-chang finally arrived. He apologized, explaining that one of their schoolmates had gotten hold of him, and had insisted on seeing him all the way home.

"All right, sit here." Chun-mei slid over to give him half the surface of the boulder. "Do you know why I've asked you to come at this hour of the night?"

"I . . . don't know. . . ."

They had grown up together. When they were small, gathering firewood, cutting grass, picking wild herbs, "playing house" with mud pie "food"—they were always inseparable, like a pair of young swallows. When they were a little older, they fell victims to the identical "fate"—both were forced to work in the house of the same landlord. As comrades in distress, they grew even closer and looked after each other through thick and thin. After liberation, they went through land reform together, and helped form mutual-aid teams among the local peasants. Now in their early twenties, not only was the quiet flowering in their hearts becoming more apparent, but Hsiao-chang had been trying desperately to gather enough courage to speak up. Yet now, when Chun-mei gave him this opening, he couldn't come out with it.

The girl turned to face him. In the bright starlight, she could see his head thrown slightly back; beneath his upswept eyebrows, his eyes were staring at her—thoughtfully, questioningly.

Chun-mei's heart leaped. She wanted to avoid that piercing gaze.

But then she made up her mind. She would speak the words she had prepared, regardless. Only there seemed to be a weight pressing down in her bosom. Her speech and her breathing were very uneven.

"I—I asked you to come, because I wanted to ask you something. You remember the fourteenth, the night the lanterns were lit at the tombs? You came looking for me at my father's tomb. You said you wanted to talk to me. But then you hemmed and hawed and never did speak out. So I'm asking you—what exactly were you trying to say?"

Hsiao-chang's heart began to thump. "That night . . . I was afraid to tell you. . . ."

He had said he wanted to talk to her about something, and had asked her, "Will you let me say it?" She had replied, "If it's something you ought to say, then say it. Otherwise, don't." Her reply seemed to have closed the door on his words. She was afraid she had spoken too sharply.

"Well, what am I—a tiger? I won't bite you. What did you want to say?"

Hsiao-chang hesitated. His heart was beating madly. Funny. Just a paper-thin reserve was holding him back, yet he didn't dare to push through. Under Chun-mei's repeated urgings, he finally began to speak. Only this time, Hsiao-chang, who usually expressed himself so well, was all sputters and stammers.

"I think—you—you're like my older sister. . . . That year we worked for the landlord, you—you saved my life. . . . I've been thinking a lot about this. If I say anything wrong, you can cuss me a little, but you mustn't hold it against me—"

"Aiya!" Chun-mei exploded. She slapped her hand down on the ice-cold boulder. "That kind of talk gives me the creeps! Since being born two months ahead of you makes me an 'older sister,' if you say something wrong it'll just go in one ear and out the other!"

Hsiao-chang paused and got control of himself with an effort. Then, as though preparing to lift a heavy burden, he took a great breath.

"Chun-mei, I'll say it plain, then. We ought to get married. . . ."

Though the night was cold, Chun-mei could feel her face burning. Her heart was pounding as if it wanted to leap right out of her. She suddenly realized that Hsiao-chang had stopped talking, that he seemed to be waiting for her answer. She twisted sideways, her breasts straining against her clothing. To the deep black night sky, she forced out a reply.

"All right, I'll marry you!"

Much to her own surprise, the words virtually leapt from her mouth, as though bounced out by a spring. She didn't dare to look at Hsiao-chang; she didn't know what was his reaction. A faint sound indicated that he had gotten to his feet. Chun-mei couldn't resist turning around. Hsiao-chang was standing before her.

"Chun-mei, thank you!"

At last that's settled, thought Chun-mei, with a sigh of relief. Now that she relaxed she became aware of the biting cold. The swirling night air was like ice-water. Not only were her clothes soaked with the damp, her fingers and the tip of her nose were frozen stiff. The chill was creeping in through her sleeves and other openings in her garments, intent on driving all warmth from her body. Shivering, she noted that Hsiao-chang's clothing was thinner than her own.

"Are you cold, Hsiao-chang?"

"I don't feel it!"

The boy was really impervious to cold. His eyes were fixed on the stars shining between the branches of the big cedar. The stars were laughing, and his thoughts were running far into the future. . . .

Infected by his rapt, dreamy expression, Chun-mei was laved by a surge of warmth. But then she recalled the pitfalls that lay ahead of them. This was not yet the time for joy. She stood up abruptly.

"Hsiao-chang, do you know why, even though I'm a girl, I forgot all about face and called you to talk in such a hurry?"

Actually, he hadn't the faintest idea. Hsiao-chang made no reply. Just as Chun-mei was about to explain, a stone came bounding down from behind the big cedar, ripped through a patch of brambles and struck a sapling so hard that it vibrated. The startled youngsters jumped to their feet. Chun-mei whirled around and shouted towards the dense growth on the upper slope.

"Who's there? Speak up if you've got anything to say! Your sneaky tricks don't scare anyone! I've been a slavey to a landlord, I've seen every dirty trick in the bag! A little spit'll cure a hornet sting. It wouldn't need that much to take care of you!"

Hsiao-chang rushed out and searched through the bushes. But the intruder was gone. There was a crackling of snapped twigs in the distance and the sound of someone running. When Hsiao-chang returned to the cedar, he found Chun-mei seated and composed.

"Never mind about him," she said. "We've got important things to discuss! If he wants to come back and listen, let him. I don't care if the whole village hears!"

She had thought it all over. Unless she was willing to be led around by the nose, this question of her marrying Hsiao-chang would have to be battled out in the village.

Chun-mei related the facts to him simply: Her mother had told her that her marriage had already been arranged. On the recommendation of Yang the Elder, senior member of the Yang clan, and with "Glib Lips," proprietress of the wine and grocery shop, serving as matchmaker, Chun-mei had been promised to Tseng the Pedlar. Tseng was distantly related to the Yang clan. Though called "the Pedlar," he was primarily a peasant. On market days, he kept a small stand where he sold needles and thread and the like. What he couldn't dispose of in the local market,

he occasionally would pack on his back and take to fairs in neighbouring villages. Tseng was a simple, honest fellow, well over forty. He had high cheekbones; deep wrinkles, like tropical fish tails, fanned out from the corners of his eyes.

Hsiao-chang remembered that he'd often seen Tseng calling at Chun-mei's house. The boy's throat suddenly seemed choked with a wad of cotton; he couldn't breathe. After a long pause, gasping slightly, he asked:

"What does your mother say about all this?"

"My Ma is very queer. She seems to approve, and yet she doesn't. Everytime he's mentioned, she sighs. Maybe she's in favour of it, but she's never really pressed me. Maybe she's against it, yet she's always saying what a good man he is. Last night, I got angry and asked her why he keeps after me. She said, 'Puppets don't move unless somebody pulls the strings. You shouldn't blame him!' . . ."

A torch appeared on the market grounds at the foot of the hill. Its flame waving in the dark, the torch drew closer. Hsiao-chang leapt to his feet.

"Listen! He's calling you!"

Chun-mei paused. A long drawn-out cry floated up through the night. Three clear words—"Yang. . . Chun. . . mei. . . ." The cry stabbed her like a needle. Trembling all over, she looked at Hsiao-chang.

"The trouble is about to start!" he said through clenched teeth.

Sharply alert, Chun-mei peered at the surrounding darkness. "You better go. From now on, whatever happens, I'll meet it first. Just so long as you back me up! . . ."

Hsiao-chang's eyes flashed and his upswept brows arched high. "Don't worry about me, Chun-mei. Even if it were a millstone's iron eye, I'd come through for you somehow! We'll take up our marriage with the Youth League, we'll talk to the village administration office about it. If they can't settle it, we'll go to the district government!"

Chun-mei skirted the left side of temple grove and descended the slope. There, on the road leading to the village, she met the torch bearer. A thousand catty stone dropped from her heart when she saw his face in the light of the torch. It was Yang Li-ho. He was distantly related to Chun-mei. Although rather old-fashioned, because of his wife's affection for Chun-mei and her widowed mother, he took a great interest in their affairs. Chun-mei called him and his wife "Uncle" and "Aunt."

"Imp of a wench, wilful girl!" he shouted. "Where have you been running around in the cold so late at night!"

Holding his torch higher, he looked her over. Chun-mei was afraid he would notice that her clothes were wet with dew, and her heart beat fast. Instead, he seized her arm and began pulling her towards the village.

"Wilful girl, can't you hurry! If it weren't for your aunt's habit

of going to bed late, your mother would have hung herself dead by now!"

One wave had just subsided, and the next one swelled forward. With a cry, Chun-mei tottered, bumping into Li-ho's torch and shaking loose a shower of sparks. Li-ho held her firmly as she stamped and wailed.

"Ma, Ma! What's been happening to you!"

Li-ho knocked the ashes of his torch off against the side of a paddy terrace wall, then waved the torch vigorously to revive its flame.

"Let's go, Chun-mei! A boil must be lanced, an illness must be treated. Just crying won't do any good. . . . Use your head a little. As sure as there's a sky above, the people's government won't let a person be forced to suicide without getting to the bottom of the matter!"

This reminder shook Chun-mei back to her senses. She flew down the road towards her home. Li-ho, waving his torch, hurried after her.

Chun-mei lived in a house that faced the fields, with its back to the street along which the village stretched, near the exit of the market grounds. The walls of the house were made of hard-packed earth. On either side of it, the villagers kept little vegetable gardens. There were also small fruit trees in the gardens and one tall shade tree that towered ten feet higher than the roof of the house. It was from this tree that Chun-mei's mother had hung herself.

Li-ho's torch burned out even before he and Chun-mei reached the market grounds exit. He tossed the stump away and hastened after his niece. The frosty grass crunching beneath their feet was slippery, making them slow their pace somewhat. Nearing the house, they heard voices coming from beneath the dark big tree.

"Hmph! Imagine a woman as old as that having an affair!" someone was saying in a squeaky falsetto.

Li-ho was very annoyed. "Glib Lips, a woman as old as you ought to have a more generous tongue."

From the shadows, a man's voice replied, "It isn't Glib Lips, it's me. I may be only one of the younger generation, but if I had found her, my hands wouldn't have been generous either—I'd have hung her up a little higher!"

The speaker was Yang Pen-tsai, a rascal and loafer. Of him, people said, "If there was excitement in ten places, he'd be in nine of them." His words infuriated Li-ho.

"You dirty dog! Your lazy skin ought to be peeled from your bones!"

With only a glance at the shadows, Chun-mei rushed to the house. There was a babel of voices at the door. Torches and lanterns cast fitful gleams; people were moving in and out. Some had their jackets draped around their shoulders. Apparently they had gotten out of bed and had come running over when they heard the news. Chun-mei didn't stop

to see who they were, but hurried into the narrow bedroom to the right of the main room. Her mother was lying on the bed.

The moment she entered, many people began noisily questioning her, demanding to know where she'd been. Chun-mei ignored them all, her gaze riveted on her mother's face. Her mother was lying limply, her eyes closed. There was an ugly red welt on the right side of her neck. Her sharp bony face was bloodless, like a drab leaf.

All the way home, Chun-mei had been unable to restrain her tears. But the vicious words in the garden had dried them up.

"Ma!" she cried hoarsely. "Ma! How could you want to die? Let me die for you! Years of disaster we came through all right. What could be worse than those landlords and Kuomintang officials to make you do a thing like this!"

Her mother opened her lids a trifle. Her eyes moved, and two big teardrops rolled down her cheeks. Just then, someone gripped Chun-mei by the shoulder. She turned to see a strong, dark-visaged woman standing behind her, holding a bowl. This was her aunt—Li-ho's wife—a very competent person. The aunt's maiden name was Li, and after liberation she insisted on being called by that, rather than by her husband's family name of Yang. She was a leader of the village women's association.

"Child," the aunt reproved, "your mother's just quieted down, and you're upsetting her again!" Then, leaning over the bed, she urged, "Sister, drink a little brown sugar water and ginger."

Several women helped the widow sit up. After two sips, she looked at her daughter, and her tears began to gush like popped beans. Chun-mei dried her mother's eyes with a face towel. In a small voice, she queried:

"Ma, after all, why did you do it?"

Aunt Li tapped Chun-mei on the arm and led her outside the back door. After looking around in the darkness, she scolded Chun-mei quietly.

"Stupid girl! Can't you understand? How can your mother talk to you in front of all those people?"

Chun-mei's right hand was clutching her forehead, her fingers kneading it fretfully.

"Ma was never willing to tell me anything. She kept it all in. There wasn't a thing I could do about it!"

Aunt Li thought a moment. "You can't blame her. You're an unmarried girl and your mother is sensitive and timid. Even with me, she sometimes says only half of what's on her mind."

Voices were heard on the garden path, and Aunt Li stopped talking. By then, the pale sickle moon hung over the treetops, and the cocks had already crowed for the second time. People were beginning to go home.

A bristly-faced old man looked up at the big tree and said, half to himself:

"If I remember rightly, the widow is the fifth one to hang herself on that damned tree. We ought to get a Taoist priest to drive the evil spirit away, then cut it down!"

Seeing the old man, Chun-mei was reminded. "Aunt," she asked, "has the Elder been here tonight?"

Aunt Li shook her head. "He's not home." She leaned close and put her mouth to Chun-mei's ear. "He went to his married daughter's place to shoot some fireworks. That girl Huan is raising quite a rumpus over there too!"

The unfair way her friend Huan was being treated angered Chun-mei. "He's so good at managing people," she snorted, "just let him keep on trying!"

Li-ho was calling his wife, and Aunt Li took her leave. "I have to go now. Come to my house tomorrow and I'll tell you all about your mother's problem."

* * *

Chun-mei's mother had married a Yang at fifteen. At seventeen, she gave birth to Chun-mei. Her husband died before she was twenty. The Yangs were the leading clan in the village, and in their ancestral temple was a large stone plate inscribed with the clan "Laws." Among them was one which read: "All women of this clan, whether by birth or marriage, may only marry once. Any woman who elopes or remarries shall be punished as the clan members may direct."

Chun-mei's mother was in the same position as all the other unfortunate girls and wives in the clan. After her husband died, she had to devote herself to serving her mother-in-law, without another word. She remained a widow and brought up her daughter. The year her mother-in-law died, the landlord, Yang Li-chai, foreclosed her small patch of land for a usurious debt. Because the land still couldn't meet what she owed, she was forced to indenture fifteen-year-old Chun-mei into the landlord's service for several years. No wages were paid.

It was these things that Aunt Li and Chun-mei first discussed. Some of them, Chun-mei knew about, or had experienced personally; others, she had heard of only vaguely, or had no knowledge of whatsoever.

"Being a widow was harder than standing on one leg!" Aunt Li paused with the scissors in her hand and looked at her niece. Chun-mei was helping her paste cloth shoe uppers. "Taxes and levies to the officials, the landlord bearing down like a sledge-hammer—they never let up. As for social life, the only men you could meet were your own brothers. If any other man should be seen at a widow's door more than once, the rumours would start flying. Take your mother, for

instance. Once, before she was as old as you are now—she still couldn't work in the fields or do any heavy labour—a man came to repair her house. By the time he finished eating dinner after the day's work, it was fairly late. Yang Li-chai, the landlord, heard about it, and, as clan leader, raised hell with your mother."

After liberation, Yang Li-chai had been executed for his many brutal crimes. The mere mention of his name brought fire to Chun-mei's eyes.

"That pack of curs! There wasn't a good one in his whole damn family! You know what happened to me, Aunt. I ask you, are they human or are they wild beasts?"

When Chun-mei had been working for them, Yang Li-chai's second son had gotten fresh with her and she slapped his face. Yang Li-chai not only didn't reprove his "precious," he gave Chun-mei a beating.

Aunt Li laughed coldly. "Sure, they were full of 'Family Rules' and 'Clan Laws' for others, but they broke them all themselves. Dogs in human skin, that's what they were! Nobody dared touch a hair on their heads then! . . . Wasn't Glib Lips a widow too? But when she opened that wine and grocery shop, didn't Yang Ken-hua go in and out as he pleased, pretending it was part of his job as Kuomintang boss of the township? And didn't he beat Yang the Elder with his pistol butt the minute the old man said one word about it?"

This last remark was as refreshing to Chun-mei as a cool drink of water. But immediately she felt there was something wrong in her joy at the Elder's misfortune. Even though she disliked him, it was nothing compared with her hatred for Yang Li-chai, Yang Ken-hua and that whole gang of landlords and crooked Kuomintang officials. How could she lump the old man in with them? Her mind was a jumble of confusion.

Chun-mei heaved a little sigh. Aunt Li raised her head and saw a dark shadow flit across the girl's round face. She had often seen that expression on the face of Chun-mei's mother, but her niece seldom looked like that. Aunt Li had always sympathized with the widow, and she was even fonder of Chun-mei. This twenty-year-old girl was usually bright and gay as a clear sky. At times she was noisy and boisterous, explosive, like a clap of thunder. At times she was a complete child. Yet comparing Chun-mei's youth with her own, Aunt Li felt that the girl had matured too early, too quickly. Especially in the few years since liberation, she was like a tender shoot that suddenly, in a couple of days, sprouted up into a big tree.

"Chun-mei," the aunt said earnestly, "don't look so worried. I'm always telling your Ma—crying is no good unless it solves something!"

The girl quickly straightened up, her eyes shining like stars. "I'm not worried. It's just that I don't know what's troubling my Ma. When I find out—whether it's a copper burden or an iron load—I'll bear it for her. Today we have the Communist Party and the People's Government. If we've committed any crime, we'll go along to jail

voluntarily, without any fuss. But if anyone is trying to pick on us, they're not going to get away with it!"

"Good. Now listen to what I have to say."

Before Chun-mei had finished pasting one pair of cloth shoe uppers, her aunt's recital was ended. Because the girl was still unmarried, there were some things her aunt had to think carefully how to express, and could only tell by indirection. But finally she made Chun-mei understand: Tseng and Chun-mei's mother were on very good terms. Before liberation, when a black net covered the sky, they didn't dare reveal a word of their relationship. With liberation, the poor were able to rise to their feet, and the landlord class was, of course, knocked head over heels. The peasants no longer had time to worry about such things as "Widows' Continence to the Departed," and the pair were able to meet more openly. Later, they heard about the new marriage law, with its provision that widows were allowed to remarry. Both were overjoyed, and they now made less effort at concealment. But they still couldn't completely get over their caution. "Fearing cliffs ahead and tigers behind," they lacked the courage to formally apply for a marriage certificate.

At last they were trapped by Yang the Elder and other leaders of the clan. These worthies insisted that no widow of a Yang could remarry. They demanded that Chun-mei be given to Tseng to create the impression that she was the real reason for his frequent visits to the widow's house. This, they said, would be "covering the dog dung with a clod of earth, so that it won't stink everybody out!" They even claimed that they "were going easy on the widow, for the sake of her dead husband."

Chun-mei's breast was heaving as though she had been climbing a steep hill.

"Huh! 'Going easy,' eh?" she raged. "I suppose I ought to send them thank-you gifts!"

Aunt Li put a restraining hand on the girl's arm. "Chun-mei, the thing to do is think of a way out. Even your uncle Li-ho is a little old-fashioned on this subject."

Chun-mei decided to tell this wise, courageous aunt of hers about Hsiao-chang, and ask for her advice. But just then the door opened with a bang and Li-ho came barging in.

Li-ho plopped down on the bed. He looked at his wife, he looked at his niece. Then he brought out his short-stemmed pipe and slowly packed it with tobacco. After using several matches to get the pipe lit and puffing up a great cloud of smoke, Li-ho turned to his niece.

"Chun-mei, you'd better not go on the main street the next few days. Yang the Elder is exploding again. Stay out of his way."

"When did he get back?" Aunt Li asked. "I suppose he made life miserable again for his daughter Huan."

Li-ho made no reply to his wife. He kept after Chun-mei.

"I was just out digging in the back garden and I saw him go by with his hookah. A whole crowd of people were tailing behind him. He went into your house. I put down my hoe and rushed over. He was lecturing your mother."

"Oh!" Chun-mei gave a startled gasp. "And my Ma?"

"Your Ma didn't cry or answer him back. She sat there like a block of wood and let him talk." Li-ho threw his pipe on the table with annoyance, scattering ashes. "After he came out is when the row started."

Wang Kai, the deputy mayor of the village, had roused the Elder's ire, said Li-ho. "Wang Kai said something the old man couldn't answer. He got so mad his beard stood out crooked. On top of that, Yang Li-chia, Iron Hammer and some of those other young fellows added a couple of quips. The old man was like one of those play actors on the stage—he stamped and swore and waved his hands!"

Deputy mayor Wang Kai was also the secretary of the local Youth League branch. He was a short young man, with a very humorous way of talking. Hearing that Wang Kai had been present, Chun-mei felt better immediately. Like sunlight breaking through the dark clouds, she smiled for the first time that day.

"When the old man started swearing, who did he swear at?" she asked. "At our Youth League secretary?"

"Hah!" Li-ho frowned. He felt the girl was quite immature after all. She didn't understand much. "You can still ask that? Every bit of his swearing was at you! He said you were disobedient, that you insist on freedom; that on account of you, your mother hung herself!"

Chun-mei was unperturbed. "Why should I worry about him swearing at me? I'm ready for it. Maybe he thinks he can hit me too!"

"Now, now, you shouldn't talk like that. . . ." Li-ho's voice trailed off. He picked up his pipe again and rapped out its remaining ashes. Finally, he recommended what he thought Chun-mei should do. He said she ought to admit her refusal to marry Tseng had caused her mother's attempted suicide. As to whether or not she should marry Tseng, that was another question.

"If you don't want to, we don't have to settle that right away anyhow. The thing to do now is take the blame from your mother's shoulders. No one must know that she had a lover. That's a disgrace for a widow. There are a couple of gossips in this village with mouths like ducks' rump holes—you can never cork them shut. Why should you. . . ."

Li-ho paused. He could see that his niece was displeased. "Chun-mei, you trust your uncle, don't you?" he urged. "Your uncle is a just

man. He always wants to see the right thing done by you and your Ma."

Aunt Li glanced sideways at her husband. "Tsk, tsk," she mocked, "a mouse climbs a scale and finds himself weighty! A just man, eh? Some 'justice'! You and that old firecracker are two of a kind!" She turned to Chun-mei. "Don't listen to him! Go home and talk it over with Mama. It says so in the Marriage Law—widows can remarry!"

The wind taken out of his sails, Li-ho dropped his pipe and stood up. "Aiya," he said helplessly, "again you're talking about that law! How do you know what's in it? Don't pretend to be an expert and tell people things that will ruin them!" He smiled. "Everybody says I'm afraid of my wife. Is there any provision in the Marriage Law for that?"

Aunt Li glared at him, then she smiled too. But at once she became serious again.

"I don't want anyone to be afraid of me, I only want to see fair play. You men want us to take slapping around every day and not say a word even if you beat us to death. That's the way you prove you're not afraid of your wives! . . ."

Chun-mei didn't want to get involved in their argument. Smoothing her clothes, she rose to leave. As she reached the door, Li-ho suddenly remembered.

"Mayor Wang Kai wants to see you," he called after her. "He says you should come to his house."

* * *

Yang the Elder had studied a few of the old philosophy classics, and had always been considered a very righteous man. With the death of the self-styled "Venerable Master," father of landlord Yang Li-chai, he became the oldest member of the clan both in terms of generation and actual age. In keeping with his rank as senior member of the clan, though only forty at the time, he grew a beard. Even now, fifteen years later, the beard was still quite black. The Elder not only was a good farmer, he was famous far and near as a maker of firecrackers. They never failed to go off, and they made a tremendous bang. Some people said they were like his temper. Others said firecrackers blew up and were finished, but Yang the Elder's temper was indestructible no matter how often it exploded. At home, he imposed many taboos. For instance, none of the women of the family were allowed to sit at the front gate, no male visitor could go into the kitchen. . . . If you violated any of these prohibitions, whether intentionally or not, he would lecture you harshly till your face reddened and your ears turned crimson.

In accordance with ancient custom, and a written "Clan Law," he had been known as the "clan leader" for the past dozen years. But before liberation, the landlord ruling class had some rules of their own.

One was that you ranked high if you had money; without it, you were at the bottom of the heap. Yang Li-chai, Yang Ken-hua and that gang never addressed him as "Sir," or even "Uncle." They were completely disrespectful. Sometimes they swore at him. Once they even raised their hands against him and sneered, "Who says elders can't be hit? Let's try it and see!"

But Yang the Elder was tough and stubborn. Aside from frequently quarrelling with the landlord gang about rent and fees, he was always getting into trouble with them on questions of social conduct. After liberation, when mass meetings were held to bring charges against despotic landlords, others attacked them for political oppression, for economic exploitation. Yang the Elder added his own charge: "You have none of the respect of the young for the old; you're a bunch of animals!"

When the paddy fields of the ancestral temple were distributed during land reform, at first he was rather upset. Later, learning that this was done in accordance with the law, and himself receiving a share of the temple lands, he swallowed his objections. But thereafter, when some of the clan members suggested converting the temple into a school, he and his clique were strongly opposed. Finally the dispute was settled by a compromise. The two side wings in the temple compound were given over to the school. The main temple building was not to be touched, nor could the placard of the village school be hung outside the compound gate.

He had been quite taken aback by the friendly chatter and laughter among the men and women government personnel who came to the village with liberation. As time went on and there was no "disgraceful incident" among them, he was both surprised and respectful. But he could not get used to local women—especially those in his own clan—behaving in that manner. If ever he saw one of them acting "free," he would snort, "Pei! Not like a man, and not like a woman either! Violating all virtue and morality!" He hadn't the nerve to speak up in the presence of government comrades, however. When they were around, he would fume inwardly when displeased, or walk off, or turn his eyes away from the offending object.

On learning that the People's Government had proclaimed a new Marriage Law, he was very shocked.

"Widows can marry again, children's marriages are not to be arranged by the parents any more—aiyaya! What kind of a world are we coming to?"

At times, when he had a few drinks in him, he would announce, "I definitely am going to write to Chairman Mao. What if I *am* only an unimportant clan leader. . . . That Marriage Law could never have passed through the Chairman's hands personally. He probably hasn't seen it!"

People who have always lived in a morass of "Ceremonial Edicts," "Clan Laws" and "Family Rules," may not follow them to the letter, but many are quite vociferous in paying them lip service. Yang the Elder took this as confirmation of his views, and as "clan leader," interfered in this and meddled in that. With his own family, he was exceptionally strict. He had married his daughter, Huan, to a man in a neighbouring village. The mother-in-law tormented the girl mercilessly, and the Elder frequently lectured her.

"Annoy your mother-in-law, avoid your own mother's door" was the feudal aphorism he often quoted at his daughter. "Huan, if you go on acting this way, I won't have you crossing our threshold. I'll disown you!"

Two days ago, the girl had taken part in a meeting. When she got home, her husband and mother-in-law locked her in her room. Then, knowing Yang the Elder's disposition, the old lady sent for him. As soon as he heard that his daughter was again "violating all virtue and morality," he rushed over to lecture her. Moreover, he issued an order:

"If she doesn't admit she was wrong and won't change, don't let her out!"

Then, the morning he returned home, he learned that, as if to spite him, Chun-mei's mother had tried to hang herself the night before!

"That cheap baggage! Don't cover the dung pot and it'll stink up the whole place!"

After he cooled down a bit, he thought the case over. This relative had created a "disgraceful incident," but she had also remained a model widow for many years. He didn't know quite how to treat her. He had his breakfast, then took up his hookah and set out to find "Bigot" Yang Pen-yuan, a narrow, pedantic, Confucian dogmatist. The two had grown up together. The Bigot had been a tutor to children of the wealthy. Now, although his family had received land under the land reform, he devoted himself to fortune telling. He and the Elder got along very well. They saw eye to eye on a great many matters. They discussed the case of Chun-mei's mother for about half an hour and reached a unanimous conclusion:

"Family linen must not be washed in public. The best thing would be to pass the blame on to Chun-mei!"

After leaving the Bigot, Yang the Elder went looking for Chun-mei, but she was not at home. He ran into a group of youngsters who infuriated him by addressing him "with no sense of rank or fitness." He angrily berated them for several minutes.

But what was really to make him rage was yet to come.

The next day was a village market day. It was the Elder's custom, after setting up his fireworks stall, to order a big cup of wine. This he would leisurely sip while sitting beside his stall. After drinking a

while, he would light his hookah pipe and smoke. Alternating between the wine and the pipe, he would while away a pleasant hour. Today, however, he had just sat down with his cup and had barely dipped into it, when Glib Lips came hurrying over from her wine and grocery shop. Although only a few years his junior, she addressed him respectfully as "Grandfather."

"Please come to my place, Grandfather. I have to tell you something!"

"What is it? Can't we talk here?"

Glib Lips' red mottled drinker's nose twitched as though taken by a chill. It was obvious from her reaction that she would only convey her information in private. The Elder followed her into her shop. It was still early in the morning and no customers had yet arrived.

When the Elder returned to his stall, he was pale and his beard was trembling. He slumped down on a stool and sat dully for a long time. Then he seized the cup of wine, raised it to his lips and drained it half empty. Fiery heat at once seared his forehead and his eyes. So the little slut won't do it, he thought. And why? All because she's involved with that young Hsiao-chang!

"Elder, you've spilled your wine!" called a passer-by.

The cup had overturned on the counter, and a rivulet of wine was beginning to soak into a packet of fireworks. The Elder opened his mouth to shout for the wine shop waiter to remove the cup, when a jaunty young man, chest high, went striding by. It was Hsiao-chang. The youngster glanced at him coldly and continued on his way. Yang the Elder glared after him, practically piercing Hsiao-chang's back with his eyes. Then, turning around again, whom should he see but Chun-mei. A book under her arm, she was strolling along with deputy mayor Wang Kai, chatting and smiling. They drew nearer; they walked past. It was as though they didn't even know a Yang the Elder existed.

He sat up straight. "Chun-mei!" he shouted. She looked back. "Come here!" he ordered, then walked straight to the wine and grocery shop. Inside the shop door, he peered behind. Chun-mei wasn't following him at all. He had been planning to take her into the back room and give her a good talking-to. But she wasn't coming. His eyes bulged. He sat down heavily. A customer at the table invited him to have a drink. The Elder didn't even hear him. Breathing hard, he called to a little boy:

"Go fetch Chun-mei for me!"

Glib Lips put down her wine pot and advanced two steps on her crane-like legs. "Aiya, an elder shouldn't be upset by a mere girl. Calm yourself. I'll go get her for you."

From the steps of the shop next door, a voice sang out, "You needn't bother. I'll be over in a minute."

"Hurry up," someone else said sarcastically. "If you don't go, he'll probably issue an official summons!"

Glib Lips recognized the voice of the second speaker as that of Chun-mei's Aunt Li. Though far from a beauty, the wine shop proprietress had a clever tongue. When it came to talking, she could charm a bird from the tree. Yet Aunt Li was one person she didn't care to clash with, for the words of the former were like a steel awl—they could pierce to the bottom of anything.

Chun-mei entered, and walked up to Yang the Elder without a care in the world.

"Grandfather," she said with a friendly smile, "what did you want to see me about?"

The Elder sagged like a piece of soft leather hit by a rock. But he recovered immediately. This child was trying to soft-soap him. His whiskers flared.

"What indeed! Pretending you can't even count up to three! Why did your mother hang herself?"

"Oh," the smile left Chun-mei's face. "That's what Grandfather wants to know. I'm trying to get to the root myself, but I'm still not clear. You have to bother about so many things, yet you're willing to take an interest in my Ma and me—that's very kind!"

The Elder tottered as if from a punch. His eyes were ready to burst from their sockets.

"What! You mean I have no right to bother? I'm the clan leader! When your father was dying, he asked me to look after you! If it hadn't been for me, how do you think you would have grown up?"

"I know how I grew up," Chun-mei retorted. "Before I was three feet high I was out with my mother and grandmother gathering grass for the pigs, picking up firewood to sell, digging roots to eat. At fifteen I became a slavey in the landlord's house. I didn't know a thing then. His son—one of my clan brothers—tried to paw me. . . . You were the clan leader then too—why didn't you bother about him?"

The old man had no reply. Collapsing on a bench like a porter after a long journey, he sat breathing hard. Glib Lips' mouth twitched. She poked her head forward.

"The tune you sing depends on where you are, Chun-mei. You can't blame Grandfather—they were a landlord family!"

"Oho!" someone said derisively. "So the job of the clan leader is to control the peasants!"

Chun-mei recognized the voice of Li-chia, a member of the Youth League. It gave her additional courage.

"Hot beans out of cold ashes—who would have expected it!" she said tartly. "A clan leader! I've heard of township leaders, village leaders, district leaders, county leaders. But a clan leader—that's one official I never heard of!"

Yang the Elder bounced to his feet and clamped his hands on his hips. "Fine, fine, excellent! As a clan leader, I'm not good enough. I shouldn't try to save your face for you! All right!" His bloodshot eyes gleamed with a savage light. "Let me ask you then, Yang Chun-mei—were you or weren't you with young Hsiao-chang under the big cedar tree on the slope the night before last?"

The question took Chun-mei completely by surprise. Her heart pounded. All eyes seemed to be on her. She could feel her face burning. But then she remembered what Wang Kai, the deputy mayor and Youth League secretary, had just told her—"Face up to him. We'll all support you!" Calming down, Chun-mei conquered her confusion.

"I was," she replied evenly.

"Fine, fine, a fine virgin!" Yang the Elder shouted hoarsely in a voice like a shattering crockery pot. He whirled and faced the crowd growing at the door. "Look at her, you old and young of the Yang clan, you respected members of other families! Did you ever see the like?" He coughed and choked, working himself into an incoherent fury. "Why, why, she's smeared every tablet in our ancestral temple with filth! A virgin, playing around with a boy in secret, and she still has the brass to talk about it! Shameless hussy!"

A flame of rage burst in Chun-mei's brain. She forgot he was of the older generation.

"Stop talking like a goddamn fool!" she yelled.

This mere girl had dared to swear at him—the Elder thought the heavens had fallen. With an "aiya!" he raised his hand and rushed towards her. Chun-mei dodged, and the old man ran into a table with such force that he set four or five cups on it dancing and slopping their wine in all directions. A number of people immediately swarmed around him, restraining him, trying to soothe him. In the confusion, a skinny rooster of man slipped behind Chun-mei and grabbed her by the back of her collar.

"Little whore," he squawked, "we'll tie you up and then see what you have to say!"

It was Yang Pen-tsai, the idler who had said Chun-mei's mother should have been hung higher. But just as he was showing how tough he was, a palm slapped hard against his black monkey's face. Pen-tsai saw stars, and he quickly released Chun-mei's neck to rub his own smarting cheek. He was about to fly at the man who had struck him, when deputy mayor Wang Kai entered the room.

"Break it up, break it up," called the mayor. "You've all got business to attend at the market-place. We didn't have this much excitement even last market day, when we put on that publicity campaign about spring planting!"

After Wang Kai had shooed out the crowd, he spoke to Yang the Elder.

"Grandfather, if something's bothering you, we can talk it over gradually. We only have a market here every fifth day. Think of how much business you lost this morning."

The old man sat with his back against a table, his legs spread, his hands resting listlessly on his knees. Every bone in his body ached. He felt ready to collapse. But this was only for a brief instant. Suddenly, he stood up.

"A loss of face for the whole clan!"

Muttering, the Elder left the wine and grocery shop. Outside, he shouted to his fifteen-year-old grandson, "Pack up the stall, we're not selling today! I'm going to find someone to write notices. We'll call a clan meeting and settle this thing!"

Contrary to his usual practice, he went to the rice mart without bringing his hookah. The Bigot set up his fortune-telling stand in an open space in the rice mart on market days, and there Yang the Elder was sure to find his cronies.

The ceremony of "Sweeping the Ancestral Temple and Convening a Grand Meeting of the Clan," according to custom, could only be performed on the annual Ching Ming Festival, when everywhere graves were tidied and sacrifices made to the spirits of the departed. Only in the event of some happening of momentous importance could the temple be given a real cleaning and a big meeting be called at any other time. But in the past few years since liberation, even at Ching Ming this had not been done. Many had simply forgotten about these rites. Though Yang the Elder and his intimates had not forgotten, they found the matter difficult to put across. Funds which formerly had been set aside for the purpose, as well as all the clan dues, had long since been gobbled up by the "Big Mouthed Old Crowds"—the local landlords. There had been no way to get a clear accounting out of them. The temple's income-producing paddy fields had been distributed during land reform. You couldn't call on individuals to put up funds every time the temple had to spend a little money to conduct a meeting.

Of all his cronies, Yang the Elder was the most distressed about this. As clan leader, he felt he was letting their common ancestors down. Again raise a special fund? He had spoken to a few people about that at New Year's time. It was hopeless. Some said they would help in other ways, but not with money. Several kept quiet, obviously not very interested. A few came out flatly against conducting the ceremony at all. "No two members think alike," he had sighed. "The clan has lost its clannishness!"

The affair of Chun-mei and her mother, and especially the saucy way Chun-mei had talked back to him, made him feel that their traditional clan "Customs" and "Laws" were being ground to a pulp. What's more, his prestige as "Venerable Leader of the Clan" was becoming quite worthless. He could see no difference between Chun-mei's treatment of him

and the Kuomintang township boss hitting him with the butt of his pistol, in fact he thought she was the worse of the two.

"Still wet behind the ears!" Telling about it at the Bigot's fortune-telling stand, he nearly wept.

One of the men said it was only three weeks to the Ching Ming Festival, why not wait until then to call the big meeting?

"By that time, you won't dare to show your face anywhere!" shouted Yang the Elder. "We'll all be disgraced!"

Before dusk, notices in big letters were posted at both the entrance and exit of the market-place:

The Yang Family Clan Will Convene a Meeting of the Entire Clan in the Ancestral Temple on the First Day of the Second Lunar Month. Old and Young, Men and Women, Are All Required to Attend.

* * *

It was late at night, but Chun-mei's mother had not gone to bed. The widow was waiting for her daughter's return. She rose from her seat beside the stove, walked to the door and opened it. Outside, it was pitch dark, the earth and sky blurred into one. The whole village had been fast asleep for some time. This was one of her many trips to the door that night. Against her face drove a cold gust of wind bearing with it an icy drizzle. She worried about her daughter being caught in the rain on the road.

Chun-mei had gone with Wang Kai and her Aunt Li to the district government. She said they definitely would be coming back the same night. They had to come back right away, for the day after tomorrow was the first day of the second lunar month. Fire was already beginning to singe the eyebrows—the danger was close at hand.

The wind was strong, but the rain hadn't started in earnest yet. Chun-mei's mother returned to her place beside the stove. The flames had died down. Through the open stove door, the wood embers cast a red circular glow that pushed and pulsed against the surrounding oppressive cold and darkness. Strange. After coming back to the room, she found the night and its chilliness unbearable. She thrust in an armful of dry leaves and twigs and poked up the dying logs. A shower of sparks flew. Tongues of flame again danced and twisted, lighting the room. She felt much better then. But her daughter still hadn't come home, and her heart remained hanging in a torment of suspense.

"I hope everything went all right on her trip and that we'll be able to get through this devil's pass . . ." prayed the widow. She threw some more twigs into the fire.

Her daughter had told her they had a twofold plan. On the one hand, they would try to rouse the people of the village against any big meeting of the clan. At the same time they would appeal to the higher government authorities for an order prohibiting the meeting. If that

meeting is held, it won't be any joke, thought the widow. In the years before liberation, if a woman did what she had done and was tried at a full meeting of the clan, she would either end up in the river with a millstone around her neck, or she'd be beaten half to death with bamboo switches.

Chun-mei's mother shivered. She had the same feeling that day she had seen a dozen People's Liberation Army men fighting off two hundred Kuomintang soldiers. If they hadn't been able to hold out, everything would have been finished. Her fears had been groundless that day. She only hoped they would prove groundless this time too!

Still no sign of Chun-mei. Would the district government authorities be willing to interfere in a small matter like this? And if so, how would they handle it? She had no way of guessing.

The past few days, Chun-mei seemed to have spent every spare minute urging the widow to stand firm. Several times, the proud untamable girl had encouraged her—"You certainly won't kill yourself. Let *them* try to kill you—if they dare!" These words to the widow were like a drink of piping hot broth to one shivering with cold. At once, they brought warmth and strength. Mulling them over, a flame of courage leaped within her. "So they want to kill, do they? Even a pig fights back at the slaughtering block. They won't find it so easy!"

The fire in the stove went out. She had forgotten to add wood. But now the room didn't seem so cold and fearful. Thinking back, she wondered why she had always been such a weak ball of fluff. There was no disgrace in being a widow. She marvelled at the stubborn character Chun-mei had developed in the few years she had served as a slavey in the landlord's household. That character had angered the widow at times, but she knew now that Chun-mei was an unusual child. "Even if the sky falls, it can only happen once!" That was Chun-mei's attitude. She was afraid of neither storm nor waves.

There was a clatter as the cat upset the crockery teapot beside the stove. Chun-mei's mother was reminded that she ought to have some hot tea ready for the girl when she got home.

Before the water boiled, Chun-mei returned. Aunt Li was with her. Chun-mei threw away her torch as she entered the room, picked up two big armfuls of twigs and leaves, and stuffed them into the grate. Fire tongs in hand, Aunt Li scolded her.

"Wench, why must you do things so crudely? You've jammed it too full!"

Chun-mei's mother lit a resin-smeared stick and pushed it carefully into a crack in the earthen wall. Then she seated herself on a low stool off to one side. How odd. She had been anxiously waiting for this moment, but now that they had returned, she was afraid to question them. She tried to read their expressions, to see whether their trip resulted in good or ill.

Chun-mei suddenly pulled back her hands which she had been toasting over the stove.

"Ma, let's let them hold that damn meeting!"

Her mother jumped with panic and grasped Aunt Li by the arm. "That'll be terrible!"

Aunt Li thrust the tongs into the ashes. She glared at Chun-mei. "Beginning from the end—is that the way to tell her?" To the widow, she explained, "There's nothing to worry about." She reported all that had transpired in the district government office: The authorities felt that to prohibit the meeting would solve nothing. You can't cure an old ailment without getting at the basic cause. The best way was to use the meeting as a forum at which the problem could be put before the people clearly. Make everyone understand. Lay a foundation for the educational campaign that was about to start concerning the new marriage law.

Chun-mei's mother frowned. "What if they get wild?"

"Wild? They'd better not think they're still living in the old days!" Chun-mei straightened up sharply. Her eyes gleamed at the dark earthen wall. "Just let Yang the Elder try to get tough. I'll pull his whiskers or my name's not Yang Chun-mei!"

Aunt Li immediately corrected her. "That's the wrong attitude! Didn't you hear what the district political officer said today? You have to teach them. Feudalism has been a bag over their heads, blinding them for hundreds of years. You can't remove it like taking off a hat! That dead-brained uncle of yours, for instance. What a nuisance that man is! Every night he's been arguing with me about women's rights. Finally, I took his own sister's case and put it up to him. Didn't she kill herself because of the way the clan persecuted her? That stopped him cold!" Aunt Li sighed. "But he's far from being won over one hundred per cent. The root of a way of looking at things isn't like the root of a tree —all the force in the world won't yank it out. People have to be reasoned with and convinced."

Chun-mei laughed. "I said—'if he gets tough.' Like that day at the market. If he really hit me, I'd have gone for him, no matter what generation he is!"

To tell the truth, it was for this very trait of never yielding no matter how heavy the pressure that Aunt Li loved the girl so well. Of course, Chun-mei was on the impetuous side, but then, she was young, there was nothing surprising about it. Hadn't Aunt Li been that way herself not so many years ago? The head of the district women's federation had teased her, "Chun-mei ought to be your daughter." Recalling this, Aunt Li smiled proudly. She accepted the bowl of tea Chun-mei handed to her. It was very hot. She sipped it slowly.

Pouring the second bowl, Chun-mei looked at her mother. The firelight cast a reddish glow on the widow's thin face. Though her expres-

sion was cheerful, there was a reflective depth in her eyes. Chun-mei gave her the tea bowl.

"Ma, are you worried? I can't feel easy if you're upset."

Her mother's eyes flashed a smile. Though only the same faint smile she had limited herself to for many years, it was a real smile nevertheless, with none of her usual helpless bitterness.

"I'm not worried!" To Aunt Li, she said, "I didn't want any fuss or scandal, but they've brought it all out into the open. As long as the government is taking charge, I'll go along with this thing right to the gates of hell if I have to!"

Aunt Li spilled her tea dregs into the hearth. "You're talking like those old fogies. What 'scandal'? What you've been doing is perfectly honourable!"

Chun-mei's mother blushed like a girl. As Aunt Li rose to leave, the widow told Chun-mei to light a torch for their guest. Then she got up and walked over to Aunt Li. Leaning close, she whispered:

"Is it quiet at your house? I'd like to have a private talk with you tomorrow."

"Do you want to meet him at my place?" Aunt Li asked softly.

The widow punched her playfully. "Wretch!"

The torch lit, Chun-mei insisted on seeing her aunt home.

* * *

After both sides spent a final day of preparation, the day of the big clan meeting dawned. Except for women who had married outside the clan, no persons with surnames other than Yang were permitted to attend gatherings of this sort. Deputy mayor Wang Kai had asked permission to sit on the sidelines and listen, but Yang the Elder and his clique turned him down. Wang Kai went into conference with the administrative officer the district government had sent, then consulted with some of the progressive members of the clan, like Yang Li-chia and Aunt Li. The latter were advised to keep the meeting under control, to be calm but alert. Under no circumstances should they let things get out of hand.

The sun was hot and strong that day, drying some of the dank mustiness out of the Yang ancestral temple. The padlock had been removed and the big doors of the main building stood open.

Yang the Elder dispatched his grandson to fetch his daughter, Huan. Then, accompanied by the Bigot, he went to the temple. Several men of the younger generations were inside, sweeping. Thick dust hung in the room like a heavy mist, permeated with the oppressive odour of mildew. By the time the Bigot and Yang the Elder arrived, the dust had settled somewhat, but the stink of the mildew was stronger than ever. The canopies draped above the various ancestral shrines were so faded it was impossible to guess their original colour. The gold letters on the

big horizontal plaque which hung in the centre of the hall were in better condition—not only the large motto of "Eternally Just," but even the smaller inscription proclaiming the date of the temple's erection could still be distinguished. Yang the Elder, moving his lips, read both the big letters and the small with the relish of one savouring a well-aged and tasty morsel for which he had been craving a long time.

"You take charge of the cleaning," he instructed the Bigot. "I want to look around first. I'll be right back."

As he stepped through the temple doorway, he found a woman with a waist like a water snake barring his path. In spite of her patched clothing, she spoke in the affected accents of the idle rich.

"Uncle, dear uncle, the soul of your nephew still hasn't entered the ancestral temple! No matter what the past, after all he was a son of the Yang family. You simply must do something about this!"

She was the concubine of the late landlord Yang Li-chai, and she gave the Elder quite a shock. A brutal tyrant of a landlord who had been executed for his crimes—should his tablet be enshrined in the temple or not? There had never been any problems like this before liberation. According to ancient custom, as long as the family of the deceased paid the "entrance fee" and had the proper ceremonies conducted, the tablet of any Yang could be installed in the temple.

"Dear uncle, we may be poor, but I'd pawn my last stitch to raise the money so that the dear departed can rest in peace!" Forcing a sob, she dabbed her eyes delicately.

The Elder stood puzzled. He noticed that several people were watching them, glaring hatefully at this slinky witch. The landlord's lifetime of cruelty came back to the Elder's mind with a rush. He spat.

"Get out! We can't bother with you today!"

To end the conversation, he turned and walked rapidly away along the steps. Near the wing which had been converted into the night school, a fierce-looking fellow came rushing out of the temple's ante-room.

"Do you want any bamboo switches? I cut a whole bunch of them!"

This was the brother of the former Kuomintang township boss. He was a minor bandit, at liberty but under surveillance.

With a cold stare, the Elder brushed past him and strode out of the compound through a breach in the wall. He walked around in a grove of trees for a few minutes, then sat down on a rock in the shade.

The Elder was very confused. Closing his eyes, he automatically put the mouthpiece of the empty hookah to his lips and sucked reflectively. He could hear the voices of many people on their way to the temple, but he paid them little heed. Some time later, from the sapling-covered slope off to the right, came the sound of laughter. Opening his eyes a slit, he saw three people going up the path—Wang Kai, Hsiao-chang, and a third person he couldn't see clearly, but who was dressed in the simple blue uniform of a government worker. After they had disappeared, his line

of vision naturally followed up the slope until stopped by another object —the big cedar. Immediately burning with rage, he leaped to his feet.

"Violating all virtue and morality!"

At the same moment, he heard someone calling to him frantically, "Elder, Elder, please come right away! They won't listen to reason! They're making a terrific fuss!"

When he reached the temple, he found the courtyard filled with people all talking at once. They seemed to be arguing about something. The quarrel was raging the hottest right in front of the temple door. Pushing his way through the crowd lining the steps, he discovered the Bigot surrounded by a large group of angry people. The old man had his hands clasped together and was bowing all around in abject supplication.

"Your worships, it wasn't my idea. I wouldn't dare to break the law!"

Seeing Yang the Elder, Glib Lips raised her voice. "All right, all right, the clan leader is here now. For better or worse we're all in the same clan. A Yang is a Yang no matter what you say!"

Several others were about to chime in with the same sentiments, when Aunt Li interrupted. She pulled Glib Lips by the arm and shouted:

"Before you go off half-cocked, first let me ask the clan leader!"

Forcing her way through to the steps, she stood before the Elder, her head thrown back.

"Say, uncle, you're a peasant too. How come cats and dogs and landlords and counter-revolutionaries have all been invited? If this is a meeting of landlord families who are being reformed, then all us peasants are going to leave!"

"Right, right, let's go!"

"I don't like the stink around here!"

The concubine with the water snake waist had been standing beside a stone incense-burner at the foot of the steps. Now she slithered brashly forward.

"Aiya, Sister Li, we're all in the Yang family. This is a meeting of the clan. Why were we notified if we weren't supposed to come?"

A tall young man shook his fist in her face. "Get out! Even if you're a Yang ten times over, you won't be pulling your tricks again. Damn bitch! It looks like you didn't get enough at that last accusation meeting!"

"Tell her off! Who notified that dirty gang to come?"

Yang the Elder's melon face went from white to red, and from red back to white. His beard trembled, his breath came harshly. He shot his hand into the air.

"Chase them out, send them away! I'm an old fool!"

With much pushing, pulling, shouting and swearing, a group of people were driven from the compound. Yang the Elder shook his head, heaved a long sigh, then entered the main temple building.

In the centre of the room stood a long table on which two piles of tea bowls were awaiting the commencement of the meeting. Benches from the classroom had been placed around the table. The more he thought of his mistake, the angrier Yang the Elder became. He pounded his fist on the table, his eyes sweeping the men who had followed him in the door.

"You tell me—are we going to hold this meeting or not?"

"Of course!" replied a man carrying a long-stemmed pipe. "Right is right and wrong is wrong. We don't want landlords here and we don't want counter-revolutionaries. But that doesn't mean we're going to let any of our women break the Clan Laws!"

A bushy-browed middle-aged woman agreed noisily. "If we don't enforce discipline, our girls will all be chasing the boys!" The lady was the famous "Loudmouth." Once she got started—it didn't matter whether anyone listened to her or not—she could go on for hours reciting the occasions on which her daughter-in-law "refused to be taught."

It was at this point that Glib Lips came in through the door. Hearing Loudmouth orating against "secret clutching and pawing," she at once affirmed that she too was firmly opposed to such activities. Much to her surprise, Loudmouth returned her virtuous proclamation with a dirty dig.

"I can't stand people who put up a false front. They ought to take a good look at their reflections in the water vat!"

Glib Lips, reddening, scurried to the side of the room. In her haste she stepped on Li-chia's foot. She turned to apologize, hoping to change the subject. But he wasn't even looking at her. She could only sidle away and seek her opportunity elsewhere.

Young Li-chia was standing with his hands clasped behind his back, examining the crowd. He knew there were quite a number of people who shared the views of the old men. A few minutes ago, straight thinking had overcome distorted ideas, when the peasants insisted on kicking out the reactionaries. The old timers couldn't say a word against that. But now, they had gotten up full steam again. A goateed old man was walking to the front of the room. Li-chia recognized him as Yang Yung-huai, grand-uncle of his friend Iron Hammer.

Yang Yung-huai approached Yang the Elder and thrust out his hand. "Brother, is the list of Judges ready?"

The so-called "Judges" were those who sat at the big table with the clan leader and drank tea while "trying the case." Before liberation, landlords and "important personages" in the clan, members of the older generation and those of advanced years were all considered "qualified." But the final decision of who should sit as a judge always rested with the clan leader. Since liberation, things had changed drastically. The Elder had conferred with the Bigot for hours the day before on the question of the Judges list. As to qualifications, there was one requirement

on which the Elder insisted: "They must be thoroughly versed in Family Rules and Clan Morality!" Finally, twelve names were agreed upon, and Yang Yung-huai was second on the list. Now, the Elder hastened to reply to his question.

"It's all ready. You're on it too. We sent word to your house yesterday, but you weren't home. . . ."

Yang Yung-huai smiled with satisfaction. "Well, take it then and let's get started. Tell Pen-tsai to pour the tea. Nearly everyone's here!"

Several others also urged the Elder on from the sidelines. He loved being the centre of attraction. His anger had long since cooled. The Elder thought a moment, then said:

"Wait a little longer. My daughter Huan hasn't come yet."

He had summoned her so that she should learn from the lesson which he expected would be given to Chun-mei and her mother. He was about to expound on how all the young women of the clan would benefit by attending this meeting, when he heard a splintering sound, followed by several people crying out in astonishment. Wheeling towards the shrines, what he saw made him speechless with rage. Young Iron Hammer, accompanied by his mother, was going around smashing the wooden ancestral tablets. Iron Hammer would point at a tablet and ask his mother a question. If the old lady said, "Break it!" he would swing a heavy pole and split the tablet in two. Everyone was dumbstruck.

Crash! Crash!

Only after Iron Hammer had demolished about ten tablets did Yang the Elder find his voice.

"Stop him, someone! Are you all dead!"

Iron Hammer waved his hand reassuringly. "They're only landlords' tablets! I'm not breaking any others!"

Several people rushed forward and grabbed him. His mother advanced on Yang the Elder.

"Uncle! Elder!" she cried, and launched into an impassioned recital of her grievances. It seemed that twenty-four years ago, when she was pregnant with this very same son, she had talked back to the "Venerable Master" of the clan, father of the landlord Yang Li-chai. He accused her of committing a "crime against her superiors," and the clan "Judges" ordered her to kneel on broken tiles. When she refused, she was severely beaten. As a result, her son was born prematurely. Thereafter, she and her husband were fined two piculs of rice. Because they couldn't pay, her husband was slowly but surely hounded to death.

By this point in her story, the old lady was weeping bitterly. "And now you want to hold a clan trial too! They're a sin, I tell you!"

Yang the Elder looked at her helplessly. He hastened to explain. "You must remember, I was away from the village then, I wasn't at the meeting! It was all the work of that landlord gang!"

Holding his big pole, Iron Hammer pushed up to the Judges table.

"So the landlords did it! Why do you copy their methods then? Why don't you copy good people!"

Goateed Yang Yung-huai was timid. Fearing that his bold young grand-nephew might go wild, he stole away. Li-chia also thought his friend looked dangerous; and he quickly took hold of him.

Meanwhile, Chun-mei's uncle Li-ho leaned across the table to address Yang the Elder.

"You must admit, old grandfather, that my sister should never have been tormented into killing herself! I've got an old-fashioned brain too, but I think it's time we stopped following those old landlord laws. We don't want to cause any more deaths!"

On all sides, people began talking among themselves. Yang the Elder felt as though his heart was being hacked by a knife. The clear voice of a woman rose above the clamour.

"Since the time our clan was founded, the tears the girls and wives of the Yang family have shed could drown under this whole ancestral temple!"

From the doorway came the retort, "Where would you get that much tears? Are you sure it's not piss you're talking about!" The sceptic was Loudmouth. She had more to say, but the clear voice over-rode her.

"Who's talking to you? None of us can compare with you—you picked on your mother-in-law when you were a bride, and now you pick on the girl your son's married! The way you live, nobody's ever seen the like!"

A man's hoarse tones were heard on the left. "Nothing good ever came out of this lousy temple! They want Ching Ming Festival money, money for a reserve fund, incense and lamp fees, a fee for installing your ancestral tablet, you have to pay fines. . . . Son of a bitch! One-third of the money the damn landlords sweated out of us they got through the temple!"

Many men went into action, and a row of ancestral tablets on the left side of the room came clattering to the floor. Li-ho picked up the two tablets belonging to his family.

"I'm going to take them home," he said. "It's wrong to keep them here. Before they were used to terrorize people; now, they get knocked around!"

Another row of tablets crashed to earth on the right.

Now tablets were being destroyed indiscriminately, and Li-chia was rather worried. Hadn't they been urged not to let the meeting get out of hand? He looked around for Chun-mei's Aunt Li and saw her talking to a group outside the doorway. Her face was serious and she was gesticulating, evidently in the middle of an argument. It didn't seem as though he could get to her right away. In several places, people were

beginning to shout angrily at one another. He couldn't wait any longer. Li-chia jumped on a bench.

"Wei, wei, wei!" he cried. "Don't smash the tablets everybody, don't smash the tablets!"

The tablet wreckers paused, the brawlers stopped their hands and stilled their voices.

"Breaking all the tablets like this is no good," Li-chia continued in a quieter tone. "My idea is that any family that wants to worship in private can take their tablets home. Keeping them here is a waste of time, no question about it!"

About half the people took his suggestion, and hurried to pick up their fallen tablets. The other half made no move towards the tablets, but began a lively discussion among themselves. Some of them said they already had a shrine and tablets at home. Others said they never really had a home until after land reform, and that the most prominent place in the house was already occupied by a picture of Chairman Mao; they didn't need any of that tablet junk. One man said, "The dead are like a lamp that's gone out"—it didn't make any difference to them whether you worshipped them or not. Quite a few stated that since their families hadn't had enough money to pay the "Tablet Entrance Fees" for several generations they had no tablets in the temple anyhow.

After all those who decided to take their tablets home had collected them, Iron Hammer pointed his big pole at the remainder. "Then nobody wants these? Smash 'em!"

Immediately, there were loud crashes, and splinters began flying all around the room. Shrine canopies shook violently, spreading great clouds of murky dust. Suddenly, there was a sound like a clap of thunder. The large central placard—emblazoned with the glory of Grand Marshal Yang who originated the clan one thousand years ago—came tumbling down.

Yang the Elder had rushed about tempestuously when Iron Hammer had first started swinging his pole. Afterwards, when Li-chia stopped the wrecking, the old man had relaxed and returned to his seat at the table. But he hadn't dreamed that the young man would say what he did, and that these words would set off an even more thorough demolition. The Elder's cronies had long since disappeared. Only the Bigot remained, huddled beside the doorway, clutching his ancestral tablets to his chest, wagging his head and sighing.

Jumping to his feet, Yang the Elder let out a roar. He glared around with bulging bloodshot eyes, like a maddened bull looking for a target. Finding no one on whom to vent his rage, he raised his hookah and ploughed it through the tea bowls piled on the table, sending the crockery crashing to the floor.

"I'll fight to the last breath in this old body!" he howled.

At that moment, he noticed Chun-mei, beside a rack which was hung

with a large bell. There was a flash as Yang the Elder flung his brass-bowled hookah at Chun-mei's head. It sailed through the air, and struck the bell with a musical clang. The old man charged at Chun-mei in the immediate wake of his missile. Several people seized him. Threshing and kicking wildly, he fought to break free. His slightly crippled son, looking very distressed, pleaded that the old man be taken home.

Crowding and pushing, they got the Elder outside and made him sit down on the steps. Li-chia followed close behind, intending to talk seriously to him. But by then, the old man was beyond hearing anything. He had collapsed limply against the body of Li-ho, who was supporting him. Li-ho shouted for his wife to hurry and bring a bowl of hot tea for the Elder.

In response to everyone's anxious coaxing, the old man drank the tea. He had just become somewhat calmer when a young boy came rushing into the temple courtyard. It was the Elder's fifteen-year-old grandson. Even before he had run halfway across the courtyard, the boy dropped the bundle he was carrying and burst into tears.

"Grandpa! Huan—Huan—has jumped in the river and drowned herself!"

Many cried out in shocked dismay. The Elder's eyes rolled up and he fell unconscious. People were thrown into a frenzy of alarm. One man calling to him, pressed a fingernail hard on the centre of the Elder's upper lip. A few massaged his back with their fists. Someone got cold water and threw it in his face. . . . Finally, there was a rasping in the old man's throat and he began breathing normally again. He opened his eyes, looked at the people surrounding him, and gasped:

"They've killed her! We must get revenge! Our Yang clan is big. We'll bring the house of her husband's family down on their heads!"

Straight and erect, Li-chia stood before him. "Elder, we don't have feuds between families any more. We've got our own government now. We can bring charges against them there. Anyone who drives a person to death has to be punished!"

Loudmouth shivered. That very morning she had cursed her daughter-in-law and struck her with the fire tongs. Quickly, she turned and searched through the crowd. Only after she discovered that the thin little sixteen-year-old girl was still among the others did she relax.

When the excitement subsided a bit, Li-chia asked a few men to carry the Elder home to rest. But the old man proved surprisingly strong. He stood up, and taking Li-chia and Li-ho each by the arm, walked out with them under his own power.

Aunt Li could see that the meeting was breaking up; people were beginning to leave. She ran to the temple doorway and shouted for everyone to wait a little while.

"The rest of you please don't go yet. Chun-mei has something to

LI HUAN-MIN: Tibetan Women Weaving a Carpet

say. She wants to tell you about the new law of our People's Government!"

Iron Hammer stopped goateed Yang Yung-huai at the courtyard gate. "Grand-uncle, you can curse me as much as you like later, but now I must beg you to listen to this new law!"

"Let's hear it! Listen, everybody!" a number of people cried. These even included Loudmouth and several old timers on the Judges list.

The people flowed back into the courtyard, and Chun-mei came out and stood on the top steps in front of the temple doorway. Her round face was flushed, her heart pounded; she was afraid to raise her eyes before such a large crowd.

"Speak up, Chun-mei," a youngster standing next to her encouraged. "You're not going to talk about anything bad!"

Taking courage, Chun-mei opened her eyes wide and swept them across the upturned sea of faces. Instantly, her country-girl shyness vanished.

"All right, I'll tell you people something. The gossip about my mother and me has spread far and wide. You know all about it! What I want to say is this—Yang the Elder and a few others insist that we've made the clan lose face. Today they put on a big show. They wanted to finish us—to kill, to flay, to drown! What they didn't know is that the People's Government has a Marriage Law!"

She drew from her bosom a small pamphlet. "Look, everybody. The day before yesterday, the head of the district government gave me this. The trouble is I can't read much yet. I'm afraid I can't read it to you very well. Aunt Li," she called, "you read it, please!"

Dragging someone forward with her, Aunt Li replied, "I only recognize a few dozen words myself. Why not invite an educated person to read it aloud first, then I'll explain it a little further. Listen carefully, everyone, and we'll put a stop to all these killings and suicides!"

The man she pulled to the front was the old Bigot. His shoulders hunched, squinting, he thrust out a trembling hand, and with respectful veneration received the small pamphlet which Chun-mei proffered to him. A ray of sunshine, breaking through the clouds, lit up the courtyard and the temple steps. The bright red letters on the cover of the booklet shimmered before the Bigot's eyes: *The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China.*

Aunt Li prodded him. "Read. Your superstitious fortune-telling business is out of date now. Change your old ideas and we'll find you another side-line!"

The Bigot looked at her dazedly. Then, in helpless frustration, he opened the pamphlet to the first page.

* * *

Ten days later, the case of the suicide of Yang the Elder's daughter Huan was closed by the court. The old man returned from the county seat, making a stop at the district government office on the way home. The blow to his spirits was the worst he had suffered in years. He, who had always been so sure of himself, now felt completely crushed. He crept back to the village after dark and groped his way into the house. Lying down on his hard wooden bed, he seemed to go all to pieces. His back was sore, his legs ached, his eyes were swollen, his head was spinning, his body weighed a thousand catties. He had no desire to eat or drink, or even to smoke. Falling into an exhausted slumber, he didn't awaken until very late the following morning.

Physically, he felt a little better but his numbed brain, which was just beginning to function again, was at once deluged with a flood of recollections of the stupid things he had done in past years, of the events of the last two weeks. They raced through his mind without respite.

The tempest in the village receded, washing away with it the blind prejudices that had encrusted his thinking for so long. But he had lost his daughter and had nearly caused the destruction of Chun-mei's mother. Who knew when these scars would heal? If the government had been severe with me, he thought, and sentenced me to a long term in prison, maybe I wouldn't feel quite so bad. But only Huan's husband and her mother-in-law were sent to jail. . . . Both in the county and in the district, the authorities had only talked to the old man, long and patiently, as though teaching a confused, stubborn child.

"Is the sin of Huan's husband and his mother any worse than mine? No, no, no. . . ." The Elder shook his head. With tears in his eyes, he lay on his back, heaving sigh after sigh, staring at the dust-coated spider streamers hanging from the ceiling.

But before long he made up his mind. Rising from his bed, he instructed his young grandson to invite Chun-mei, her mother, her Aunt Li and young Li-chia to come to his house.

"Remember," he cautioned, "you must say 'please.' Even to Chun-mei you must say 'please.' You tell them I haven't been well lately, or I'd have gone to see them. . . ."

When Aunt Li arrived, bringing Chun-mei and her mother, the old man had already had a bite to eat. He was talking to his crippled son. The latter immediately stood up when the visitors entered, opened the windows and brought in a few stools. The son was a simple, honest fellow who was entirely at a loss at making conversation. After fussing about for a few minutes, he slipped away to the next room to return to his firecracker manufacturing.

The old man invited his guests to be seated, then asked his grandson, "Where is your uncle, Li-chia?"

"He hasn't any time right now," Aunt Li interposed. And she added

in a kindly voice, "Whatever you have to say you can tell us just as well."

The women had already gotten word of the disposition of the case of Huan's death. Moreover, they had heard that the Elder was showing signs of comprehension. Aunt Li and Chun-mei were intending to take this opportunity to help the old man a little further along in his thinking. But right after tea was served, before they had a chance to open their mouths, the old man began to talk. Starting with the decision in the case, he told of the education he had been given at the county and district governments. When he related the "warp and woof" of the principles he now understood, he became very excited and tense. He thought carefully before each sentence, anxious to remember every point correctly.

Aunt Li thought the leadership had done a good job of teaching the Elder. Not only was he able to say, "What counts with the peasants is class, not clan!" but he could even distinguish between the bestial ways of the landlord class and today's proper freedom of association prior to marriage. He spoke quite well. Aunt Li stole a glance at Chun-mei's mother.

Sitting quietly, the widow hadn't heard a word of what the Elder was saying. From the moment she had entered the room, her mind was filled with the image of Huan. That well-behaved, gentle girl who wouldn't even crush an ant. "It's always the good who are tormented," she mused, her thoughts turning from Huan's character to her own. She couldn't repress a glare at the old man.

She noticed the grandson standing beside the door, and she beckoned to him. "Tell me," she asked softly, "before Huan killed herself, did she say anything special?"

The boy didn't know what she meant by "special." He stared at her.

"What I'm asking is—did she hate your grandfather? Did she tell you to say anything to him?"

The boy thought a moment, then answered, "She fooled me! I walked with her to the river bank. She said her back ached, her legs hurt. She had just been beaten again that morning. Of course she hurt! She said she couldn't walk any further. I said I'd see her home. She wouldn't let me. She said it wasn't far, she could go back herself. She gave me a bundle and told me to give it to grandpa. She said, 'Be sure to give it to him. Tell him I'm sending back all the things I took with me. When he looks at them, it'll be just like seeing me at home again.' She said, 'Thank your grandpa for me. I've been a lot of trouble to him all these years. When I get better I'll come and see him.' I didn't know she was fooling me! She went in that direction, I came in this. When I reached the top of the stone-flagged path, she ran back and jumped in the river! The water is deep. I shouted, but nobody came. . . ."

Chun-mei's mother suddenly recalled how wretched she felt the night she hung herself. Her eyes smarted and two tears rolled down her cheeks. Frightened, the boy fell silent. Chun-mei's mother noticed that the room had become exceptionally quiet. Looking up, she found that the others had stopped talking, when, she had no idea. . . . They were all facing her, listening to her conversation with the Elder's grandson. The old man sat paralyzed in his wooden armchair, tears streaming from his eyes.

Chun-mei, leaning an elbow on the edge of the table, was deep in thought, her face tight and drawn. She stood up and addressed the old man.

"Elder, if you hadn't ordered Huan to come to the clan meeting, I don't think she would have killed herself. You knew how cruel those meetings were!"

The old man's face was anguished. "Yes! I regret that very much, Chun-mei! Not only her, but I was bringing you and your mother. . . ."

Aunt Li tugged Chun-mei by the sleeve. "What's past is past," she interrupted. "Many people in this village have finally come to their senses! Loudmouth doesn't dare to utter a peep now. The Bigot has gone to the village school-teacher. He wants to learn how to teach the new texts. . . ."

But what particularly surprised the old man was hearing that goateed Yang Yung-huai had given a ceremonial dinner of apology to Iron Hammer and his mother. This was because, although quite young at the time Iron Hammer's mother was so brutally used by the clan, he was already a member of the older generation, and had been compelled to occupy a seat at one corner of the Judges table.

Chun-mei exchanged a few quiet words with her mother, then cut in on her aunt's recital to the old man. "You shouldn't put it so generally. There are plenty of people still in a daze!"

Aunt Li laughed. "Silly wench, I've told you before. You can't remove the root of a way of thinking by trying to yank it out!"

The Elder was listening woodenly, pondering. Then he abruptly rose to his feet, pushed back his armchair, and strode over to Chun-mei and her mother. To their surprise, he made them each a respectful short bow. He had invited them today, he said, in the first place, to apologize.

"Secondly," he went on, less formally, "when I was at the district government, I heard that Chun-mei and Hsiao-chang have already registered their marriage there. I want to congratulate you both, and give you a little something as a remembrance."

At this point, another thought came to him, and he asked Chun-mei's mother, "Sister, what about you? Have you registered yet?"

The question was unexpected, and Chun-mei's mother blushed.

Aunt Li answered for her. "Brother Tseng is a little hesitant. He's afraid the clan is too strong against them."

"Aiya!" exploded the Elder. "Then you go and speak to him! And if anybody in the clan ever talks any more of that nonsense, just send him to me and I'll convince him!"

He squatted beside the bed and pulled out from underneath an old wooden trunk. Opening it, he groped around and produced two objects—an antique silver bracelet and a flowered quilt cover.

"These things are the most valuable of what I gave Huan for her dowry. The silly child naturally never wore the bracelet; she didn't use the quilt cover either. When she decided to die, she sent them back to me." The Elder paused and his eyes reddened. But he took a grip on himself and continued. "I don't want to keep these things here. It hurts me to look at them. You two, mother and daughter, have suffered because of me. Let me give you these small gifts. Consider them as keepsakes. The quilt cover is for Chun-mei; the bracelet is for her mother. Of course, the bracelet is out of style. If you like, you can bring it to the silversmith in the city and let him make something else out of it."

Seeing the reluctance of the other two, Aunt Li hastened to accept the gifts on their behalf. "Thank you, Elder. They'll take them!"

The old man again seated himself in his armchair. He seemed about to say a good deal more. But just then a great beating of gongs resounded on the street, and the Elder's grandson rushed in.

"Grandpa, Grandpa, a government comrade is going to make an announcement at the temple! I want to go!"

Aunt Li stood up. She explained to the old man that a month of publicity and explanation of the new marriage law was beginning, that the team which would do this work was arriving in the village.

Chun-mei had an idea.

"Grandfather, you just said you'd convince anyone who still talked nonsense about marriage. But convincing people one at a time would be a long job. It wouldn't be nearly so good as getting up on the platform and talking to all of them at once!"

Flustered, the old man rubbed his mouth, fingered his beard. But at last he said firmly, "That's right. I—I ought to take myself as an example!"

Late in the afternoon, the meeting ended. Group after group emerged from the ancient Yang family temple. Yang the Elder strolled slowly, carrying his hookah, chatting with a few neighbours about some of the points he had just made from the speakers' platform. Behind, a noisy group of youngsters was approaching. The old man turned and saw Chun-mei in their midst, like a queen bee. They caught up to the older folk, and Chun-mei hailed the Elder with a dazzling smile.

"Grandfather, you spoke well today!"

"Quite well! Not bad at all!" chorused several others.

Yang the Elder laughed a bit unnaturally. Before he could reply, the young people swept past him and hurried on ahead.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

TSUI YI

Shu Chun

It is two years since I returned from Korea, and the armistice negotiations have been successfully concluded. But the memories of those days still shine like jewels in my mind, particularly because I often talk about the times in Korea to the workers in the Anshan Iron and Steel Company, where I am working now. The story I have told most often, in the Model Workers' block, and other places, was about Comrade Tsui Yi.

One day, one of the girls who works in the propaganda department handed me a notebook and said, "Please read this over and make it into a real story for me some time when you have time." I expected it to be a propaganda draft, or a report on her section's work that she wanted me to give her a hand in, but when I turned to the first page I saw the title "Comrade Tsui Yi." I then realized that the manuscript was no other than the notes she had jotted down from a talk I had given to the workers on a construction site the other day. I asked her why she wanted this permanent record, and she said she wanted to be able to tell the story to other workers who had not yet heard it. When I got back to my room I went over her notes. The story I had told was all there, and so was the spirit behind my telling of it. I felt very much inclined to do what she wanted. Some of the pages were blurred . . . was it by rain or accidental splashes? I think it was from her tears, the passionate tears she shed when she heard the story.

But I realized that it would take me a long time to do what she wanted, and we were all of us very busy. The Heavy Rolling Mill was just being completed and I was involved with all the others. I had to put the notebook away for the time being.

After the rolling mill started operations, and was in trial production, I began turning in at night later and later, but could not get to sleep. It was during this sleepless period that I polished up her notes, adding here and deleting there. Then when I had finished the whole of the first part, and I was about to lay my pen down, it suddenly occurred to me that if she thought it was helpful to the worker at Anshan, why

shouldn't it reach a yet wider audience? The story is now laid before you with her permission.

I

It was in the spring of 1951 that I set out from Shenyang to Korea. I ran into air-raid after air-raid as I travelled through the winding highways, among mountains, through green pine woods, and across clear streams . . . sometimes through the rubble of ruined towns. Finally I arrived at a Section H.Q. of the Army Service Corps. I had already picked up the rudiments of military strategy, and knew that in the war against United States aggression in Korea, the supply services played a major role. In fact victory depended as much on supplies as on other services. I also knew that I was going to a famous supply unit, which kept the transport road open in the face of almost insurmountable odds, and was never halted by air-raids. I was also looking forward to meeting the C.O. Commandant Shen, who is an old friend. . . . I first knew him in Yenan more than ten years ago. I was particularly glad therefore to have arrived in this outfit.

Preparations were in hand for the Fifth Battle, and as the military pundits have it, "Munitions are the life blood of war," so the Corps was working all out. The Political Commissar, Comrade Li, had gone to inspect the front zone, Political Officer Wang was conducting political briefing among the troops, and only Commandant Shen with two aides was at H.Q. directing the show.

One night began like all the other nights, with a scene of intense activity. The homestead where the H.Q. was quartered was in a hubbub from dark to dawn. The sentry at the door was alert, challenging any comers, and being the air-raid alarm when necessary, so that we knew when to make the black-out complete. An orderly was also hanging around, busy and slack by turn. In his busy moments he strode in and out as purposely as a ferryman with his pole, but in between he lounged or squatted outside the door. Now and again he looked in through the cracks, or listened through the paper windows. This was Feng Hsiao-kui, who had been with the Commandant for six years, starting off as one of our beloved "little devils" and was now a first-rate orderly. He knew his Commandant inside out, and could tell what he was thinking by his very breathing. I took to Feng Hsiao-kui immensely; his intelligence and straightforwardness shone out from him. So much for the general appearance from outside.

Inside, three candles burned. By comparison with the Korean village, this was brilliance, but these three candles were not enough really to read the transport map on the wall. The telephone on one wall was in constant use. One of the aides was using it incessantly, to the exchange,

to Sachang, Yenchon or the stores. His conversation ranged from ammunition of various types to roast flour. . . . His voice had given way till it was only a husky whisper. The other aide used his tongue less but his legs more, running between the Section H.Q. and the Signals, to get and send telegrams, and in between drafting orders for the Commandant. He was fagged out, and his bloodshot eyes were showing the strain he was under.

Commandant Shen told me with a grin that the young people couldn't take it like the tough old ones. He was forty-three, the total of the aides' combined ages! His uncropped hair framed his thoughtful face and his broad-rimmed spectacles. He sat cross-legged at a little Korean-style desk, reading, listening, giving orders and dealing with problems. He had to use all his faculties at full pitch, and work very closely with his two youngsters. I found him very matured from his previous self, more flexible and steadier. Even at the most critical points his face gave no sign of strain, and his level tones did not vary. At such time, in fact, he was apparently in the best of humour, cracking jokes. I did see some signs of change. His forehead was criss-crossed with deeper wrinkles, and his hair was greyer. The uniform I knew him in in Shenyang was now changed to army red-bordered uniform. I was close to him now. My desk faced his, and we slept next to one another, and I went with him wherever he went. He gave the impression that all problems could be solved if he were around.

The night wore on. One aide came with an urgent report from Transport. Fifty trucks were loaded, but could not start. . . .

"What's the trouble?" asked the Commandant, not looking up from the telegram he was reading.

"They're dropping delayed action bombs on the highway from the stores."

"Tell the anti-aircraft to get the planes in this area, and mobilize the workers' brigade to move the bombs."

The enemy had found it useless to bomb the roads, and turned to scattering nails. He then found that this didn't halt the traffic, so he had taken to dropping delayed action bombs. We had, of course, stepped up our struggle to meet these attacks from the sky. As Commandant Shen said, "If they're trying bombing, we'll take cover, deceive them, and answer with anti-aircraft fire. If they drop nails, we'll sweep them up. Now if they are trying delayed action bombs, we'll shift them." But as we'd just heard, this was easier said than done. Blowing out the candles, the Commandant told little Feng to come with him, and set off to see the matter for himself. I went with them.

It was midnight. The sky was dark, and the earth even blacker. We could hear sounds, but see nothing. Our jeep bucketed along, ignoring the machine-gunning and bombing of enemy aircraft. It was an awful job for the comrade driving. He could not use his headlights—

the anti-aircraft regulations forbade it—and had to strain his eyes as his only guide. As well as this, he had been told to go at top speed by the Commandant, and must go on despite the concussion of falling bombs and the appalling noise. I felt as though we were in a little boat on a storm-tossed ocean. Little Feng sat beside the driver, doubling the parts of air-raid warden and signaller. In normal times he would have told the driver to stop, but now he couldn't, with the Commandant's strict orders. He just poked his head out, keeping a sharp look-out, and warning the driver "Enemy plane about! Strafing ahead!" or "Look out, there's a steep bank . . . rocks in the road. . . ."

We sat in the back. Now and again I felt Commandant Shen's re-assuring hand on my arm. I knew he was helping me to relax.

In a musing voice he said to me, "D'you know, old chap, I'm indulging in a day dream . . . or is it a night dream? Perhaps you think the word is too far-fetched. Let me call it a hope. Can you guess what my hope is?"

"That you'd like to see our planes turn up!" I answered with undue self-confidence.

"What else?"

"You hope for peace in Korea?"

"Yes, but what else?"

I had no more ideas, and could only wait for him to tell me himself. More like a scientist engrossed in work in a peaceful laboratory than a commandant at the front, he talked about the immediate problem. He said that physical removal could be one way of tackling the job, but that it was very dangerous, and anyway it was a backward and primitive method. The scientific and advanced method was to dismantle and render safe the bombs. Properly done, this was much less dangerous. Finally he said, as we jolted along, "I must confess to you that I hope we can start dismantling the bomb, instead of having to shift it. Do you see what I'm driving at? D'you think it's feasible?"

My mind went back over his life, as far as I knew it. He had been apprenticed as a lad to an engineering workshop. Later, by dint of doing odd jobs, he raised the money to keep himself at a university and studied physical science. He joined the revolution and the Party in his early youth, and he had held responsible posts before he came to Korea as a Volunteer. He was well equipped, therefore, not only with scientific knowledge, but with revolutionary experience. In the few months that he had been working in the Service Corps he had been able to suggest many improvements, such as air-raid sentries stationed among the lines of communication, camouflage improvements, and so on, most of which had been adopted and found useful.

I had no difficulty in agreeing with him, as you may imagine, and answered as much.

"What makes you agree with me so easily?" he retorted, taking me aback.

"Well, I also believe in the advance of scientific knowledge, and the technical abilities of our country. Aren't I right to do so?"

"H'm. What I'm getting at is that it's the masses I'm going to rely on, not experts. Now do you see what I've got up my sleeve?"

We had fairly got to this point in our breathless talking when we got to our destination. Enemy flares hung in the night sky, giving out their unearthly cold light, and there in front of the stores lay five ungainly monsters. Certainly they were holding up the traffic! The Chief of Staff and the Transport C.O. were already there, and so were the mobilized workers. Only naturally, for such an unusual task, they were inclined to be hesitant about removing such objects. Commandant Shen realized that this was only to be expected. But the mounting queue of lorries and cars might lead to heavy losses, should one of the circling planes get on to them. This was the urgent problem. The occupants of the cars, laden with records and files, had got out and scattered to the sides of the road. The medical corps took over the wounded, and nurses were staggering along, carrying their wounded soldiers by the fireman's lift. I saw one who passed me just as the soldier realized it was a girl who was carrying him. Wounded as he was, he insisted on getting off and managed to hobble along by himself. . . . The scene was one of the intense expression of the common will to overcome the difficulties. But no one could take the responsibility off Commandant Shen's shoulders. He strode backwards and forwards purposely, organizing the movements. For the first time I found him somewhat hurried. As he passed me, he said briefly, "I haven't done much of a job here, I'm afraid. The situation's a tough one. . . ." But he was interrupted by the impatient halloos of the lorry drivers, who were fed up with waiting. They didn't know that Commandant was about, and were properly letting off, as you might expect. "Where's the responsible comrade? Let's get cracking, for God's sake."

Everyone was wanting to play his part. But what was the individual responsibility? Perhaps everyone has his own interpretation. Commandant Shen had one, certainly, and exemplified it in his work. I remember several incidents—when he had been the first to go into one of his flour stores and carry out the damp sacks—or when he was the leader in hauling out cartridge boxes from an exploding ammunition dump which had been raided. Of course he had a definition of what responsibility meant to him . . . the call of the Party spirit, voluntary self-sacrifice. Now he pushed aside Feng Hsiao-kui, who was trying to stop him going near, as though Feng were just the gate-keeper of a zoo. He eyed the delayed action bombs, for that matter, as though they were black bears safely in a cage! He went on till he was near the biggest, and scrambled up on top of it. From this pulpit he spoke to the workers, who would not

approach nearer than some ten yards. "Hallo there! This is Commandant Shen speaking! Commandant Shen from the Service Corps. I've come here specially to give someone a treat!" He was always fond of a joking manner, but this time he was particularly jovial. I took it that he wanted to reassure the workers. I didn't expect the reaction though. One of them took it perfectly seriously, and asked, "Who's going to be given a treat?"

"Well, I ask you, who should get one but these five U.S. beauties? I have a treat in store for them, but they won't budge. What shall we do about it? We'll have to shift them! Yes, we'll have to shift these sons of bitches ourselves."

Just then I heard some one bawl out at the top of his voice, "Comrades! That's a commandant, one of our leading comrades. . . . We mustn't let him get hurt! We must protect our leading comrades!"

This piercing cry cut through all other sounds like a whip. I could hear a white-hot passion beating in it, roused now by Commandant Shen's courage, but speaking also of the traditions of our people's army and the courage of the soldiers who, wounded, still refuse to leave the lines if they can stand. . . . I turned to see the speaker; it was a wounded soldier, the soldier I had seen struggle down from the nurse's back. I could not see his features in the wavering light, but could make out a tall shape limping forward, with a crutch under his right arm, hobbling as fast as he could, as though he had a race to win. The other watchers did not guess his intent, and gave him passage. By the time they realized he was making for the delayed action bombs, it was too late for them to stop him. When he got to Commandant Shen, he shifted his crutch to the other arm, and stood upright, balancing on his left leg. It looked as though his right leg had been crippled, but that he still had a good deal of strength in the rest of his body. He did not speak again, and Commandant Shen could not get out a word, so rapid were his movements, as he reached up, grabbed Shen's arm, and with a pull got him down off the bomb. Then with a firm hand, he butted him well away, turned, and tried to scramble up on the bomb himself. With only one good leg, however, he couldn't manage it, so he just sat on it, as calmly as a traveller who sits down on a wayside bench to have a breather.

The workers began to come nearer, and he said matter-of-factly, "It's all right. You can handle them. I know their little ways—" stooping and putting his ear against his bomb—"There'll be some indication before it goes off. I'll listen to it, and tell you directly there's any danger. There'll be plenty of time for you to get away."

The workers were emboldened by this, and those nearest came closer, while the hesitant ones further off gathered up courage. They began to get at the bombs, and rope them up so that they could drag them away, while the smaller ones were shifted bodily. They began to jest to one another. "What guests to have, to be sure! It's all we can do

to persuade them to move!" And some of them went up to the soldier, and said, "It's all right, mate. You get off to safety now. We can manage."

The wounded man was intent on his "listening," and could not take in what was being said. His ear still glued to the bomb, he only grunted.

"Hey you, get off to a safe place. We don't want you here. If the bombs begin to talk, we'll take to our heels all right. But you can't, with your crutch. Can't you hear us? Don't look at me as though you were daft! It's you I'm speaking to, you!"

He stirred as though he had only just woken up to the fact he was being spoken to. "Oh, me!"—he rubbed his head with his hand as though he was feeling to see if he did exist as an individual—"Oh, I'm a Communist. You don't have to worry about me."

At such a moment, with enemy planes lazing around the night sky, our communication lines cut, and the anti-aircraft barrage thundering, and when the spirit of readiness to overcome all obstacles was almost palpable, the lucid simplicity of these words struck home to me more powerfully than any rhetoric could have done. Its very simplicity illumined the depths of man's nobility.

II

The workers shifted the bombs within half an hour. They were parked by a hillside, some hundred yards away. The lorries roared away, and the road cleared. We wanted to find our wounded soldier, but he had also disappeared. Of course we felt that we had come to know many people closely, but we were particularly drawn to him. Who was he, where did he come from? We didn't even know his name, and we would not know his face again, after only seeing him in the night. He had made a profound impression on his hearers, and some of the crowd went over to "listen" to the bombs as he had done.

It was already daybreak when we got back, but we got constant reports that there were still people on that hillside, "listening" to the bombs. The Commandant promptly ordered a notice to be put up, to say the place was dangerous, but this had no effect. He followed this with another order that the area should be roped off and an "Out of Bounds, Danger" notice put up. We still heard that this didn't discourage the "listening." Then a report came in that one bomb had exploded, and had killed a boy messenger. While the Commandant's heart went out to the youngster for his courage, he mourned the unnecessary loss of life, and felt that he ought to have taken steps to enforce the orders. He said to us that as the Volunteers came from all over China to fight against U.S. aggression, they would have to learn the reason for military orders, and finally gave strict orders that a sentry should be posted at

the roped-off area, who was to refuse to allow people to go in. After this, the order was obeyed.

An ordinary day, after this fantastic night. Feng Hsiao-kui got on with his normal routine, rolling up the bedding which had been warming on the *kang* all night, and started to urge us to get off to our mountain caves to sleep. I lifted the black-out tarpaulin at the doorway, and went out on the threshold. Most mornings we would stand at the doorway and stretch ourselves, but this morning we were in no mood to relax. We looked around in silence. Although there was no objective change from yesterday, or the day before, we felt that there must be some imperceptible reflection of the night's strangeness. All we could see, though, was the little glen, the village, and some scattered homesteads, with smoke curling from their roof tops. With their steep thatched roofs, they looked like old fishermen in their grassy rain-cloaks. The nearby stream glittered in the morning sunlight like a silver chain, and alongside it a woman walked in shining white, balancing a jar on her head. There was an old white-bearded man with a bundle of faggots, and an ox-drawn plough. All was the same as it ever was; it was we who felt strange.

All was stillness and peace. It lay like balm on our souls. The warm sunlight caressed us, striking through the rosy cloudlets; our hands curled in it as though we could touch its kindly circlet, and we welcomed the friendly embrace of the morning breeze. The vivid green pine woods framed the quiet scene, heightening its beauty. But as we stood there under the eaves, our impatient thoughts were on our wounded comrade, and I heard the Commandant give vent to our feelings, as he muttered, "Where can he have gone?"

Feng Hsiao-kui shared none of our musing. He was impatient at our dawdling, and came back to hurry us to our caves. Once there, we fell back into being our wartime selves. The darkness, the cool dampness, and the call of the quilts brought us back to our immediate need, the most cherished need at the front, sleep. I lay down on my camp bed, and rolled myself up in my quilts, still holding their comforting warmth from the *kang*, but sleep would not come to me. The telephone bell still rang. . . . A shell depot was damp, a new unit had turned up and needed supplies . . . it was some time before Commandant Shen got the chance to drop off.

Our faithful Feng was on duty at the door, and keeping a firm hand on telephone calls and visitors. I could hear him, "The Commandant's only just got off to sleep. Please give him a chance to rest." Like a good member of the race of orderlies, Feng could be absolutely maddening at times, but at critical moments he was right on the job, watching over the safety and well-being of his charge.

Suddenly I was startled wide awake by an altercation outside. Two people were at it hammer and tongs. "Pah! You haven't even been in uniform long enough to get the creases out of it!" "Who d'you think

you are? A veteran? What the hell does length of service mean anyway? There are mules still pulling the guns today who were at Chingkangshan!"* I knew one of the voices—it was young Feng. I went out to see what was going on, and found him at it with a squad leader from the Guards Company.

I didn't have to ask what the row was about! It must be some message for the Commandant which Feng was trying to intercept, so that the Commandant could get his sleep. I drew them off a little way, and tried to find out how urgent it really was, and if it really couldn't wait. The problem came from our bomb area. There was a man there who would not obey orders, but insisted on going within the enclosure, to "listen."

"Pooh! Everything turns into a craze, and now it's a craze for listening to bombs." Feng got his word in, indignantly.

I told the lad to shut up because I didn't want another loud argument, and asked the squad leader why the Commandant's orders were not being kept.

"Well, we've got the chap in custody," he said.

"What on earth have you come round here for, then?"

"Our C.O. is afraid there'll be trouble if we keep him shut up too long."

"Where does the trouble come in?"

"You see, the chap's a wounded soldier, and he insists he knows how to deal with delayed action bombs. He's managed to talk his way round the C.O. already, and that's something!"

Of course I realized in a flash who it was. Even if there was no connection between him and Commandant Shen's dream, I wanted to go and see this soldier anyhow, as I wanted to know more about him. I told young Feng that I'd go along to the Guards Company, and would phone back if I thought I ought to. If I did, he was to put me through to Commandant Shen and not try to interfere. He grinned rather sheepishly at that, like the good boy he was, and shook hands with the squad leader who, for his part, said that he shouldn't have been so hasty!

III

We walked about half a mile, crossing a stream, round the brow of a hill, and skirting some marshy land, to reach the Company H.Q. I knew the C.O. and I was taken to see the "prisoner" straight away. Directly I got into the detention room I recognized him as "our" wounded soldier of the night. Now I could see him clearly. He looked round about thirty,

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* Revolutionary base on the borders of Kiangsi and Hunan Provinces, established by Mao Tse-tung in 1927.

with his thin, sallow face and his uncropped hair, but this may have been due to the obvious effect of his wounds and his war service. He was huddled up into a corner, in his army overcoat, with crutch lying by his side, and was engrossed in drawing in a notebook which he held against his good knee. He had made such a remarkable impression on me before that I was surprised to see his reactions to us now. The C.O. spoke to him in a friendly way, and I said, quite naturally, "How are you, comrade?" but he did not even raise his head. Whatever was up? Was he naturally so taciturn? I went up to him, and laid my hand on his shoulder.

"What's the great work?" I asked.

Through nearly closed lips he answered, "Look here, I'm not a counter-revolutionary, and I'm not going to try to run off. I'm not drawing anything reactionary. There's no need for you to waste your time hanging around guarding me. Haven't you got anything better to do?"

I could see he was perfectly sincere in what he said, but I didn't like the biting ring. I tried to explain what I was going.

"I'm not a guard, comrade, and we're not treating you like a criminal." I could not bring myself to argue with him, remembering his behaviour during the night. He had put up with enough then, and since had been kept under guard. I went on, "I came here just to see you. Aren't you the comrade who helped to move the bombs last night? I was there."

He turned round at that in a flash, and said, "Are you the Commandant, then?" When I saw into his face for the first time fully, I could see that his honesty shone out in his eyes, which reminded me of his saying last night—"Oh, me! . . . I am a Communist." When the C.O. saw that we'd roused him, he seized his chance, embroidering a little on the bare facts, and said, "This comrade isn't the Commandant, but he came from him. You can tell him what you have already told us."

Once the ice was broken, there seemed nothing taciturn about him. He was typical of the rest of the chaps in our army, who treat you like one of the family when they get to know you. He told me his name was Tsui Yi and that he was twenty-seven. He came of working class stock; his grandfather had been an Anshan miner, and his father a fitter. Both he and his brother were apprenticed to the Anshan Steel Company, and afterwards worked in an armament factory. After the Japanese surrender he had joined the P.L.A., and as he knew about munitions he was posted to the artillery. He rose to be a company leader in five years, and had been wounded three times in the War of Liberation. Now, as a Volunteer in Korea to resist U.S. aggression, he had been wounded again. His right kneecap got a bit of shrapnel. He made light of this, and said he was still alive, and there was nothing the matter with his hands. He had not meant to leave the line, but his battalion C.O. had ordered him to get back and recuperate. He was going back when he ran into our little trouble, and had been greatly impressed with Commandant Shen's bearing. He had instinctively come out to organize the workers, and

when he heard that a boy messenger had been killed, following his example of "listening" to delayed action bombs, he was both deeply grieved and inspired.

"I went on and registered at the field hospital, and transferred my Party records," he wound up, "but I wasn't going to hang around just to get something to eat and have my dressing done, and I got out when the nurses' back was turned. I want to dismantle that bomb, so that it won't be able to terrorize us again."

"Have you handled that type of bomb in your munition factory?" I asked.

"No, not that kind."

"What makes you think you can dismantle them, then?"

"The principle will be the same—most bombs run true to type! My guess is that this kind will have some kind of time-mechanism, which ticks over like a watch, until a certain time, when the detonator breaks and the bomb explodes."

"And does it make a noise before it goes off, as you said last night?"

"I suppose there'll be some kind of indication when the detonator gets going, but I don't know if there's actually anything audible. Then again, if there is a sound, I have no idea how much time there'd be between the sound and the explosion. It may be all right if you're pretty nippy, but I don't know."

"Why were you so confident last night, then?"

"Oh well, that was really only for a try-out, and to encourage the others. I was bitterly disappointed I wasn't there when the bomb went off this morning. That would have given me the chance to know if there was time. . . . . Anyway, whether there's any obvious sign or not, if I had some tools, I'm sure I can dismantle those bombs. Comrade, I ask you to tell the Commandant to let me have a try. Tell him I'm not irresponsible, I won't risk my life for nothing. Even though I'm a cripple at present, I still love my life, and besides, the Party has done a lot for me. I'm not going to waste it."

He showed me his sketches in his notebook, the diagrams and cross sections, and hypothetical diagrams of the workings. All the drawings were carefully done to scale, and produced with great delicacy.

As he showed me the drawings he dilated on them with enthusiasm, accompanying his words with gestures. I listened, fascinated, and finally was completely convinced. "You must let me do it, and quickly at that," he concluded. "Because we shan't get such a chance again, if we let all these bombs go off." I realized that the C.O. felt as I did, and why he thought he would not be justified just to hold Tsui Yi under arrest and why he had sent an urgent message to the Commandant. Tsui Yi had worked his magic on him already! As I came to realize later, once his mind was made up, there was no stopping him. He went straight ahead without deflection.

IV

I went out and telephoned the Commandant, and it seemed only a few minutes before I heard young Feng's voice. "Those damned planes were after us all the way, and we're nearly drowned in mud!" And in came Commandant Shen, his face beaded with sweat, and his whole body bespattered with mud. Tsui Yi was carried away with excitement when he saw him, and struggled to his feet, forgetting his crutch, and hopped over, one hand on the wall. Commandant Shen rushed forward to hold him up. Their silhouette against the bright sunshine which streamed in through the door merged into one mass. They greeted one another with affectionate arms and slaps on the shoulder, more like old friends and old comrades-in-arms, with common memories of risks they had shared, than people who had just met.

Then they settled down for a deep talk. One had the scientific background, and the other the practical experience. One talked while the other listened, all ears: One demanded an answer and the other pondered. The talk ranged from the peculiarities of time bombs in general, and of their automatic mechanism in particular, to the nature of dynamics. I knew nothing about this scientific mountain-top, but I could see they were finding plenty in common.

Finally, they seemed to have reached a measure of agreement over some action to be taken, and Tsui Yi said, "Is it O.K. then? Are you going to let me try?"

"Yes, I'm agreeable," said the Commandant without hesitation. "But the thing will have to be worked out properly."

By "worked out properly" he meant thorough security measures were to be taken. Commandant Shen's ideas on the subject were a good deal more complicated than Tsui Yi's—he quite simply wanted just to get on with it, and his plans were accordingly simple. In fact there was a considerable gap between the two ideologies.

"The bombs are delayed action bombs, but it doesn't mean they're going to delay themselves to suit our convenience" was Tsui Yi's line, while Commandant Shen was as reasonable from his point of view. "Without full and adequate preparations, there's nothing doing."

This did not seem reasonable to Tsui Yi, "I know I'm nothing compared with you," he said, "in fact, I might be called only a Young Pioneer, but if you'll excuse my saying so, Commandant Shen, we're not proposing to mount a full-scale battle. And come to that, I don't remember seeing all these preparations last night when you got up on one of the bombs!"

The Commandant didn't rise to this. "Let's go along to the roped-off area, and see what we shall need when we get there," he said amiably.

No sooner said than done. We started off, borrowing some surgical instruments from the field hospital on the way, scalpels and forceps, which we took along with us.

By now it was noon. The sun blazed down out of a cloudless sky, and not a breath of air stirred. The scent of newly-ploughed earth rose strongly off the fields. By some method, the news that the Commandant was going to dismantle a time bomb had spread, and long before we got to the actual scene we could see the area was thick with people. Soldiers, orderlies, workers, and the Korean villagers. . . . Commandant Shen had to start off with giving orders that they were all to be cleared off to a safe distance before he began to go in with Tsui Yi.

"You'll please stay outside the rope, Comrade Commandant," Tsui Yi said firmly. "That's too far off!" was all he got from the Commandant, who went on right up to the ropes and a few steps inside.

"Not a step further, Comrade Commandant."

"I gave you permission to come here at all, and now you don't let me have a look! I tell you what, we'll compromise. I'll just go near enough to be able to see it properly."

He hadn't gone another two steps, however, before Tsui Yi got really angry, and just pulled him back to the fence. "You're not to go on, Comrade Commandant!"

Commandant Shen faced him, with a grin. "You'd better get it into your head, comrade soldier. If you can't agree with my security measures, you won't be allowed to. . . ."

"Allow me to speak my mind too, Comrade Commandant. If I'd known what you meant by security measures, you'd never have got me here with you at all!"

All the men who had worked with the Commandant knew very well that he didn't throw his weight about, and that he never tried to pull his rank, but would be the first to say, in all humility, that he hadn't done his work well. In his Party records it was always stated that he was genuinely democratic in his relations with comrades of all ranks. But he was being properly the head of the family now, while Tsui Yi was being plain pigheaded, and sticking like glue to his own way of thinking. The one could not yield, and the other would not. I was afraid that an impasse had been reached. The Guards C.O. wanted to suggest that he should swap places with the Commandant but no one took any notice of this. I suggested that I might be a mediator, but Tsui Yi, his face red with indignation, would have none of it.

"Talk, talk, talk, the whole bloody day, and now I'm led over here, all for nothing," he said scornfully.

He saluted the Commandant stiffly, and turned to limp away. Commandant Shen softened, and began to speak again, but the soldier went off without turning his head. The crowd dwindled away, and we heard some disapproving comments on the Commandant as they went. At last there were only Commandant Shen, young Feng, and myself left standing by the enclosure.

V

Back again at our quarters, the Commandant was deep in thought. I knew him too well to think that when he was working out a problem he was ever concerned with his own prestige or advantage. Finally he made his mind up, and ordered young Feng to take the jeep and fetch Tsui Yi from hospital. He gave him a letter for the director, and ordered Feng to bring the soldier back at all costs. His two aides, who knew all about the whole business from young Feng, were ragging him. "Tell them that the Commandant says he's wrong," one said, while the other pulled a shocked face at the Commandant as though he had really committed a crime.

"If I have made a mistake," the Commandant said frankly, "I'll tell Tsui Yi so to his face, and I'll quite openly criticize myself before all of you."

We waited to see what would happen. It was getting on for two o'clock, and the Commandant would have usually had his first meal of the day by noon. He seemed to be preparing for it now, though, as he told the old cook to prepare for a guest, and to get out the two bottles of wine. This wine had a history attached to it. Some time ago his wife had sent him a parcel of wine and a book. He had written to thank her and had said, "There is gold in the book and love in the wine." He tried to keep both. He often read the book and he hardly drank the wine. In fact, he had only broken into it twice, once on New Year's Eve, to celebrate the victory of the Third Battle, and once at a fraternization dinner with the Korean villagers. I knew it was not because he begrudged drinking it, but because of its sentimental value. Now, when he told the cook to get out the last two bottles, I knew he had some very special guest in mind.

However, we were foiled again. Young Feng telephoned to say that he had not only failed to find the soldier in hospital, but that he had been properly ticked off by the matron for being the first to break their rules! The Commandant told him to try the guardhouse, in case Tsui Yi had got himself arrested again, but we heard then that he wasn't there either. The Commandant then ordered him to go with the Guards C.O. back to the bomb enclosure, "And if that's where he is, you jolly well bring him back."

He put down the receiver at this, and turned to speak to me. "I think he must be there, don't you? He struck me as being the ideal scientist for the job, and I think he'll probably get away with it. But it's his condition I'm worried about. With that bad leg, how's he going to dodge if anything happens? But I'm not going to take that line with him any longer. If we can get him here again, I'll just see what's the maximum safety measures he'll agree to take, and leave it at that."

We waited. . . . No Tsui Yi. Finally the telephone bell rang. Young Feng's triumphant voice came over.

"We've got him, Comrade Commandant!" he shouted. The Commandant couldn't keep back a roar of laughter. "I bet you found him at the bomb, didn't you?"

"That's right. That's where he is."

"Why the hell haven't you brought him back here, then?"

"Easier said than done, Comrade Commandant! He's incited the masses to rise now!"—Feng's voice shook with real dismay.

"Why didn't the sentry stop him going through the rope?"

"The sentry says that the soldier told him that he had been brought there before by the Commandant himself, and that he had the right to go in when he wanted to. He also said he wasn't going to do anything, just wanted to have a look. As a matter of fact, the sentry didn't try to stop him very hard. . . ."

"What about the C.O.?"

"Comrade Commandant, I have to inform you that the C.O. is a double-dealer!"

"What the hell are you doing about it then?"

"What, me?"

"Yes, you. Who d'you think I mean? Are you incited too?" The Commandant winked at me as he said this, as much to say that these cruel words were hiding his real affection for his young devil who had been through so much by his side.

A strange voice came over the telephone, "Beg to report that young Feng has been taken prisoner too."

The Commandant said gravely, "Report received, comrade stranger," and put the receiver down. No chance of dinner or that bottle of wine now! He grinned at me resignedly, and said, "We'd better face the facts. Everyone's against me. Shall we go and surrender?"

We started out, and about halfway we met young Feng coming back in the jeep. The Commandant stared sternly at him, and waited for him to speak first. "How can a chap clap with only one hand?" Feng muttered. We got in the jeep and soon ran across the C.O., standing by the roadside. He also got a stern glare, and cold silence. He didn't know that the Commandant had already changed his mind, and started out to persuade him to look at the problem from another point of view. He put it across quite convincingly, saying that a leading comrade ought to be able to accept the views of the masses, and that the masses and Tsui Yi were of one mind. Having already got some indication of this, and having heard as much from young Feng, I was myself by now heartily convinced that Tsui Yi had won over the masses all right. As we might have known, the masses were about. On the other side of the hill, the place was crowded. Soldiers, orderlies, workers, Korean villagers . . . all of them organized and busily working under Tsui Yi's instructions,

building an open-air workshop-laboratory. They had cleared and levelled a plot of ground—that was the workshop site—and had dug a large hole, in which they had planted a delayed action bomb, the size of a barrel, with its top sticking up. That is, the machinery had been installed. There were even security measures, too. They had poured a quantity of sand round the bomb's "nest." The shop was all tooled up, into the bargain, with the famous scalpels and forceps, and where they lay, was, we supposed, the lab. bench. By the time we got there, the capital construction of the project had just about been completed, and the toiling masses were retiring to a viewpoint some twenty yards away, to wait for the formal commissioning of the factory. No one seemed surprised to see us. At the sight of the Commandant, they greeted him as the director of the outfit, and came over to take him to the best "front seat." Shen didn't seem entirely pleased with the lay-out of his workshop. It seemed to him that the security measures would not stand up to too close an inspection. There it was, however, and what could he do about it? He didn't feel that he could now raise any objections to Tsui Yi, nor did he see just how the workshop could stop being commissioned. In fact, if he did try, he saw no way of preventing everyone from criticizing him for innate conservatism. At the same time, he could not really cavil overmuch at the arrangements, and could in fact not at all withhold his admiration of the organizer! In fact he whispered to me, "He is not only an engineer but a good organizer." But where, indeed, was the "organizer" in question? So far we had seen everyone but him. It turned out that he was reconnoitring in the woods. When he had put himself into the picture, he came hopping back towards the amphitheatre. When he saw the Commandant, he shifted his crutch to his left arm and gave a ceremonious salute, the salute of a soldier before he steps out on an important duty at the front.

"Reporting for your orders!" he said, in soldierly tones. The Commandant smiled, as though to intimate that nothing he could say would alter the way things were turning out. Then he thought better of it, and said, "You've won the battle so far. I am sure you will win the next engagement."

Tsui Yi's answer was brief: "Salute!" His voice, his salute, his whole bearing breathed of the immensity of his task and the solemnity of his approach to it. No one stirred in the crowd, as we watched Tsui Yi, a little stooped now, hopping forward. He seemed like a new-fledged university graduate starting his first important job—excited yet solemn, apprehensive but confident in his capabilities, sure that he could fulfil the task which lay ahead and win through. Thus he set his hand to the work.

Like an old artilleryman, his mouth was slightly open. This he must have learnt from his first day in the unit, when you are warned to do this to save your ear-drums when the guns are fired. I realized what

was in his mind. Forceps in hand, he attacked the screw-head of the delayed action bomb. The grip was too small, however, and both the forceps and the neck of the screw-head were slippery. If he did get the forceps open enough to reach round, it would not grip properly, and skidded in his hands. For half an hour he struggled, getting impatient, with his eyes starting from his head and the sweat streaming down his face. I could not bear to stand and watch so impotently, but longed to help in vain. I had never felt so useless! He tried first the forceps, then the scalpel, then from that to the scissors . . . the whole range of his tools. The electroplating of the surgical instruments flashed in the sunlight. Even the most experienced surgeon would feel the strain, I thought, if he had to spend so long on the most difficult operation, and would feel his instruments growing heavy and his hand less sure. He would repeatedly ask his assistant how the patient's pulse was, and would turn to the theatre sister to have the sweat wiped off his brow. But Comrade Tsui Yi was not a surgeon, nor was he working in a quiet, clean operating theatre. He was digging in the crater of a volcano; or travelling over an ice-bound river in early spring. If the volcano become active, or the ice begin to break up. . . .

Then with a roar of thunderous sound the mountains and the earth shook, and a blast of gunpowder-filled air swept over us, knocking down a Korean girl. Close on its heels came a cloud of smoke, which sealed off our view completely. As it cleared I saw the Commandant begin to speak, and then could hear him call out to Tsui Yi.

To our relief an answering hail came through the smoke screen . . . at least we knew that he was alive, and that the explosion must have come from one of the bombs on the other hillside. The smoke wreaths cleared off further, and there was Tsui Yi still intent on his work. He stopped and looked round at us, his face blacked all over with the smoke.

"Comrade Commandant, all of you," he shouted imperatively like the artillery leader that he was. "Listen, everyone, if I hear anything and tell you to lie down, you must do so straight away. Do you understand? When I call, 'lie down!' you're to do so."

"What about yourself?" the Commandant hallooed back.

"Oh, me! You don't have to worry about me."

When he said, "Oh, me!" my mind went back to last night. Commandant Shen seemed to resign himself to being unable to move Tsui Yi from the spot, but three combatant soldiers offered to be a rescue party to go in so as to be able to move Tsui Yi away at the last moment. Commandant Shen told them to be careful to remember about his wounded kneecap, and they began to move forward to take up their posts. But when they started towards him, he shouted out, "Halt. Stay still!" in English. All our Volunteers knew the phrase. It was the one they had learnt in Korea to use when they met the enemy close to. They stopped and looked round at the Commandant to see what he thought they ought

to do next. I could hear Tsui Yi shouting away, though I could see the three bodyguards had stopped where they were. I snatched up a telescope and looked at him. Now I could see his lips I realized he wasn't shouting to anyone but was giving vent to his long-pent-up feelings. He had got the head moving and was unscrewing it. As he took it off, we all joined in his excitement. Everyone grabbed for the telescope so as to be able to see for themselves. . . . The Korean girl who had been knocked down by the blast snatched the telescope from me, with such a jog that it bumped my eyes.

Tsui Yi put the head down, and stuck his ear to the hole. Then he peered into it, took out his notebook to make an alteration, and put his hand down into the maw of the bomb, and moved it as though he was untying some intricate knot. He was still shouting excitedly, but this time I could hear him, in English again, "Give up guns, or be killed!" The three bodyguards had by then run up to help. Exhausted as he was, however, he could not relinquish his "knot" at this critical moment, but went on working away, until he succeeded in doing what he was after—disconnecting the detonator, and disarming this U.S. warlord. By this time he was just about played out, even though he seemed to be made of iron, but he still kept at it, and to save the powder said reassuringly, still in English, to his "disarmed prisoner": "Well treat captives!"

The world seemed to wear a smiling face, and so did all of us. We were all cheering madly, Chinese and Koreans together. The Korean girl, whom I could now notice as a person in her pink coat and long green skirt, had burst out singing. "O'er the summit of the White-Headed Mountains a white stork wings its way," she carolled. She couldn't keep on the ground even, but was on tiptoe, dancing to her song. Then she flung her arms wide and flew across to Tsui Yi like a butterfly, followed by the shouting crowd. They seized Tsui Yi, and lifted him triumphantly into the air.

Commandant Shen did not move, so little Feng and I stayed by him. He stood as in a trance.

"What are you dreaming?" I asked him.

As though carried away by his intense joy, he answered proudly, "It's no dream that I'm having. No dream! It's all real!"

Later on, Comrade Tsui Yi came to our unit, to organize a training class. Except for his trips to the field hospital for dressings, he lectured all day on "How to Dismantle Delayed Action Bombs"—and how to save the explosive for use in the reconstruction of Korea. . . . He very quickly trained a group of comrades to dismantle the bombs, so that we no longer had to remove them bodily.

He was cited as a Special Grade Meritorious Fighter of the Chinese People's Volunteers. At one of the meetings held by the Chinese People's Delegation to Korea to present citations and merits to those who had

earned them, I was amazed to find our courageous soldier was frightened, when he had to report on his exploit. He tried to get out of it altogether, and when he was finally forced on to the platform by the Commandant, he could not read the draft I had prepared for him, even. At last he said, impromptu, "I just managed to dismantle a toy. I've got no more to say about it. That's all." . . .

This is not the end of the story of Tsui Yi. I hope that one day I shall have time to write up the rest of the notes which were in that little notebook.

Translated by Chang Hui-min

Tales from the Sung and Yuan Dynasties

Kaifeng, capital of the Northern Sung Dynasty (960-1127 A.D.), and later, Hangchow, capital of the Southern Sung Dynasty (1127-1279 A.D.) when the north was overrun by the Nu Chen Tartars, were great political and commercial centres, thronged with officials and merchants from all parts of the country. There was a large domestic and foreign trade in the China of that day, and the capital cities were centres of wealth and culture. It was here that the art of the story-tellers of the Sung Dynasty developed. Citizens of Kaifeng, it is recorded, were to be seen every day, rain or shine, listening to stories told in the market-places.

The tales of the story-tellers, composed in the everyday tongue of the people, were truly popular literature. They were meant for the entertainment of the "common citizenry," not the nobility and literati who despised the story-tellers and their art. It is not surprising, therefore, that we do not know the names of most of the authors of the stories which have come down to us from Sung and Yuan (1279-1368 A.D.) times.

Most of these stories were, as a matter of fact, based on tales and anecdotes originally composed in earlier times in the classical written language of the literati which was difficult for the man in the street to understand. The story-tellers took the bare themes of these originals, embellished them with what they conceived to be the natural developments of the plots, filled out the characterisation with details of the lives and feelings of the characters and made all such amplifications as seemed necessary to make them more real, lively and beautiful.

Today these story-tellers' tales have come into their own. They rank high among the treasures of Chinese classical literature because they give us a realistic picture of the times: they show us the social conditions obtaining in the Sung and Yuan Dynasties, the power and luxury of the ruling classes, the bitter lot of the common people, the inferior position to which women were condemned, the rise of the cities with their handicrafts and commerce. . . . Exposing and criticising the social evils of their time, they express a deep sympathy and love for the common people.

Many of these story-tellers' tales were committed to writing. In this form they became the first short stories written and published in China in the language of the common people. Some of these texts, closely approaching the way they were originally told in the streets of China, have luckily come down to us. The following are three examples of these popular tales from the Sung and Yuan Dynasties.

Now some are born intelligent,
Some hide the gifts that Heav'n has sent;
The merest glance may make you foes,
And laughing chat may end in blows.
Men's hearts are devious as a stream,
And stern as mail their faces seem;
Women and wine make kingdoms fall,
But study does no harm at all.

This verse points out how difficult it is for a man to behave correctly; for life is fraught with danger and human hearts are hard to fathom. Since the ancient way of life was lost, men have taken many paths in their pursuit of gain and often brought trouble on their own heads; many, too, are the accidents which may befall a man or his family. Thus, as the ancients say: There is meaning in every frown and meaning in every smile, and a man should be very careful how he frowns or smiles.

My story is about a gentleman who lost his own life, ruined his family and caused the death of several others through some remarks made in jest after drinking. First, however, I shall tell you another tale by way of introduction.

During the Yuan Feng period (1078–1085 A.D.) there lived a young scholar named Wei Peng-chu or Wei Chung-hsiao. He was just eighteen and had been married to a very lovely girl for not quite one month, when the spring examination was announced and he had to leave his wife, pack up and go to the capital. When they were taking leave of each other his wife urged him, whether he received an official post or not, to come back as soon as he could and not to forget their love.

"Fame and fortune are within my grasp," replied Wei. "Don't worry about me." Then he left for the capital.

Sure enough, he passed the examination, winning ninth place in the first rank and receiving a splendid appointment at the capital. Wei then wrote a letter home and sent a servant to bring his wife to the capital. In his letter, after the usual greetings and the news of his official post, he wrote: "Because I have no one to look after me in the capital, I have found myself a concubine; but we are waiting for you to come and enjoy our wealth and splendour together."

Wei's servant took this letter and went straight home. When he saw the young mistress, he congratulated her and handed her the letter; but when she opened and read it, she exclaimed: "How could your master be so heartless! He has only just been appointed to an official post, yet he has already taken a concubine!"

"I didn't hear anything of the kind when I was in the capital," the servant reassured her. "It must be a joke, ma'am; you'll see that when you get there. There is no need to worry."

"Very well," said the wife. "If you say so."

While waiting for a boat, she packed her belongings and sent a letter by another messenger to the capital. This messenger reached the capital, asked for Wei's hostel, gave him the letter and left after accepting a meal. When Wei opened the letter and read it, he found it was very brief. All his wife had written was: "Since you have married a concubine in the capital, I have found a male concubine at home, and we shall be coming to the capital together soon."

Wei realized that his wife was joking, and thought no more of it; but before he had put the letter away, his servant announced another successful candidate. Now in the hostels at the capital one does not have as many rooms as at home, and this caller was a good friend who knew that Wei's wife was not with him, so he walked straight into the living room and sat down. After talking for a little about the weather, Wei went out for a wash, whereupon his visitor, happening to look at the papers on the desk, saw this letter. Greatly amused, he read it aloud; and Wei, who could not hide it now, turned very red as he protested: "This is sheer nonsense. I played a trick on her, so she wrote this back as a joke."

His friend roared with laughter, and said: "This is hardly a joking matter!" Then he left.

That friend was a young fellow who liked to gossip, so in no time this story about Mrs. Wei's letter was known in all the hostels. Some scholars, who envied Wei for winning distinction while still so young, made much of the incident and a censor reported it to the throne, claiming that Wei was too young and frivolous to hold an important government post. The result was that Wei was demoted to a provincial post; and though he bitterly repented his folly, it was too late. After this incident he never gained promotion and his career, which had promised so well, was ruined.

After this tale of how one joke cost a man a fine official post, I shall tell you another about a gentleman who was cut off in his prime and responsible for the death of two or three other innocent people, just because of a joke he made after drinking. How did it happen? As this verse says:

Our life on earth with danger is beset,
While others laugh and gossip as they please;
The white cloud is not master of its fate,
Since it must drift with every giddy breeze.

During the reign of Emperor Kao Chung (1127–1162 A.D.) the

capital was moved south to Hangchow, where it vied in wealth and splendour with the former capital in the north. On the left of Arrow Bridge in Hangchow lived a gentleman named Liu Kuei or Liu Chun-chien. He came from a well-to-do family, but after he inherited the property luck was against him; and although he studied at first, later he could not maintain himself and had to go into trade. As he was no professional, however, he had no head for business and soon lost his capital. First he had to sell his big house to buy a small one, and later he had to sell the small house and rent two or three rooms in which to live with his wife, a Miss Wang whom he had married in his youth, and a concubine whom he had married later because his wife had no son. The concubine's family name was Chen, and she was the daughter of a cake-vendor. They called her Second Sister, and Liu had married her in the days when he was still comfortably off. His family consisted of just the three of them. Liu himself was a most agreeable man, whom all his neighbours liked. They used to say to him:

"You are having a spell of bad luck, Mr. Liu. But better times are sure to be ahead."

This was what they all predicted, yet nothing of the sort happened; and Liu just stayed at home feeling thoroughly depressed, unable to find any way out of his difficulties.

One day he was sitting idly at home when Old Wang, his father-in-law's seventy-year-old servant, came in and said:

"This is our master's birthday, sir, so he has sent me to invite you and the mistress to come over."

"So it is!" exclaimed Liu. "I've been so taken up with my own troubles that I actually forgot the old man's birthday."

He and his wife got out some clothes which they made up into a bundle and gave the servant to carry. Leaving the concubine in charge of the house, and telling her that they would not be able to come back that night but would return the next evening, they set out. Seven or eight miles from the city they came to Mr. Wang's house. Liu greeted his father-in-law; but as there were many other guests present, he could not talk about his poverty. When the guests had left, however, Liu's father-in-law asked them to stay in the guest room, and the next morning he had a talk with his son-in-law.

"You can't go on like this," he said. "You know the proverb: A man who does nothing but eat can eat up a mountain, and a man's gullet is as deep as the sea, but time passes as quickly as a shuttle! You must think of some way of making a living. When my daughter married you, she expected you to be able to provide for her. This really won't do, you know."

Liu heaved a sigh and said: "You are right, sir. But it is easier to catch a tiger in the mountain than it is to find a friend in need. Who

in the world will sympathize with us as you do, sir? We must resign ourselves to poverty: to beg for help would be labour wasted."

"There is something in what you say," agreed his father-in-law. "But I can't let things go on like this. Today I mean to lend you some money to start a grocery shop, so that you can make enough to live on. What do you say to that?"

"I am more grateful than I can say," replied Liu. "That will be the very thing for us!"

After the mid-day meal, Mr. Wang got out fifteen strings of cash and gave them to Liu, saying: "Take these now to start a shop. When it is ready, I shall let you have another ten strings. Let your wife stay here for a few days; and when you have settled on a day to open shop, I shall take her home myself to offer my congratulations, if you are agreeable."

After thanking his father-in-law again and again, Liu shouldered the money and left. It was already late when he reached the city; but, happening to pass the house of an acquaintance who wanted to go into business too, he thought he might as well stop to discuss the matter with him. He knocked at the door, someone answered within and his friend came out, greeted him and asked the reason for his call.

When Liu explained his plan, the other said: "I have nothing to do at present. If you can use me in your shop, I should be glad to help."

"Good," said Liu.

After they had talked business for some time, Liu's friend kept him to dinner; and, since wine and food were ready, he had a few cups. But Liu was not a good drinker, so presently, feeling the wine go to his head, he took his leave saying: "I've trespassed on your hospitality today. Please come to our humble house tomorrow to talk things over further." His friend saw him to the street corner where he said goodbye to him.

With his money on his back, Liu staggered home and knocked at the door. It was past the time to light the lamps and his concubine, left alone at home with nothing to do, after waiting for them till dark had closed the door and dozed off before the lamp; so she did not hear him knocking. He had to knock for a long time before she woke up and answered: "I'm coming." Then she got up and opened the door to let him in.

As she took the bag of money from him and put it on the table, the concubine asked: "Where did you get so much money? What are you going to do with it?"

Now Liu was slightly drunk, and he was also annoyed with her for taking so long to open the door; so he decided to frighten her.

"If I tell you, you will be angry," he said. "But I can't keep it from you: you will have to know. I'm so hard put to it now, that I've had to pawn you to somebody. I don't want to let you go for good, though; so I've only asked him for fifteen strings of cash; and if I come into

luck, I shall redeem you with interest. But if I remain as hard up as ever, I'll have to let you go."

When the concubine heard this, she could scarcely believe her ears, yet there were the fifteen strings of cash confronting her! Liu had never said an angry word to her in his life, and her relationship with his wife was good too—what could have made him so cruel all of a sudden?

"Well," she said doubtfully, "you should at least have told my father and mother."

"If I had informed your parents, they would certainly have raised objections. Tomorrow when you've gone to that man's house, I'll send someone to convince your parents of the necessity for this. They won't be able to blame me."

"Where were you drinking today?"

"With the man to whom I pawned you. After drawing up the contract, I drank a few cups with him before coming back."

"Why is Elder Sister not back?"

"She couldn't bear the thought of parting with you like this; so she will come back after you have left tomorrow. This was the only way out for me, and it's all settled now." As he spoke, he was secretly laughing to himself. Then, without undressing, he lay down on the bed and fell asleep.

The young woman was very upset. "What kind of man has he sold me to?" she wondered. "I must go home first and tell my father and mother. If he's told that other man to fetch me tomorrow, they can go to my home to settle matters there."

After turning things over in her mind, she piled the fifteen strings of cash by Liu's feet and, taking advantage of the fact that he was drunk, quietly put together some clothes, opened the door and went out, closing the door behind her. She went to the house of a neighbour on their left whose name was Chu; and she slept that night with Mrs. Chu, whom she told:

"Today, for no reason at all, my husband has sold me; so I must go home to tell my parents about it. I'll trouble you to tell my husband tomorrow where I've gone. The man who's bought me can come with my husband to my parents' house to discuss the matter and arrange a proper settlement."

"That's right," said Mrs. Chu. "I'll give Mr. Liu your message after you've gone."

The next morning the concubine set off for home.

Just like a fish escaping from a hook,
She flourished off without one backward look.

Mr. Liu slept till midnight, when he woke to find the lamp still lit

and his concubine no longer at his side. Thinking she was in the kitchen clearing up, he called out to her to bring him tea; but though he called several times, there was no answer. He made an effort to get up, but because he was still befuddled he dropped off again.

Just then a bad man happened to come along. Having lost all his money through gambling, this rogue had slunk out at night to steal something, and he came to Liu's house. Since the concubine had only pulled the door to when she went out instead of locking it, the thief was able to open it at a push and slip inside unobserved. When he reached the bedroom, he found the lamp still lit but could see nothing worth taking. As he groped about the bed, however, he saw a man sleeping with his face to the wall and a pile of cash at his feet. He was taking a few strings, when Liu woke up and shouted:

"Hey! You can't do that! I have just borrowed that cash from my father-in-law to live on! What shall we do if you steal it?"

Without troubling to reply, the thief lunged out at Liu's face; but Liu dodged the blow and leapt out of bed to grapple with him. When the thief saw how active his opponent was, he fled from the room. Liu would not let him go, however, and followed him to the kitchen where he started shouting to rouse the neighbours. The thief, hard pressed and at a loss what to do, suddenly caught sight of a bright axe lying close at hand. In desperation, he seized the axe and swung it at Liu's face, felling him to the ground. He followed up with another blow, and so the unhappy man was killed!

"There was no drawing back once you forced my hand," panted the thief. "It was you who chased me, not I who wanted your life." Going back to the bedroom, he took the fifteen strings of cash, tore up a sheet to wrap them in and made quickly off with the money, pulling the door to behind him.

The next morning when the neighbours got up, Liu's door was still closed and there was not a sound from his room.

"Mr. Liu!" they called. "You've overslept!" But no one answered. Then they pushed open the door and went in, only to find Liu dead on the ground. His wife had gone home two days previously; but where was the concubine? There was a great uproar until Old Chu, the neighbour in whose house the young woman had stayed the night before, said: "Yesterday evening the concubine stayed in my house. She told us Mr. Liu had sold her for no reason, so she was going back to her parents; and she asked me to tell Mr. Liu to take her new master there to settle matters with her parents. If we send to fetch her back, we should be able to get to the bottom of this. We must also fetch Mrs. Liu back before we decide on anything."

"You are right," they all agreed.

They first sent a messenger to Mr. Wang's house to break the bad

news. The old man and his daughter wept bitterly, and Liu's father-in-law said:

"He was all right when he left yesterday, and I had given him fifteen strings of cash to start a business. How did he come to be murdered?"

"It was like this," said the messenger. "When Mr. Liu came home it was already dark and he was tipsy. None of us knew about his money, and we are not sure what time exactly he got back; but this morning we found his door ajar, and when we went in there he lay murdered on the ground, while the fifteen strings of cash were nowhere to be seen and the concubine had disappeared too. We made such a noise that Old Chu from the house on the left came out. He told us that the concubine had stayed in his house yesterday, because she claimed Mr. Liu had sold her for no reason and she wanted to go and tell her parents. She spent the night there and left early this morning. We decided that we should let you know what has happened, and men have been sent, too, to catch up with the concubine. If they don't overtake her on the road, they will go all the way to her parents' house; but they must bring her back to find out the truth. You and your daughter had better come back now to avenge Mr. Liu." Mr. Wang and his daughter hastily made ready and, when the messenger had been given wine and food, hurried to the city.

Now the concubine had left Old Chu's house early that morning to start home. She had only walked half a mile, though, when her feet started aching and she sat down by the roadside to rest. Presently a young man came down the road, wearing a cap with zigzag designs and a loose gown, clean socks and silk shoes. Over his shoulder he was carrying a bag containing cash. When he came up with the concubine he saw that, while she was no beauty, she had pretty eyebrows and good teeth, her face was rosy and her eyes inviting. In a word, he found her quite attractive.

Men may be dazzled by a country flower,
And country wine weak heads may overpower.

He put down his bag, came up to her, made a low bow and said: "Are you all alone, ma'am? May I ask where you are going?"

With a curtsey, she answered: "I am going home to my parents. I felt tired, so I am taking a rest." Then she asked: "Where are you from, sir, and where may you be going?"

Clasping his hands before him, the young man answered respectfully: "I come from the country. I have just sold silk in the city and got some cash which I am taking to Chuchiatang."

"Why, my parents live near Chuchiatang! I would like it so much if you could walk with me for part of the way."

"Certainly, if you wish it," replied the young man. "I shall be delighted to accompany you."

They went on together; but they had gone less than a mile when two men came running after them, sweating and panting, with the fronts of their jackets open. "Stop, madam!" they shouted. "We've something to say to you."

Startled, the concubine and the young man came to a halt. When the two men caught up, they seized them both without a word of explanation, crying: "A fine thing you've done! Where do you think you are going?"

The concubine was taken aback, but she saw now that these were neighbours, one of them being the master of the house in which she had stayed the previous night. "Didn't I tell you last night," she said, "that my husband had suddenly taken it into his head to sell me, so I was going home to tell my parents? Why have you come after me?"

"Never mind that story of yours," retorted Old Chu. "Murder has been done in your house, and you must come back to clear yourself."

"My husband has sold me: he took home the money yesterday. What is this about murder? I'm not going back."

"So you're being stubborn, eh?" roared Old Chu. "Well, if you won't come with us—here, officers! These are murderers! Arrest them! Otherwise we'll find ourselves involved and you won't have any peace here either."

Seeing that things had taken an ugly turn, the young man said to her: "It looks as if you had better go back, ma'am, I'll leave you here."

But the two neighbours shouted: "If you hadn't been here, that would have been all right. But since you are travelling together, we can't let you go either."

"How ridiculous!" protested the young man. "I just happened to meet this young lady on the road and walked a short distance with her. This can have nothing to do with me. What do you want me for?"

"Murder has been done," said Old Chu. "Do you expect us to let you go and take the blame ourselves?"

They ignored all the protests of the concubine and the young man.

By now a crowd had gathered, and people advised the young man: "You can't just make off. A man with a clear conscience needn't fear a midnight knock at his door. You'd better go along."

"If you refuse to go," said the neighbours, "that shows you have a guilty conscience. But we won't let you escape." They seized the young man and the concubine and hustled them off.

When they reached Liu's door, they found the house in a great hubbub. And when the concubine went in and saw Liu dead on the floor, killed by an axe, and realized that the fifteen strings of cash on the bed had vanished, her jaw dropped and she was too frightened to speak.

The young man was appalled, too, and exclaimed: "How unlucky

I am! By happening to accompany this young lady, I've got myself mixed up with murder!"

In the midst of all this confusion, Mr. Wang and his daughter limped in. They wailed over the corpse, then turned to the concubine and demanded: "Why did you kill your husband, steal the cash and fly? Heaven is just, and you have been caught. But what have you to say for yourself?"

"It's true that there were fifteen strings of cash," said the concubine. "But when he came back last night he told me that he was so pressed for money he had pawned me for fifteen strings of cash and that today I should have to go to that other man's house. Because I didn't know what sort of family he had pawned me to, I decided to tell my parents first; and late last night I put the fifteen strings of cash in one pile by his feet, then closed the door and went to stay in old Mr. Chu's house, so that I could go home first thing this morning. When I left, I asked Mr. Chu to tell my husband that since he had found me a new master, they should go together to my family to settle the business. I've no idea how he got murdered."

"Well!" cried the wife. "Yesterday my father gave him fifteen strings of cash to bring home as capital to support us all. Why should he deceive you by saying it was money raised by pawning you? In the two days when you were alone at home you must have had an affair with a man. Seeing how poor we were, you didn't want to stick it out; and when you saw the fifteen strings of cash, that put an idea into your head, so you killed my husband and stole the money. Then you deliberately stayed one night with the neighbours, after planning to run off with your lover. You were walking with a man today. What have you to say to that? Can you deny it?"

All agreed: "Mrs. Liu is right."

Then they asked the young man: "Didn't you plot Mr. Liu's death with his concubine, and secretly arrange to meet at some deserted place and escape together? What have you to say?"

"My name is Tsui Ning," replied the young man. "I have never set eyes on this young lady before. Last night I came into town to sell silk—I have the money from the sale on me—and today on my way back I happened to meet this lady. When I asked her where she was going and why she was alone, she mentioned that she was going my way; so I accompanied her. I know nothing of what has happened here."

Do you think they would listen to him? They searched his bag; and when they found there exactly fifteen strings of cash, not a coin more, not a coin less, they cried: "The guilty can never escape Heaven's justice! You murdered him, stole his money and his concubine and tried to make off, leaving us neighbours to take the blame."

Then the wife seized the concubine and Mr. Wang seized Tsui Ning. With all the neighbours as witnesses, they marched straight to the

magistrate's office. When the magistrate heard that it was a murder case, he took his seat in the court and ordered the plaintiffs to state their case from the beginning. Mr. Wang was the first to speak.

"Your Honour," he said, "I am a native of this district, living in the country. I am nearly sixty and have only one daughter whom I married some years ago to Liu Kuei who lived in this city. Later, as they had no son, Liu took a concubine from the Chen family. They called the concubine Second Sister, and the three of them got on quite well together and never quarrelled. The day before yesterday, since it was my birthday, I sent a man to fetch my daughter and son-in-law to stay for one night; and the next day, realizing that my son-in-law had no means of supporting his family, I gave him fifteen strings of cash to set up a business which would bring them in enough to live on. The concubine had stayed at home to look after the house. Last night when my son-in-law went home, she seems to have killed him with an axe and fled with a young man named Tsui Ning; but they have both been caught. I beg Your Honour to take pity on my son-in-law's strange death. Here are the wicked man and the adulteress, with the stolen money as evidence. May it please Your Honour, in your wisdom, to pass sentence!"

Then the magistrate called to the concubine: "Come here! How did you plot with your lover to murder your husband, steal the money and escape? What have you to say?"

"Though I was only Liu Kuei's concubine," she replied, "he treated me well and his wife was good to me. Why should I want to harm them? But last night my husband came home half drunk, with fifteen strings of cash. When I asked him where the money came from, he said he had pawned me for fifteen strings of cash, because he couldn't support the family; and he hadn't let my parents know about it, but wanted me to go to the other man the next day. I was so upset that I slipped out that night to stay with a neighbour, and I set off early this morning for my parents' home. I had asked the neighbours to tell my husband to go with my new master to my parents' home to settle the business. I was on my way home when the neighbour I had stayed with caught up with me and dragged me back. I know nothing about my husband's murder."

"Nonsense!" shouted the magistrate. "The fifteen strings of cash were given him by his father-in-law, yet you claim that he raised the money by pawning you: that is obviously a lie. And why should a woman slip out at the dead of night? You must have been planning to run away. You couldn't have done this alone: some man must have abetted you in this murder and robbery. Out with the truth now!"

Before the young woman could speak again, several neighbours stepped forward, knelt down and said: "Your Honour is as all-seeing as Heaven. The concubine did spend the night in the second house to the left of their house, going off this morning. When we discovered that her husband had been murdered, we sent men after her who overtook her

on the road. She was walking with that young man and they refused to come back; they had to be dragged back by force. We also sent for Mrs. Liu and her father, and when they arrived Liu's father-in-law said he had given the dead man fifteen strings of cash yesterday to set him up in business; but now Liu was dead and the money gone! When we questioned the concubine, she said she had left the money piled on the bed; but we found the fifteen strings of cash on the young man. This proves that the concubine and the young man must have plotted the murder together. How can they deny it, with such clear evidence against them?"

The magistrate believed all they said and, calling the young man forward, demanded: "Here, in the seat of the imperial government, how dare you act so lawlessly? Confess now how you made off with Liu's concubine, stole his fifteen strings of cash and murdered him, and where you were going together."

"My name is Tsui Ning," said the young man, "and I live in the country. Yesterday I came into town and sold some silk: that's how I got these fifteen strings of cash. This morning I fell in with this young lady on the road; but I didn't even know her name, to say nothing of the murder."

In a towering rage, the magistrate thundered: "Nonsense! How could there be such a coincidence: they lost fifteen strings of cash, and you got fifteen strings for your silk! You are obviously lying. Besides, a man shouldn't covet his neighbour's wife or horse: if she was nothing to you, why were you walking together? No doubt a cunning knave like you will never confess unless I have you tortured."

The magistrate had Tsui Ning and the concubine tortured until they fainted away again and again. Mr. Wang, his daughter and the neighbours insisted that the couple were guilty, and the magistrate wanted to close the case, so the unfortunate concubine and Tsui Ning were tortured until they broke down and agreed that they had been tempted by the money and killed Liu, then had taken the fifteen strings of cash and fled. The neighbours, acting as witnesses in the case, put their crosses to the confessions; Tsui Ning and the concubine were pilloried and sent to the prison for those condemned to death; and the fifteen strings of cash were returned to Mr. Wang—who found they were not enough to pay the men in the yamen!

The magistrate drew up a report of the case which he submitted to the higher authorities; and after due consideration an imperial edict was issued to the effect that since Tsui Ning was guilty of adultery, robbery and murder, he should lose his head according to the law; while the concubine, who had plotted with her lover to kill her own husband, was guilty of the worst crime and should be sliced to death. The confessions were then read out in court, after which Tsui Ning and the concubine were brought from the gaol to be sentenced—he to decapitation and she

to be cut into pieces. They were taken to the public square for execution as a public example, they had no way to protest.

When dumb men eat wormwood, how great their distress!
Their dread of its sharpness they cannot express.

Now, worthy readers, if the concubine and Tsui Ning had really committed robbery and murder, would they not have fled the same night? Why should she allow herself to be caught by spending one night with a neighbour and setting off to see her parents the next day? Anyone who thought twice could see that injustice had been done; but the magistrate was a fool who, in his impatience to close the case, did not stop to think that anybody will confess under torture. And when a man commits injustice, either he or his descendants will suffer; for the wronged ghosts will not rest till they are avenged. Thus a judge must not condemn people as the whim takes him, nor torture prisoners as he pleases: justice and wisdom are required. For the dead can never come to life again, and the broken can never again be made whole.

Mrs. Liu stayed on in her husband's house, where she had set up a shrine for him before which she mourned every day; and when her father advised her to return home, she said: "Even if I don't mourn for the required three years, I ought at least to mourn for one."

Her father agreed and let her be. But time passed quickly, and when she had eked out a miserable existence alone for nearly a year, Mr. Wang saw that she could not carry on much longer and sent Old Wang to fetch her, saying: "Ask the mistress to pack up and come home. As soon as she has observed the anniversary of her husband's death she may marry again."

Since Mrs. Liu was in difficulties, after careful thought she agreed with her father. Accordingly she made a bundle of her belongings which she gave to Old Wang to carry, and having said goodbye to her neighbours left the city. It was autumn and, caught in a sudden squall on their way home, they had to leave the road to find shelter in the forest. They took the wrong path, however.

Like pigs or sheep that near the butcher's knife,
Each step they took was shortening their life.

For as Mrs. Liu and her servant were walking through the forest, someone shouted from behind them: "I am the king of the mountain! Stop and pay toll!"

As the travellers stood there trembling, a man leapt out, wearing a red cap and a tattered old battle dress with a red silk sash and a pair of dark boots. He had a sword in his hand which he brandished as he advanced. Old Wang was fated to die, for he said: "Bandit! Skunk!

I know your sort. I don't mind risking my old life to have it out with you." The old fellow charged at him, head down; but the bandit dodged and the old man fell flat on the ground.

In a rage, the bandit swore: "Surly old bull!" He ran the old man through and through with his sword, until all Old Wang's blood was spilt on the ground and it was clear that he was dead.

When Mrs. Liu saw how fierce this man was, she feared that all was up with her; however, hitting on a desperate plan to save herself she clapped her hands and cried: "Bravo!"

Glaring at her, the bandit stayed his hand to shout: "Who was he to you?"

"Unhappy that I am," she lied, "when my husband died I was tricked by the match-makers into marrying this old man who was good for nothing but eating. Now you have killed him for me and rid me of a plague."

When the bandit saw that she was submissive and not bad-looking, he asked: "Will you stay and be my wife?"

Knowing that she had no choice, she answered: "I would like to serve Your Highness."

Smiling now, the bandit sheathed his sword; and when he had thrown the servant's corpse into a gully, he led Mrs. Liu towards a mean-looking cottage. He picked up a clod of earth and threw it at the roof, whereupon a man came out to open the gate and they went into the hall. The bandit had a sheep killed and wine heated, then married Mrs. Liu; and, indeed, they got on quite well together, for—

Although they were not meant for man and wife,
Necessity inured them to the life.

Curiously enough, in less than half a year after gaining Mrs. Liu, the bandit made several big hauls and became quite rich. Mrs. Liu, who was very intelligent, kept giving him good advice and told him: "The proverb says: An earthen pitcher will sooner or later be broken over the well, and a general is likely to die in battle. We have enough now to keep us in comfort for the rest of our life; but if you go on flouting the will of Heaven, you are bound to come to a bad end. Though an outlaw's life is good, it is not like having a home. Why don't you turn over a new leaf and start a small business to make an honest living?"

She pleaded with the bandit day and night, until she prevailed on him to abandon his wicked ways and rent a house in the city where he opened a grocery shop. During his leisure hours he would often go to monasteries to worship Buddha and observe fasts.

One day when he was resting at home, he told his wife: "Though I started life as a bandit, I knew that a man has to pay for his crimes, so it was just to make a living that I frightened people into handing over

their money. Later, after I got you, I never did much; and now I have changed my ways. But it worries me sometimes to think how I killed two men wrongly in the past and ruined two other innocent people. I've never told you about this before; but I would like to atone for my sins by having sutras chanted for their spirits, to get them out of hell."

"How did you kill two men wrongly?" she asked.

"One was your husband. You remember how he charged at me in the forest, and I killed him. He was an old man and I had no grudge against him, but I killed him and took his wife. He can't be resting easy in his grave."

"But if not for that," she said, "we wouldn't be together now. Don't worry over what's past and done with. Who was the other?"

"It was even more wrong of me to kill the other man," he said. "And two innocent people were involved who had to pay with their lives. It happened over a year ago. I had lost money in gambling and hadn't a cent left, so I slipped out one night to see what I could pick up. I noticed a door that was not locked, and when I pushed in there was not a soul there; but in the inner room I found a man drunk in bed with a pile of cash by his feet. I took some of the money and was leaving, when the fellow woke up and started crying: 'That cash was given me by my father-in-law to start a business. If you steal it, my whole family will starve.' Then he rushed to the door and began to shout for help. Things were looking bad for me, when I saw an axe for chopping wood by my feet. In desperation, I picked up the axe, shouting: 'It's either you or me!' I cut him down with two strokes, then went back to his room and took all the fifteen strings of cash. Later I heard that his concubine and a young man named Tsui Ning were wrongly accused of the robbery and murder and executed. Though I have been a bandit all my life, these two cases are the only ones that neither Heaven nor men could forgive; and I ought to sacrifice to the spirits of my victims."

When Mrs. Liu heard this, she moaned to herself: "So my husband was killed by this beast too! And Second Sister and that young man were innocent after all! Come to think of it, I was wrong to insist that they pay with their lives: they will never forgive me in the nether regions." She pretended, however, to be in the best of spirits, and said nothing.

The next day, she seized an opportunity to slip out, and went straight to the magistrate's office to inform against her husband's murderer. A new magistrate, who had taken up office only a fortnight before, was presiding over the court when the attendants took her in. When she came to the steps, she cried aloud. Then she denounced the bandit, describing how he had killed her husband Liu Kuei, how the magistrate had not investigated carefully because he was eager to close the case, how the concubine and Tsui Ning had forfeited their lives though they were innocent, and how later the bandit had killed her father's old servant

and made her his mistress. Now that justice had prevailed and the criminal had confessed his guilt, she begged the magistrate to pass judgement and right the past wrong. After she had spoken she wept again.

Moved by her words, the magistrate sent men to arrest the bandit, and when he was tortured they found that his confession tallied in every point with her statement; accordingly he was condemned to death. The case was reported to the imperial court and, when the usual sixty days had passed, the emperor decreed that since the bandit had committed robbery and murder and caused the ruin of innocent people, he should be executed on the spot according to the law; the former magistrate, who had passed a wrong sentence, should be dismissed from his post and struck off the official list; the families of Tsui Ning and the concubine who had died unjustly should receive pensions from the authorities; and since Mrs. Liu had been forced by the bandit to become his wife and had avenged her husband's death, half of the bandit's property should be confiscated but half should be left to her to live on.

Mrs. Liu went to the execution ground to watch the sentence being carried out; and when the bandit's head had been cut off she took it and offered it as sacrifice before the shrines of her dead husband, the concubine and Tsui Ning. After lamenting bitterly over them, she gave the property she had received to a nunnery and became a nun, every morning and evening chanting Buddhist sutras for the souls of the dead until she herself died of old age. As the verse says:

Guilty or innocent, they died unblessed,
Their ruin caused by careless words in jest;
Then learn to speak the truth while you are young;
The root of every evil is the tongue!

THE JADE KUANYIN

I

'Tis not the wind and rain that banish spring,
For spring must vanish, though we know not why.
Now fade the red cheeks of the tiny plum;
Their small beaks gold no more, young swallows fly;
The cuckoo calls and blossoms drift away,
While silkworms glut themselves on mulberry leaves;
And all alone beside the rainy stream,
As spring slips none knows where, the poet grieves.

Why do I quote this poem about spring's departure?

During the Shao Hsin period (1131-1162 A.D.) there lived in Hangchow, the southern capital, a certain Prince of Hsienan, who was a native of Yenan and the military governor of three garrison areas. One day, seeing that spring was nearly over, he took some of his womenfolk out to enjoy the scenery. On their way back in the evening, they had passed through Chientang Gate and the women's sedan-chairs had just crossed Carriage Bridge, when the prince, whose chair brought up the rear, heard someone call from a shop by the bridge:

"Come out, lass, and look at the prince."

A girl came out, at sight of whom the prince exclaimed to his body-guard: "This is just the girl I have been looking for! See that you bring her to the palace tomorrow."

The body-guard assented, and immediately set about carrying out the prince's orders. There was a house beside the bridge with a sign-board on which was written: The House of Chu: ancient and modern paintings mounted. And it was out of this shop that an old man had come, leading a girl.

What was she like, this girl?

Her cloudlike hair was lighter than cicada's wing;
Her mothlike eyebrows fairer than hills in spring;
Her lips were cherry-red, her teeth like jade,
And sweeter than an oriole she could sing.

Such was the girl who had come out to see the prince's sedan-chair.

The body-guard sat down in a tea-house opposite, and when an old woman brought him tea he said: "May I trouble you to ask Mr. Chu from the mounting shop across the street to step over to have a word with me?"

The woman fetched Old Chu; and after the men had exchanged greetings they sat down.

"What can I do for you?" asked Old Chu.

"It is nothing—just an idle question. Is the girl you called out to watch the prince's sedan-chair your daughter?"

"She is. We have only the one child."

"How old is she?"

"Eighteen."

"Do you intend to marry her to someone or to present her to some official?"

"I'm a poor man. Where would I get the money to marry her off? I shall have to send her to serve in some official's house."

"What accomplishments has your daughter?"

Then Old Chu told him, in the words of the song:

As days grow longer, in her quiet room
The girl embroiders many a flower in bloom,
And rivals Nature with her needle now
To stitch bright blossoms on a slanting bough,
With tender leaves, soft buds and tendrils rife,
In all but scent completely true to life;
So many a roving butterfly and bee
Fly in to light on her embroidery.

"Just now," said the body-guard, "the prince noticed from his sedan-chair the embroidered apron your daughter is wearing. We are looking for a girl to do embroidery in the palace. Why don't you present your daughter to the prince?"

The old man went home and talked it over with his wife; and the next day he drew up a petition and took the girl to the palace. The prince paid for the girl, and gave her the name Hsiu-hsiu.

Some time later, when the emperor presented the prince with a flower-embroidered battle dress, Hsiu-hsiu immediately made another exactly like it. The prince was pleased, and said: "His Majesty has given me this embroidered battle dress. What rare gift can I give him in return?"

He found a piece of fine, translucent white jade in his treasury, and calling for his jade workers asked them: "What can you make out of this piece of jade?"

"A set of wine cups," said one.

"That would be a pity," said the prince. "How can we use such a fine piece of jade to make wine cups?"

"This piece is pointed on top and round at the bottom," said another. "It can be made into the kind of doll women use when they pray for children."

"That type of figurine is only used on the seventh of the seventh moon," objected the prince. "It would be useless at other times."

There was a young craftsman in the group whose name was Tsui Ning, a native of Chienkang in Shengchow. He was twenty-five years old and had served the prince for several years. Now he stepped forward with clasped hands and said: "Your Highness, this pear shape is no good. All it can be carved into is a kuanyin."

"Good!" exclaimed the prince. "The very thing!" He ordered Tsui to start on the job.

In less than two months, the jade kuanyin was finished; and when the prince sent it with a letter to the imperial palace, the emperor was delighted with it. Tsui's pay was increased, and he continued to serve the prince.

Time passed, until it was spring again. One day, on his way back from a pleasure trip, Tsui went with three or four friends into a wine shop just inside Chientang Gate. They had only had a few cups when

he heard a great hubbub in the street, and throwing open the window to look out he heard many people shouting: "There's a fire at Ching-ting Bridge!"

Not stopping to finish his wine, he and his companions ran downstairs and out into the street, where they saw a great fire:

First smouldering like glowworm's light,
It soon flared up like torches bright,
Outshone a thousand candles' glare
And made a blaze that filled the air,
As if whole mountains had been burned,
Or Heaven's furnace overturned!

So fierce was the fire!

"That's not far from our palace!" exclaimed Tsui.

He ran back to the palace, only to find that everything had been moved out and the whole place was deserted. Unable to find a soul, he was heading down the left corridor in the bright glare of the fire, when a woman reeled out from the hall, muttering to herself, and collided with him. Recognizing Hsiu-hsiu, Tsui stepped back and murmured an apology.

The prince had formerly promised Tsui: "When Hsiu-hsiu has served her term, I shall marry her to you." All the attendants had congratulated him, saying: "You will make a fine couple!" and Tsui had thanked the prince. He was a bachelor and had taken a fancy to the girl, while he was such a fine young man that Hsiu-hsiu wanted him for her husband too.

Now, during this confusion, here was Hsiu-hsiu coming down the left corridor with a handkerchief full of gold and jewels in her hand. When she bumped into Tsui, she said: "Master Tsui, I've been left behind! All the maids have run off, so there is no one to look after me. You must find me some place to stay."

Tsui accompanied her out of the palace, and they walked along the river bank until they came to Lime Bridge. Then the girl said: "Oh, Master Tsui, my feet do hurt so! I can't go any further."

Tsui pointed to a nearby house and said: "My home is only a few steps from here. You can rest there." So they went into his house and sat down.

"I am ever so hungry," said Hsiu-hsiu again. "Do buy me some cakes to eat. And, after the fright I've had, a little wine would do me a world of good."

Tsui thereupon bought some wine, and they drank a few cups together. And:

After the girl three cups of wine had drained,
Her downy cheeks two crimson blossoms stained.

As the proverb says: Spring is the time for flowers, and wine is the handmaid of love!

Hsiu-hsiu asked Tsui: "Do you remember that day when we were watching the moon on the tower, when the prince promised to marry me to you, and you thanked him. Do you remember that?"

Tsui put his hands together respectfully and muttered: "Yes."

"That day," said Hsiu-hsiu, "everybody cheered you and said what a fine couple we would make. How could you have forgotten?"

Once more, Tsui simply mumbled: "Yes."

"Why should we go on waiting? Why not become husband and wife tonight? What do you think?"

"I dare not."

"If you refuse," she threatened, "I shall call out and get you into trouble. What did you bring me to your house for, anyway? I shall go and tell them at the palace tomorrow."

"Very well, miss," said Tsui. "We can be husband and wife if you like. But on one condition: we must go away. We can take advantage of this fire and confusion to slip away tonight."

"Since I am your wife now," said Hsiu-hsiu, "I'll do as you think best."

That night they became husband and wife; and before dawn they left, carrying their money and possessions with them. Stopping for meals on the way, resting at night and travelling by day, they finally came to Chuchow.

"There are five highways out of this town," said Tsui. "Which way shall we take? Suppose we go to Hsinchow? I am a jade worker and I have friends in that city, so we may be able to settle down there." Accordingly they took the road to Hsinchow.

After they had been a few days in Hsinchow, however, Tsui said: "Many people travel to and fro between here and the capital, and if anyone tells the prince that we are here, he will certainly send men to arrest us. We aren't safe here. We had better go somewhere else." Then they set out again for Tanchow.

After some time they reached Tanchow, which was a long way from the capital. They rented a house in the market-place, and put up a signboard on which was written: Tsui, the jade worker from the capital.

"We are nearly a thousand miles from the capital now," Tsui told Hsiu-hsiu. "I think we should be all right. We can set our minds at ease and live the rest of our lives as husband and wife."

There were some officials in Tanchow, and, when they found that Tsui was a skilled worker from the capital, they gave him work from time to time.

Tsui made secret inquiries about the Prince of Hsienan, and learned from someone who had been to the capital that during the fire that night a maid had disappeared from the palace; a reward had been offered

for her discovery and a search had been made for several days, but she had never been found. No one knew that Tsui had gone off with her, nor that they were living in Tanchow.

Time sped as swiftly as an arrow, until more than a year had passed.

One morning when Tsui opened his shop, two men in footmen's black liveries came in, sat down and told him: "Our master has heard that there is a worker named Tsui here from the capital, and he wants you to come to do some work for him."

Telling his wife where he was going, Tsui left with the two men for Hsiangtan County. They took him to a house where he met the official, agreed to undertake the work and then started home again. On his way home he passed a traveller. This man was wearing a bamboo fibre hat, white silk coat, black and white puttees and hempen shoes, and he was carrying two bundles hanging from a long shoulder pole. When they came face to face, the traveller looked closely at Tsui. Tsui paid no attention to him, but this stranger had recognized Tsui and he proceeded to walk briskly after him.

Well might we say:

What mischievous boy sounds the clapper today,
To make the love-birds fly away?

II

On bamboo fence the morning glories bloom,
The moon casts chequered shade on my thatched room;
My crystal goblets filled with country wine,
And country dainties in jade dishes fine,
I should at last have cast all cares away,
To spend my time in mirth and laughter gay;
Though all my friends are far away or dead,
A hundred thousand soldiers I once led.

This poem was written by General Liu Chi of the Hsiung Wu Army Area in Chinchow. After the Battle of Shunchang in 1140 A.D., General Liu had retired to live in Hsiangtan County in Tanchow. A famous general who had never attempted to amass wealth, he was in fact very poor. He often went to village inns to drink, and the villagers who did not know him sometimes treated him disrespectfully. "I held a million barbarian troops as nothing," remarked the general once. "But now these country folk hold me in contempt!"

So he wrote this poem which became known in the capital.

When the Prince of Yangho, who was then Commander of the Imperial Guards, saw this poem he was very moved. "To think that General Liu should become so poor!" he exclaimed. He ordered officers to send

money to him. And when Tsui's former master, the Prince of Hsienan, heard of the general's poverty, he also sent a messenger with money to him. This messenger passed through Tanchow; he was the man who saw Tsui on the road from Hsiangtan and followed him all the way home.

He saw Hsiu-hsiu sitting at the counter of the shop, and called out: "Master Tsui! I haven't seen you for a long time. How does Hsiu-hsiu come to be here too? I have been delivering a letter for the prince to Tanchow; that is how I happen to be here. So Hsiu-hsiu has married you. Well, well!"

Tsui and his wife were nearly scared to death now that they had been recognized. This newcomer was a sergeant in the palace who had served the prince since he was a boy. Because he was trustworthy, he had been chosen to take the money to General Liu. His name was Kuo Li, and he was also known as Sergeant Kuo.

Tsui and Hsiu-hsiu entertained Sergeant Kuo to a feast, and begged him: "When you go back to the palace, for Heaven's sake don't breathe a word about us to the prince!"

"The prince will never know," replied Kuo. "I hope I can mind my own business." Then he thanked them and left.

When he reached the palace, he gave the prince the general's reply; then, looking at the prince, Sergeant Kuo reported: "On my way back, as I came through Tanchow, I saw two people."

"Who were they?"

"That girl Hsiu-hsiu and the jade worker Tsui. They gave me a meal and wine, and told me to say nothing."

"So that's what they have been up to!" said the prince. "How did they get all that way?"

"I don't know," said Kuo. "I only know that he is living there now. He has a signboard up and is doing business."

The prince ordered his attendants to go to the city government and have an officer sent immediately with a warrant to Tanchow. This officer took assistants and money for the road and, when he arrived at Tanchow, requested the authorities there to help him to find Tsui and Hsiu-hsiu. It was like

Swift hawks that on weak sparrows fall,
Or tigers slaying lambkins small!

In less than two months Tsui and Hsiu-hsiu were caught and sent to the palace. And as soon as the prince heard of their arrival, he took his seat in the court.

During his campaign against the Tartars, the prince had wielded a "small blue" sword in his left hand and a "big blue" sword in his right hand. And many were the Tartars those two swords had killed! They

were now sheathed and hung on the wall of the court. When the prince had taken his seat and all had bowed to him, Tsui and Hsiu-hsiu were brought in and made to kneel before him. Fuming with rage, with his left hand the prince grasped the small blue sword and swung his right arm to draw it from the sheath, glaring as if he were killing Tartars again and gnashing his teeth in fury.

The prince's wife felt very nervous. "Your Highness!" she whispered to her husband from behind the screen. "We are right under the emperor's eye here! This is not the frontier. If they have done wrong, let the city authorities deal with them. Don't go slicing off heads at random."

The prince answered his wife: "How dare these two wretches run away! Now they are caught, and I am angry, why shouldn't I kill them? But since you advise against it, I'll have the maid taken to the back garden and Tsui sent to be tried by the city court." The prince also ordered that the officers who had arrested the runaways be rewarded with money and wine.

Haled before the city court, Tsui confessed: "After the fire that night, when I went to the palace and found everything had been taken away, I met Hsiu-hsiu in the corridor and she took hold of me and said: 'Why have you put your hand in my breast? Unless you do as I say, I shall make trouble for you.' She wanted to run away, and I had to go with her. This is the truth I'm telling."

The city authorities sent the record of the case to the Prince of Hsienan, who was a stern but just man. "Since this is the case," he said, "let Tsui's punishment be light." To punish him for running away, Tsui was beaten and banished to Chienkang.

Tsui was sent off under armed escort. He had just left the North Gate and reached Gooseneck Bend, when he saw a sedan-chair behind him carried by two men and heard someone shouting: "Wait for me, Master Tsui!" Tsui thought he recognized Hsiu-hsiu's voice, but could not understand how she came to be running after him. Once bitten, twice shy: bending his head, he kept on his way. Presently, however, the sedan-chair caught up with him and a woman got out who proved to be none other but Hsiu-hsiu.

"You are going to Chienkang, but what about me?" she demanded.

"What do you want?"

"After you were sent to the city court for trial, I was taken to the back garden and given thirty strokes with a bamboo stick, then driven out. When I heard that you were going to Chienkang, I hurried after you to join you."

"Good," said Tsui.

So they hired a boat and went straight to Chienkang, after which Tsui's escort returned to the capital. If that escort had been a talkative fellow, Tsui would have been in trouble again; but the man knew that

the Prince of Hsienan had a fiery temper and that people who offended him did not escape lightly. Since he did not serve the prince, it was none of his business. Besides, Tsui had treated him well on the way, buying him wine and food. So he held his tongue.

Tsui and his wife settled down in Chienkang. And since he had already been sentenced, he was no longer afraid to meet people, but went on plying his trade as a jade worker. "We are doing well here," said Hsiu-hsiu one day, "but my two old parents must have had a hard time of it since I ran away with you to Tanchow. And when we were arrested, they tried to commit suicide. Let us send someone to the capital to fetch them here to live with us."

"Very well," said Tsui. He told a man where his wife's parents lived, and sent him to the capital to fetch them.

When the man reached the capital, he found the quarter where Hsiu-hsiu's parents lived and asked the people there to direct him to their house.

"There it is." Someone pointed it out to him.

He went to the gate but found it closed, locked and bolted with a bamboo bar. "Where have the old couple gone?" he asked a neighbour.

The neighbour said: "It's a sad story. They had a daughter as pretty as a flower, whom they presented to a noble family. But the girl was not content with her good fortune, and ran away with a jade worker. Some time ago, she and her lover were caught and sent back from Tanchow for trial here. The girl was taken to the prince's back garden for punishment, and when that happened the old couple tried to take their own lives. They have since disappeared. That is why their house is locked up." This being so, the messenger went back to Chienkang.

One day, before his messenger had come back, Tsui heard someone outside his shop saying, "You want Tsui's shop? Here it is." When he called to Hsiu-hsiu to see who it was, she found it was no other than her parents. They greeted each other, and settled down to live happily together. The next day, the messenger returned and reported how he had failed to find them, and journeyed in vain; but the two old folk had already come of their own accord.

"Thank you for going to so much trouble," said Hsiu-hsiu's parents. "We didn't know where you were, and we had to search far and wide before we could find you." So they all lived together.

Now one day the emperor went to his treasury to look at his treasures, and when he picked up the jade kuanyin Tsui had made, one of the jade bells on the figure fell off.

"How can this be repaired?" he asked an officer in attendance.

The officer examined the carving and remarked: "What a fine figurine! It is a pity the bell is gone." When he looked at the base, he found the inscription: Made by Tsui Ning. "It is quite simple!" he cried. "Since we know who carved this, all we have to do is call

him here to repair it." Accordingly, the emperor ordered the Prince of Hsienan to send Tsui Ning to the palace.

When the prince reported that Tsui was living at Chienkang because he had committed a crime, messengers were immediately despatched to summon him to the capital. The emperor gave Tsui the jade figurine and told him to repair it carefully. Tsui thanked the emperor, then found jade of the same colour as the original piece, made a new bell and fixed it to the kuanyin. When he returned the figurine to the emperor, he received a handsome reward and was ordered to move back to the capital.

"Now I am in the emperor's good books, I am in luck again!" said Tsui. "I shall find another house by the river where I can set up my workshop; and I shan't care who sees me!"

As it happened, he had opened shop only a couple of days when Sergeant Kuo passed by. When he saw Tsui, he said: "Congratulations, Mr. Tsui! So this is where you live!" But when he looked up and saw Hsiu-hsiu standing behind the counter, he gave a start and turned to go.

"Call back that sergeant!" said Hsiu-hsiu to Tsui. "I want to ask him something."

Tsui laid hold of Sergeant Kuo, who was shaking his head and muttering: "Strange! Strange!" And he had to go back with Tsui to the shop.

After Hsiu-hsiu had greeted Kuo, she said: "Sergeant Kuo, in Tanchow we were good to you and kept you to a feast; but when you came back you told the prince and broke up our marriage. Now we have been pardoned by the emperor: we are not afraid of anything you may say!"

The sergeant had nothing to answer, and could only mutter an apology as he slunk off.

When he got back to the palace, he told the prince: "I have seen a ghost!"

"Is this fellow raving?" demanded the prince.

"Your Highness, I've seen a ghost!"

"What ghost?"

"Just now I passed the riverside and saw Tsui's jade shop. Then I saw a woman behind the counter, and it was that maid Hsiu-hsiu."

"Nonsense!" thundered the prince. "I had Hsiu-hsiu beaten to death and buried in the back garden. You saw it yourself. How could she be there again? Are you trying to make a fool of me?"

"I wouldn't dare, Your Highness!" protested Kuo. "Just now she called me to stop and spoke to me. If Your Highness doesn't believe me, I'm prepared to bet my life on it."

"All right," said the prince. "Write that down and sign it."

Kuo was fated to get into trouble: he actually signed a wager, which the prince kept. Then the prince ordered two bearers who were on duty to take a sedan-chair to Tsui's shop, and told Kuo: "Fetch that woman

here! If it is really Hsiu-hsiu, I shall cut her head off! If it isn't, you shall take the punishment instead." Then Kuo and the two bearers went to fetch Hsiu-hsiu.

Kuo was from the northwest. He was a simple fellow, and did not realize that one cannot sign documents like that. He went with the two bearers straight to Tsui's shop, and found Hsiu-hsiu sitting behind the counter. She saw Kuo burst in, but did not know that he had bet his life that she was a ghost and come to arrest her.

"Madam!" cried Kuo. "The prince has ordered us to take you to the palace."

"Wait a minute, then," said Hsiu-hsiu, "while I have a wash and comb my hair." Having washed and changed her clothes she came out, got into the sedan-chair and said goodbye to her husband.

When the bearers had carried her to the palace, Sergeant Kuo went in first to the prince who was waiting in the hall. With a salute, Kuo said: "I have brought Hsiu-hsiu here."

"Fetch her in!" ordered the prince.

Kuo went out and said: "Madam, the prince asks you to go in."

But when he lifted the chair curtain, he felt as if a barrel of cold water had been poured over him. His jaw dropped and he stood there gaping, for Hsiu-hsiu had vanished!

"We don't know what can have happened," said the two bearers when questioned. "We saw her get into the chair, we carried her here, and we haven't left the chair."

The sergeant was called back into the palace. "Your Highness!" he shouted. "It really was a ghost!"

The prince swore: "This is too much!" and ordered: "Seize this fellow! Let me fetch that wager, and I shall cut off his head." He took down the "small blue" sword from the wall.

Sergeant Kuo had served the prince for many years during which period the prince had been promoted a dozen times; but because Kuo was a rough fellow he had never risen higher than the rank of sergeant. Now he was panic-stricken, and said: "I have two bearers as witnesses. Please call them in and question them."

Immediately the two chair-bearers were sent for, and they said: "We saw her get into the sedan-chair, and we carried her here. But then she disappeared." Since their stories tallied, it seemed that Hsiu-hsiu really must have been a ghost. Then the prince sent for Tsui, who told him all that had happened.

"Apparently Tsui is not to blame," said the prince. "Let him go." But when Tsui had left, the enraged prince gave the sergeant fifty strokes on the back.

When Tsui learned that his wife was a ghost, he went home to question her parents; but the two old people just looked at each other, then walked out of the door and jumped with a splash into the river.

He immediately called for help and tried to rescue them, but they had vanished. The fact is that when Hsiu-hsiu's parents knew that she had been beaten to death, they had drowned themselves in the river. They were ghosts too.

Tsui went home in low spirits. When he reached his room, there was Hsiu-hsiu sitting on the bed.

"My love!" begged Tsui. "Spare me!"

"For your sake," answered Hsiu-hsiu, "I was beaten to death by the prince and buried in the back garden. But it was all Sergeant Kuo's fault—he talked too much. Today I have got my own back, because the prince has given him fifty strokes on the back; but now that everybody knows I am a ghost, I can't stay here any longer."

Having said this, she got up and seized Tsui with both hands. He uttered a cry, and fell to the ground; and when the neighbours came in to look, they found that:

His pulse had stopped, his spirit fled,
And the unhappy man was dead!

So he was carried off to join his ghostly wife and parents.

THE DOUBLE MIRROR

The crescent moon shines over many lands,
On homes with happy and unhappy faces;
Some wedded pairs behind one curtain sleep,
But some are parted in far distant places.

This verse, which appeared during the Chien Yen period (1127-1130 A.D.), describes the sadness of those who were separated from their loved ones in those troubled times. For, as a result of misrule during the Hsuan Ho period (1119-1125 A.D.) when traitors and flatterers held the reins of government, in the Ching Kang period (1126-1127 A.D.) the Nu Chen Tartars stormed the capital, captured Emperor Huei and Emperor Chin and carried them off to the north. Then Prince Kang abandoned Kai-feng, the northern capital and, thanks to the miracle of the clay horse, crossed the Yangtse River to reestablish his empire in the south, naming the new era Chien Yen. Terrified of the Tartars, the citizens of the old capital followed the prince south. Pursued by the invaders' horsemen and threatened with fire and the sword, they fled in all directions; and who knows how many families were broken up! Many fathers and sons or husbands and wives, who were separated, never saw each other again. There were some, however, who came together once more; and remarkable stories of this kind have been handed down to us.

Severed air will blend again,
Broken dew-drops merge once more;
Everything is fixed by Fate
And decreed by Heaven's law.

There was a native of Chengchow named Hsu Hsin, who mastered the military arts in his youth and married a daughter of the Tsui family who was quite good-looking. Hsu's family was well-to-do and he and his wife lived happily together until the Nu Chen Tartars invaded China and carried the two emperors off. Then Hsu and his wife decided that Chengchow was no longer safe, stowed all the valuables they could into two bundles, shouldered one apiece and fled with everybody else, not stopping day or night. When they reached Yucheng, they heard ear-splitting cries from behind and imagined that the Tartars must have overtaken them. These were the routed Chinese troops, however, that they heard. The imperial army had received no training for a long time and was completely undisciplined; thus when the soldiers were ordered to resist the invaders, they shook with fear and fled without giving battle; but when they came across ordinary citizens, they displayed great valour in looting and seizing young girls. Though Hsu could acquit himself well in a fight, the routed troops were bearing down on them like an avalanche and one was powerless against a multitude, so he fled for his life. But amid the wailing press of fugitives, he lost sight of his wife; and since there was no way of looking for her with the troops almost upon them, he could only press on alone. When several days had passed with no further sign of her, he sighed and gave her up as lost.

When Hsu reached Suiyang, hungry and thirsty, he went into a country inn to buy wine and food. Now during those troubled times even the taverns had changed: this inn had no wine left and the food was only coarse fare, but, fearing that the refugees might rob him, the inn-keeper insisted on payment in advance before he would serve a meal. Hsu, then, was just counting out money when he heard a woman crying piteously. He could not shut his ears to the sound and it upset him so much that he stopped counting his money and walked out to see what had happened. He found a woman, thinly clad and with dishevelled hair, sitting on the ground. She was not his own wife, of course, but she was about the same age; and Hsu's own loss made him feel sympathetic. "I suppose she is a refugee too," he thought. He went up and asked where she was from.

"My name is Wang Chin-nu," she told him, "and I am a native of Chengchow. As my husband and I were flying from the soldiers, we became separated and I was captured by some deserters. I walked two days and one night until I reached here; but my feet are so swollen now that I don't think I can go a step further. The deserters have stolen

my clothes, too, and left me here; and now, cold and hungry and with no one to turn to, I wish I were dead. That is why I am weeping."

"I lost my wife too in the confusion, so we are in the same boat," answered Hsu. "Luckily, I have some money left. Suppose you stay in this inn for a few days, madam, to rest; and while I make inquiries about my wife I can see if there is any news of your husband. What do you say to that?"

The woman immediately dried her tears and thanked him, saying: "I could ask for nothing better."

Then Hsu undid his bundle and took out some clothes for her, after which they had a meal together in the inn and procured half a room to stay in. Hsu was very good to the woman, every day giving her tea and food. She, for her part, was grateful for his attentions; and since the search for their missing husband and wife was wellnigh hopeless and these two lonely people had been thrown by fate into such close proximity, they could not help loving each other. A few days later, when the woman's feet had healed, she and Hsu went on as husband and wife to Chienkang which was then the southern capital.

Just at this time Prince Kang, who had come south, ascended the throne as Emperor Kao Chung, named his new era Chien Yen and issued a proclamation calling for recruits for the army. Hsu enlisted and was made an officer; and he and his new wife settled down in Chienkang.

Time passed swiftly until one day, in the second year of the Chien Yen period, Hsu and his wife went out of the city to visit a relative. Returning towards evening, Hsu's wife was thirsty, and he took her into a teashop to drink some tea. There was a man in the teashop who stood up when Hsu's wife came in and stared at her as if he could not take his eyes from her face; but since she happened to be looking down, she did not notice him. Hsu, however, thought his behaviour very strange. After they had finished their tea, paid the bill and left the shop, this man followed them at a distance; and when they reached their house he stood by the door as if unable to tear himself away.

Furious, Hsu demanded: "Who are you? Why do you keep staring at someone else's woman?"

The stranger bowed. "Don't be angry, sir," he said. "But I would like to ask you a question."

"Out with it then," snapped Hsu, still very angry.

"Pray don't be offended, sir, if I ask you to step across the way so that I can have a word with you. If you are still angry, though, I dare not speak."

Then Hsu followed him into a quiet alley, and when the stranger appeared to hesitate again before speaking, Hsu said: "I am a fair man. If you have something to say, out with it."

"Who was that lady with you?"

"My wife."

"How long have you been married?"

"Three years."

"Is she a native of Chengchow named Wang Chin-nu?"

Greatly surprised, Hsu asked: "How did you know?"

"She was my wife," replied the other. "I lost her when we were flying from the fighting; and I little thought that she was with you."

When Hsu heard this, he felt very much put out. He explained to the other man how after losing his own wife at Yucheng he had met Wang Chin-nu in a country inn at Suiyang, concluding: "I took pity on her because she was all alone with no one to look after her; but I did not know she was your wife, sir. Now what's to be done?"

"Don't worry," said the other. "I have married another, so we can just forget about that former marriage. We were separated so suddenly, though, that we had no chance to say goodbye to each other; and if I can see her only once more to tell her what I suffered, I shall die content."

By this time, Hsu felt melancholy too. "We can bare our hearts to each other," he said. "There will be no difficulty: tomorrow I shall expect you. But since you have married again, why don't you bring your new wife with you, so that we may become relatives and the neighbours will see nothing suspicious in your visit?"

The other was very pleased and bowed to express his thanks. When he was leaving, Hsu asked his name and learned that he was Liu Tsun-ching of Chengchow.

That night after Hsu broke the news to Wang Chin-nu, the thought of her former husband's love made her shed tears in secret and kept her awake all night. The next morning just after they had washed, Liu and his wife arrived. Hsu went to the gate to greet them; but when he saw Liu's wife he gave a start and both he and she wept bitterly; for Liu's wife was no other than Hsu's former wife! After losing Hsu at Yucheng, she had gone with an old woman to Chienkang, where she sold some jewels to rent a house. When three months passed and there was no news of Hsu, the old woman urged her to marry again and introduced her to Liu who became her husband. Now, by an amazing coincidence, the two couples had come together again!

When the former husbands and wives had embraced each other and wept, Hsu and Liu bowed to each other and became sworn brothers, drinking to pledge their friendship. That evening they exchanged wives, each taking back his first partner; and ever after the two families remained on the friendliest footing.

When wives and husbands interchange,
That surely is a strange exchange!
But, their reunion ordained above,
Each smiles to see his former love.

This story, entitled "The Exchange of Husbands and Wives," is based on actual events which took place in the city of Chienkang in the third year of the Chien Yen period. Another story dating from the same period is "The Double Mirror," and this, though it has less to offer in the way of coincidence, contains such fine examples of conjugal virtue that it is, morally speaking, vastly superior to the first.

A tale, to win favour, must be simply told;
To move its readers a moral it must hold.

In the fourth year of the Chien Yen period, an officer from the northwest whose name was Feng Chung-yi was appointed a tax-collector at Foochow. At that time southeast China was exceedingly prosperous, and Feng decided to set off with his family for his new post. He imagined that Foochow with the mountains behind and the sea in front was as rich a place as any in which to settle; besides, with North China constantly over-run by the Tartars, the southeast should be a good place of refuge. Starting on his journey that same year, he reached Chienchow the following spring.

Famine has always followed war. As the Nu Chen Tartars crossed the Yellow River, eastern China was laid waste; and southeast China, though not ravaged by war, suffered a famine sent by Heaven. In Chienchow the famine was so severe that one peck of rice cost a thousand cash and the people were starving. Supplies were needed for the troops at the front, hence the officials pressed for the payment of taxes without caring whether the people were in a position to pay or not. As the proverb says: Even a clever girl cannot make gruel without rice. When the people had no rice or money to hand over, yet the officers continued to beat and bully them, they could stand it no longer and slipped away in twos or threes to the mountains to become rebels. A snake must have a head before it can move, and they had a leader—Fan Ju-wei. Fan had a sense of justice and hoped to save the suffering people; so all the rebels flocked to him, until soon they were more than one hundred thousand strong.

Houses and barns they set alight,
And killed the rich at dead of night,
Fasted alike when food was none,
And shared together all they won.

Unable to resist the rebels, the government troops were defeated time and again. Then Fan occupied Chienchow, styling himself Commander Fan, and sent his men out to raid different districts; while all the younger members of his clan were given titles and became army officers. The commander had a distant relative called Fan Hsi-chou, who was twenty-

three years old and whose one talent was his ability in swimming: he could stay in the water for three or four days at a time, hence he had been nicknamed the Eel. Young Fan, who had studied but never passed the examinations, was forced to join the commander's forces; for it was decreed that any member of the Fan clan who refused to join the rebels would be executed as an example to the rest. However, though he lived among the rebels, Young Fan did all he could to help the unfortunate and took no part in any raid. The rebels thought him a coward and called him The Blind Eel to taunt him with his uselessness.

We will go back now to Tax-collector Feng. Feng had a daughter named Yu-mei, a pretty and gentle girl of sixteen who was travelling south with her parents when some of Commander Fan's rebels fell upon them at Chienchow, robbed them of all their baggage and sent them flying in all directions. In the confusion Feng lost his daughter, and after fruitless attempts to find her he could only proceed mournfully on his way.

Since Yu-mei could not run fast, she was captured by the rebels and taken into Chienchow city where, as she was crying bitterly, Young Fan saw her, took pity on her and asked her who she was. When Yu-mei told him that she belonged to an official family, Young Fan ordered the rebels to free her, unfastened the ropes with which she was tied and took her home to comfort her with kind words.

"I am not a rebel," he told her. "But I have been forced by my clansmen to stay here. In future, when the government calls on us to surrender, I shall become a loyal subject again; and if you, madam, will condescend to marry me, I shall count it a great honour."

Yu-mei had no desire to marry him, but since she was in their hands there was nothing for it but to consent. The following day Young Fan told the commander, who congratulated him; then the young man sent Yu-mei to stay in a hostel while he chose an auspicious day and sent over the marriage gifts. One of his heirlooms was a double mirror which could be divided into two. It was bright and clear and since it was inscribed with the words "duck" and "drake," it was known as a duck-and-drake mirror. This mirror, too, he sent as a gift. All his clansmen were invited and the wedding took place with due ceremony.

Now he had been a man of worth,
And she a girl of gentle birth;
Both elegant and handsome he,
And gentle and obedient she.
Though living with a rebel band,
He had not faltered in his stand;
While though she was a captive there,
She still remained demure and fair.

After this they led a happy, virtuous life together.

The proverb says: An earthen pitcher will sooner or later be broken over the well. And as a rebel, Commander Fan was guilty of the greatest crime against the state. While the government was occupied with other affairs and had no armed forces to spare, he was safe; but after those famous generals Chang Shuo, Yueh Fei, Chang Tsun, Wu Chieh and Wu Ling inflicted one defeat after another on the Tartars, the empire began to be more stable; and during the winter of the year that Emperor Kao Chung moved his capital to Hangchow and started the era of Shao Hsing, Prince Han Shih-chung was ordered to lead one hundred thousand troops to exterminate the rebels. How could Commander Fan stand up to Prince Han? He had to withdraw into the city of Chienchow, while Prince Han encamped outside the wall and laid siege to the city.

Now Prince Han and the tax-collector Feng had been friends in the northern capital; and when the prince led his troops against the rebels he knew that Feng, as an officer in Foochow, must understand local conditions. In those days commanders of an expeditionary force often carried blank commission forms which they could fill up when they found local talent; so Prince Han made Feng his chief of staff, and they came together to the camp outside Chienchow to direct the attack.

Inside the city, meantime, weeping and wailing sounded day and night; and though Commander Fan made several attempts to break out, he was beaten back each time. When the situation was desperate, Yu-mei said to her husband:

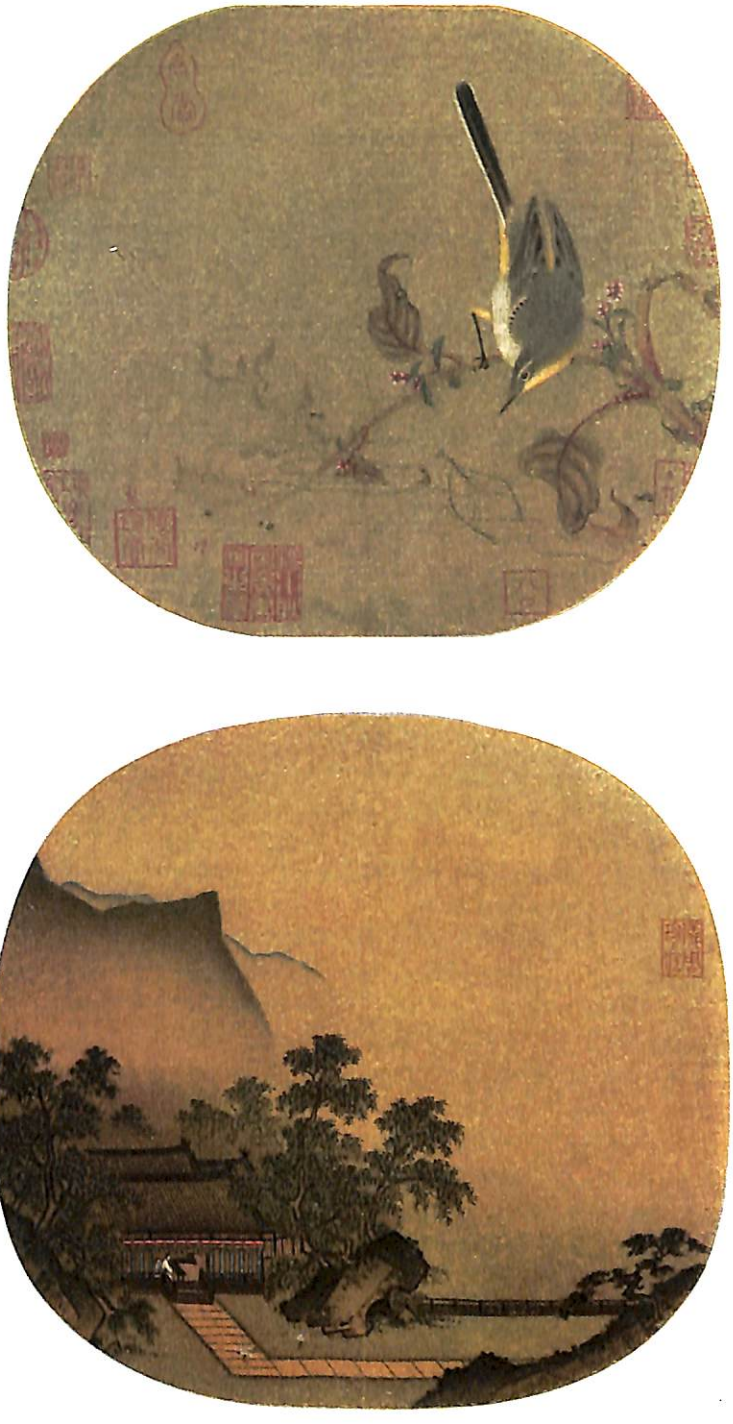
"I have heard that a loyal subject does not serve two masters and a chaste woman will not take a second husband. When I was captured by the rebels, I meant to kill myself; but you rescued me and made me your wife, so I am yours. Now that the imperial army is besieging us, the city will soon be taken; and when the city falls, you, as a member of the rebel party, will not be spared. I would like to die before you. I couldn't bear to see you executed."

She drew the sword at the head of the bed to kill herself, but Young Fan hastily stopped her, took away the sword and comforted her, saying:

"I never wanted to join the rebels, but now I have no way to clear myself. Jade and stone will be consumed in the same fire: I have resigned myself to fate. But you are the daughter of an official and a captive here—you will come to no harm. All Prince Han's officers and men are northerners like you. You speak the same dialect, and when they see that you come from their part of the country they will treat you well. You may even meet some old friend or relative who will pass on the news to your father, so that you can join your family again. Life is very dear; why throw it lightly away?"

"If my life is spared," said Yu-mei, "I shall never marry again. If I am captured by the soldiers I will kill myself rather than lose my chastity."

"Knowing your noble resolution, I can die content," replied Young



Two Paintings by Unknown Artists of the Sung Dynasty
(*Upper*) A Thrush Perched on Smartweed
(*Lower*) Music from a Secluded Chamber

Fan. "If I happen to escape from the net and save myself, I swear never to marry again to repay you for your oath today."

"You gave me a duck-and-drake mirror as a wedding gift," said Yu-mei. "Let us take one half each and carry it with us wherever we go. If ever the double mirror becomes whole again, husband and wife will be reunited." When she had said this, they looked at each other and wept.

This conversation took place in the twelfth month of the first year of Shao Hsing. During the first month of the second year, Prince Han took Chienchow by storm and Commander Fan in desperation set fire to his headquarters and perished in the flames. Prince Han set up a yellow flag and called on the remaining rebels to surrender; and all but the clan of Fan were spared. As for them, half died when the city was sacked while the other half were captured by the imperial forces to be taken to the capital for execution. When Yu-mei knew this, fearing it was all up with her husband, she ran into a deserted house and taking off her scarf hanged herself with it.

Ah, better far to perish young and chaste,
Than to live on abandoned and disgraced!

She was not fated to die, however. For just then Chief of Staff Feng happened to pass by with some of his men, and when he saw a woman hanging in a tumbledown house he hastily ordered his men to cut her down; then, looking at her closely, discovered that she was his daughter Yu-mei. When Yu-mei recovered consciousness, it was a long time before she could speak. Father and daughter felt both joy and grief at this meeting, as Yu-mei told her father how she had been captured by the rebels and how Young Fan had rescued and married her. When he heard this, however, Feng said nothing.

When Chienchow was conquered, the common people went back to their homes and Prince Han returned with his chief of staff Feng to the capital to report their victory; and there they were rewarded by the emperor and promoted.

One day Feng fell to talking with his wife about their daughter's future. They felt that since Yu-mei was still young she ought not to remain single, and they both tried to persuade her to marry again. On this point, however, Yu-mei was adamant. She told them of the promise she had given her husband.

"You come of a good family," said Feng. "And if you married a rebel, it was because you had no alternative. Fortunately he is dead now, and you are free: why should you still think of him?"

But Yu-mei, with tears in her eyes, answered: "My husband was a scholar who only joined his clansmen because he was forced to; and though he was with the rebels he always helped the distressed and never

did anything wrong. If Heaven is all-knowing, he ought to have escaped from the tiger's jaw; and though we are like floating weeds in the ocean, who knows but what we may some day meet again? I would like to live as a Taoist priestess at home and serve you both. I do not mind remaining a widow all my life; but rather than insist that I marry again, you had better let me commit suicide to preserve my chastity." Since she had reason on her side, her father did not insist.

Time flew like an arrow until it was the twelfth year of the Shao Hsing period and Feng had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant general in command of the garrison troops at Fengchow. One day the garrison commander of Kuangchow sent his lieutenant Ho Cheng-hsin with a despatch to Feng. Feng received Ho in his hall, questioned him about the situation in Kuangchow and spoke with him for a long time before letting him go.

Yu-mei had been peeping at them from behind a screen in the back room, and when her father came in she asked: "Who is the man who brought that despatch?"

"Lieutenant Ho Cheng-hsin from Kuangchow," her father told her.

"That is strange!" said Yu-mei. "For he spoke and walked just like my husband in Chienchow."

Feng laughed and said: "When Chienchow was taken by storm, all the Fans were put to death. Some innocent people may have been killed, but not one of that clan was spared. This lieutenant from Kuangchow is called Ho and he is a government officer. What connection can there possibly be? You are letting your imagination run away with you. Take care not to let your maids hear you talk like this, or you will make yourself ridiculous!" Rebuked by her father, Yu-mei blushed for shame and dared say no more.

Because she loved her husband well,
Her father's blame upon her fell!

Six months later Ho Cheng-hsin was sent again with a despatch to Feng's office; and once again Yu-mei, who was watching from behind the screen, was amazed by his resemblance to her husband.

"I am a priestess," she told her father, "so I care no more for earthly things, and I am not being sentimental. But I have watched him carefully, and I swear that lieutenant from Kuangchow is the image of my husband. Why don't you invite him into the inner hall and entertain him to a meal, then ask him? My husband used to be nicknamed the Eel. When Chienchow was besieged and we knew that the city was about to fall, we each kept one half of a double mirror as a keepsake. If you call him by his nickname and try him with this mirror, you will find out the truth." Her father agreed.

The next day when Lieutenant Ho came to Feng's office again for his

reply, Feng invited him into the inner hall and entertained him with wine. While they were drinking, Feng questioned him about his origin and his native place; and Ho hesitated and looked embarrassed.

"Aren't you nicknamed the Eel?" asked Feng. "I know all about you: you can speak freely."

Ho asked him to dismiss the attendants; after which, kneeling, he begged him to be merciful. "You need not be afraid," said Feng, helping him to rise.

Then only did Ho dare speak freely. "I come from Chienchow," he said, "and my real name is Fan. In the fourth year of Chien Yen, my clansman Fan Ju-wei incited the hungry mob to rebellion in Chienchow and I was kept in the rebel army against my will. When the imperial army attacked and took the city by storm, all my clansmen were put to death; but because I had helped those in distress, someone rescued me; and, changing my name to Ho Cheng-hsin, I surrendered to the imperial forces. In the fifth year of Shao Hsing I was serving under Commander Yueh Fei when I was sent to fight Yang Yao, leader of the brigands at Tungting Lake. Commander Yueh's troops all came from the northwest and were not used to fighting on water; but I, as a southerner, was a good swimmer, for when I was young I could stay in the water for three days and three nights: that is why I was nicknamed the Eel. Then Commander Yueh made me lead the vanguard. I fought in the front of the battle, and after the rebellion was suppressed Commander Yueh recommended me. I have been promoted several times and am now lieutenant in Kuangchow. During the last ten years I have kept this secret; but since you, sir, have questioned me, I dare not hide the truth."

"What is your wife's name? Did you have only one wife or have you taken a second?"

"When I was with the rebels I secured a girl from an official family who became my wife. A year later, when the city was taken, we were separated during our flight; but we had sworn that if our lives were spared we would not marry again; so I went later to Hsingchow where I found my old mother with whom I have been living ever since. We have one maid-servant who cooks for us; but I have never married again."

"When you took this oath with your wife, what did you use as a pledge?"

"We had an unusual duck-and-drake mirror, which could be divided into two; and we kept one side each."

"Do you still have the mirror?"

"I carry it on me day and night, and have never let it out of my sight."

"May I see it?"

Ho raised the flap of his jacket and produced an embroidered bag from the belt of his silk vest; and in this bag was the mirror. Feng took it, then produced the other half from his sleeve; and when he put the

two sides together, the mirror was whole again. When Ho saw the two sides joined together, he sobbed bitterly; and Feng was so moved that he shed tears too as he said: "The girl you married is my daughter. She is in the house now."

He led Ho to the back to meet Yu-mei and they shed tears over each other, after which Feng comforted them, a feast was spread to celebrate the reunion and that night Ho stayed in the house. A few days later, Feng gave his son-in-law the official despatch and saw him off, telling his daughter to accompany her husband to his Kuangchow office to live there with him.

The following year Ho's term of office expired, and on his way to report to the capital he brought his wife to Fengchow to say goodbye to her father. Feng had a thousand pieces of silver ready as his daughter's dowry, and he sent officers to escort his son-in-law on the road.

Since the rebellion was old history now, Ho was sure that no one would make trouble for him; and he felt that the clan of Fan ought not to be without descendants; so when he reached the capital he sent in a report to the Ministry of Ceremony and resumed his original surname, but not his personal name. He now called himself Fan Cheng-hsin. Later he was promoted to be garrison commander of the Huai River Area, where he lived happily with his wife until they were old. As for the double mirror, it was treasured by his descendants for many generations.

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

Three Stories

The following stories were written before China's liberation.

Jou Shih's A Slave Mother *appeared during the period of darkest reaction which preceded the invasion of China by the Japanese imperialists. The story mirrors the poverty and oppression the Chinese people were made to suffer under feudal rule by landlords. The outcry of the slave mother described represents the protests of innumerable other innocent victims of this age-old feudal system.*

Harvest *by Yeh Tzu is the epitome of Chinese rural life, on the eve of Japan's aggressive war on China. At that juncture, the reactionary ruling class adopted a policy of non-resistance while they intensified their oppression and exploitation of the people, with no concern at all for the fate of the country. The mass of the Chinese peasants were thrown into wretched misery. But the younger generation had begun to wake up, as is shown clearly in the person of Li Chiu in this novel. After Li Chiu joined the revolution, the things that happened to his father were so ghastly that even this stubborn old man saw that his son had taken the correct path, that in fact this was the only path for them on which to continue their existence.*

Chang Tien-yi wrote New Life *in 1938, in the early part of the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression. This short novel portrays the mental conflict with which an intellectual of the landlord class faces this war of resistance. Because of his class origin, he does not know where he stands in this boiling over of popular sentiment. Because of its timeliness, the story exerted considerable influence upon China's intellectuals.*

A Slave Mother

JOU SHIH

He was a dealer in animal skins which he bought from hunters in the countryside and sold in town. Sometimes he also worked in the fields; early each summer he turned farm-hand, transplanting rice for other people. As he had learned to transplant the seedlings in wonderfully straight rows, the peasants always asked him to help them. But

he never made enough money to support his family and his debts mounted with each passing year. The wretchedness of his life and the hopeless situation he was in caused him to take to drinking and gambling, and he became vicious and bad-tempered. As he grew poorer and poorer, people stopped lending him money, even in small sums.

With poverty came sickness. He grew sallow: his face took on the sickly colour of a brass drum and even the whites of his eyes became yellow. People said that he had jaundice and urchins nicknamed him "Yellow Fellow." One day, he said to his wife,

"There's no way out of it. It looks as if we'll even have to sell our cooking pot. I'm afraid we have to part. It's no use both of us going hungry together."

"We have to part? . . ." muttered his wife, who was sitting behind the stove with their three-year-old boy on her lap.

"Yes, we have to part," he answered feebly. "There's somebody willing to hire you as a temporary wife. . . ."

"What?" she almost lost her senses.

There followed a brief silence. Then the husband continued, falteringly,

"Three days ago, Wang Lang came here and spent a long time pressing me to pay my debt to him. After he had left, I went out. I sat under a tree on the shore of Chiumou Lake and thought of committing suicide. I wanted to climb the tree and dive into the water and drown myself, but, after thinking about it, I lost courage. The hooting of an owl frightened me and I walked away. On my way home, I came across Mrs. Shen, the matchmaker, who asked me why I was out at night. I told her what had happened and asked her if she could borrow some money for me, or some lady's dresses and ornaments that I could pawn to pay Wang Lang so that he'd no longer be prowling after me like a wolf. But Mrs. Shen only smiled and said,

" 'What do you keep your wife at home for? And you're so sick and yellow!'

"I hung my head and said nothing. She continued,

" 'Since you've got only one son, you might find it hard to part with him. But as for your wife. . . .'

"I thought she meant that I should sell you, but she added,

" 'Of course she is your lawful wife, but you're poor and you can't do anything about it. What do you keep her at home for? Starve her to death?'

"Then she said straight out, 'There's a fifty-year-old scholar who wants a concubine to bear him a son since his wife is barren. But his wife objects and will only allow him to hire somebody else's wife for a few years. I've been asked to find them a woman. She has to be about thirty years old and the mother of two or three children. She must be honest and hard-working, and obey the scholar's wife. The scholar's

wife has told me that they are willing to pay from eighty to a hundred dollars for the right sort of woman. I've looked around for one for several days, but without any luck. But your wife is just the woman I've been looking for.'

"She asked me what I thought about it. It made me cry to think of it, but she comforted me and convinced me that it was all for the best."

At this point, his voice trailed off, he hung his head and stopped. His wife looked dazed and remained speechless. There was another moment of silence before he continued,

"Yesterday, Mrs. Shen went to see the scholar again. She came back and told me that both the scholar and his wife were very happy about the idea of having you and had promised to pay me a hundred dollars. If you bear them a child they will keep you for three years, if not—for five. Mrs. Shen has fixed the date for you to go—the eighteenth of this month, that is, five days from now. She is going to have the contract drawn up today."

Trembling all over, the wife faltered,

"Why didn't you tell me this earlier?"

"Yesterday I went up to you three times, but each time I was afraid to begin. But after thinking it over I've come to realize that there's really nothing to be done but hire you out."

"Has it all been decided?" asked the wife, her teeth clattering.

"There's just the contract to be signed."

"Oh, what a poor wretch I am! Can't we really do anything else?"

"It's terrible, I know. But we're poor and we don't want to die. What else can we do? I'm afraid this year I won't even be asked to do any transplanting."

"Have you thought about Chun Pao? He's only three. What will become of him without me?"

"I'll take care of him. You're not nursing him any longer, you know."

He became more and more angry with himself and went out.

"Oh, what a miserable life!" she sighed faintly yet tearlessly. Chun Pao stared at her, whimpering, "Mummy, mummy!"

On the eve of her departure, she was sitting in the darkest corner of the house. In front of the stove stood an oil lamp, its light flickering like that of a fire-fly. Holding Chun Pao close to her bosom, she pressed her head against his hair. Lost in deep thought, she seemed absolutely dead to the reality surrounding her. Later, she gradually came to, and found herself face to face with the present and her child. Softly she called him,

"Chun Pao, Chun Pao!"

"Yes, mummy!" the child replied.

"I'm going to leave you tomorrow. . . ."

"What?" the child did not quite understand what she meant and instinctively cuddled closer to her.

"I'm not coming back, not for three years!"

She wiped away her tears. The little boy became inquisitive,

"Mummy, where are you going? To the temple?"

"No. I'm going to live with the Li family, about thirty *li* away."

"I want to go with you."

"No, you can't, darling!"

"Why?" he countered.

"You'll stay home with daddy, he'll take good care of you. He'll sleep with you and play with you. You just listen to daddy. In three years. . . ."

Before she had finished talking the child sadly interrupted her,

"Daddy will beat me!"

"Daddy will never beat you again." Her left hand was stroking the scar on the right side of the boy's forehead—a reminder of the blow dealt by her husband with the handle of a hoe.

She was about to speak to the boy again when her husband came in. He walked up to her, and fumbling in his pocket, he said,

"I've got seventy dollars from them. They'll give me the other thirty dollars ten days after you get there."

After a short pause, he added, "They've promised to take you there in a sedan-chair."

After another short pause, he continued, "The chair carriers will come to take you early in the morning as soon as they've had breakfast."

With this he walked out again.

That evening, neither he nor she felt like having supper.

The next day there was a spring drizzle.

The chair carriers arrived at the crack of dawn. The young woman had not slept a wink during the night. She had spent the time mending Chun Pao's tattered clothes. Although it was late spring and summer was near, she took out the boy's shabby cotton-padded winter jacket and wanted to give it to her husband, but he was fast asleep. Then she sat down beside her husband, wishing to have a chat with him. But he slept on and she sat there silently, waiting for the night to pass. She plucked up enough courage to mutter a few words into his ear, but even this failed to wake him up. So she lay down too.

As she was about to doze off, Chun Pao woke up. He wanted to get up and pushed his mother. Dressing the child, she said,

"Darling, you mustn't cry while I'm away or daddy will beat you. I'll buy sweets for you to eat. But you mustn't cry any more, darling."

The boy was too young to know what sorrow was, so in a minute he began to sing. She kissed his cheek and said,

"Stop singing now, you'll wake up daddy."

The chair carriers were sitting on the benches in front of the gate, smoking their pipes and chatting. Soon afterwards, Mrs. Shen arrived from the nearby village where she was living. She was an old and experienced matchmaker. As soon as she crossed the threshold, she brushed the raindrops off her clothes, saying to the husband and wife,

"It's raining, it's raining. That's a good omen, it means you will thrive from now on."

The matchmaker bustled about the house and whispered and hinted to the husband that she should be rewarded for having so successfully brought about the deal.

"To tell you the truth, for another fifty dollars, the old man could have bought himself a concubine," she said.

Then Mrs. Shen turned to the young woman who was sitting still with the child in her arms, and said loudly,

"The chair carriers have to get there in time for lunch, so you'd better hurry up and get ready to go."

The young woman glanced at her and her look seemed to say, "I don't want to leave! I'd rather starve here!"

The matchmaker understood and, walking up to her, said smiling,

"You're just a silly girl. What can the 'Yellow Fellow' give you? But over there, the scholar has plenty of everything. He has more than two hundred *mou* of land, his own houses and cattle. His wife is good-tempered and she's very kind. She never turns anybody from her door without giving him something to eat. And the scholar is not really old. He has a white face and no beard. He stoops a little as well-educated men generally do, and he is quite gentlemanly. There's no need for me to tell you more about him. You'll see him with your own eyes as soon as you get out of the sedan-chair. You know, as a matchmaker, I've never told a lie."

The young woman wiped away her tears and said softly,

"Chun Pao. . . . How can I part from him?"

"Chun Pao will be all right," said the matchmaker, patting the young woman on the shoulder and bending over her and the child. "He is already three. There's a saying, 'A child of three can move about free.' So he can be left alone. It all depends on you. If you can have one or two children over there, everything will be quite all right."

The chair bearers outside the gate now started urging the young woman to set out, murmuring,

"You are really not a bride, why should you cry?"*

The matchmaker snatched away Chun Pao from his mother's arms, saying,

"Let me take care of Chun Pao!"

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* In old China, a bride usually cried before leaving her family.

The little boy began to scream and kick. The matchmaker took him outside. When the young woman was in the sedan-chair, she said,

"You'd better take the boy in, it's raining outside."

Inside the house, resting his head on the palm of his hand, sat the little boy's father, motionless and wordless.

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The two villages were thirty *li* apart, but the chair carriers reached their destination without making a single stop on the way. The young woman's clothes were wet from the spring raindrops which had been blown in through the sedan-chair screens. An elderly woman, of about fifty-five, with a plump face and shrewd eyes came out to greet her. Realizing immediately that this was the scholar's wife, the young woman looked at her bashfully and remained silent. As the scholar's wife was amiably helping the young woman to the door, there came out from the house a tall and thin elderly man with a round, smooth face. Measuring the young woman from head to foot, he smiled and said,

"You have come early. Did you get wet in the rain?"

His wife, completely ignoring what he was saying, asked the young woman,

"Have you left anything in the sedan-chair?"

"No, nothing," answered the young woman.

Soon they were inside the house. Outside the gate, a number of women from the neighbourhood had gathered and were peeping in to see what was happening.

Somehow or other, the young woman could not help thinking about her old home and Chun Pao. As a matter of fact, she might have congratulated herself on the prospects of spending the next three years here, since both her new home and her temporary husband seemed pleasant. The scholar was really kind and soft-spoken. His wife appeared hospitable and talkative. She talked about her thirty years of happy married life with the scholar. She had given birth to a boy some fifteen years before—a really handsome and lively child, she said—but he died of smallpox less than ten months after his birth. Since then, she had never had another child. The elderly woman hinted she had long been urging her husband to get a concubine but he had always put it off—either because he was too much in love with his wedded wife or because he couldn't find a suitable woman for a concubine. This chatter made the young woman feel sad, delighted and depressed by turns. Finally, the young woman was told what was expected of her. She blushed when the scholar's wife said,

"You've had three or four children. Of course you know what to do. You know much more than I do."

After this, the elderly woman went away.

That evening, the scholar told the young woman a great many things about his family in an effort to ingratiate himself with her. She was

sitting beside a red-lacquered wooden wardrobe—something she had never had in her old home. Her dull eyes were focussed upon it when the scholar came over and sat in front of it, asking,

"What's your name?"

She remained silent and did not smile. Then, rising to her feet, she went towards the bed. He followed her, his face beaming.

"Don't be shy. Still thinking about your husband? Ha, ha, I'm your husband now!" he said softly, touching her arm. "Don't worry! You're thinking about your child, aren't you? Well. . . ."

He burst out laughing and took off his long gown.

The young woman then heard the scholar's wife scolding somebody outside the room. Though she could not make out just who was being scolded, it seemed to be either the kitchen-maid or herself. In her sorrow, the young woman began to suspect that it must be herself, but the scholar, now lying in bed, said loudly,

"Don't bother. She always grumbles like that. She likes our farm-hand very much, and often scolds the kitchen-maid for chatting with him too much."

Time passed quickly. The young woman's thoughts of her old home gradually faded as she became better and better acquainted with what went on in her new one. Sometimes it seemed to her she heard Chun Pao's muffled cries, and she dreamed of him several times. But these dreams became more and more blurred as she became occupied with her new life. Outwardly, the scholar's wife was kind to her, but she felt that, deep inside, the elderly woman was jealous and suspicious and that, like a detective, she was always spying to see what was going on between the scholar and her. Sometimes, if the wife caught her husband talking to the young woman on his return home, she would suspect that he had bought her something special. She would call him to her bedroom at night to give him a good scolding. "So you've been seduced by the witch!" she would cry. "You should take good care of your old carcase." These abusive remarks the young woman overheard time and again. After that, whenever she saw the scholar return home, she always tried to avoid him if his wife was not present. But even in the presence of his wife, the young woman considered it necessary to keep herself in the background. She had to do all this naturally so that it would not be noticed by outsiders, for otherwise the wife would get angry and blame her for purposely discrediting her in public. As time went on, the scholar's wife even made the young woman do the work of a maid-servant. Once the young woman decided to wash the elderly woman's clothes.

"You're not supposed to wash my clothes," the scholar's wife said. "In fact you can have the kitchen-maid wash your own laundry." Yet the next moment she said,

"Sister dear, you'd better go to the pigsty and have a look at the two pigs which have been grunting all the time. They're probably hungry because the kitchen-maid never gives them enough to eat."

Eight months had passed and winter came. The young woman became fussy about her food. She had little appetite for regular meals and always felt like eating something different—noodles, potatoes and so on. But she soon got tired of noodles and potatoes, and asked for meat dumplings. When she ate a little too much she got sick. Then she felt a desire for pumpkins and plums—things that could only be had in summer. The scholar knew what all this meant. He kept smiling all day and gave her whatever was available. He went to town himself to get her tangerines and asked someone to buy her some oranges. He often paced up and down the veranda, muttering to himself. One day, he saw the young woman and the kitchen-maid grinding rice for the New Year festival. They had hardly started grinding when he said to the young woman, "You'd better have a rest now. We can let the farm-hand do it, since everybody is going to eat the cakes."

Sometimes in the evening, when the rest of the household were chatting, he would sit alone near an oil lamp, reading the *Book of Songs:*

"Fair, fair," cry the ospreys
On the island in the river.
Lovely is this noble lady,
Fit bride for our lord.
. . . . . .

The farm-hand once asked him,

"Please, sir, what are you reading this book for? You're not going to sit for a higher civil service examination, are you?"

The scholar stroked his beardless chin and said in a gay tone,

"Well, you know the joys of life, don't you? There's a saying that the greatest joy of life is either to spend the first night in the nuptial chamber or to pass a civil service examination. As for me, I've already experienced both. But now there's a still greater blessing in store for me."

His remark set the whole household laughing—except for his wife and the young woman.

To the scholar's wife all this was very annoying. When she first heard of the young woman's pregnancy, she was pleased. Later, when she saw her husband lavishing attention on the young woman, she began to blame herself for being barren. Once, the following spring, it happened that the young woman fell ill and was laid up for three days with a headache. The scholar was anxious that she take a rest and frequently asked what she needed. This made his wife angry. She grumbled for three whole days and said that the young woman was malingering.

"She has been spoiled here and become stuck-up like a real concubine," she said, sneering maliciously, "always complaining about headaches or backaches. She must have been quite different before—like a bitch that has to go searching for food even when she is going to bear a litter of puppies! Now, with the old man fawning on her, she puts on airs!"

"Why so much fuss about having a baby?" said the scholar's wife one night to the kitchen-maid. "I myself was once with child for ten months, I just can't believe she's really feeling so bad. Who knows what she's going to have? It may be just a little toad! She'd better not try to bluff me, throwing her weight around before the little thing is born. It's still nothing but a clot of blood! It's really a bit too early for her to make such a fuss!"

The young woman who had gone to bed without supper was awakened by this torrent of malicious abuse and burst into convulsive sobs. The scholar was also shocked by what he heard—so much so that he broke into a cold sweat and shook with anger. He wanted to go to his wife's room, grab her by the hair and give her a good beating so as to work off his feelings. But, somehow or other, he felt powerless to do so; his fingers trembled and his arms ached with weariness. Sighing deeply, he said softly, "I've been too good to her. In thirty years of married life, I've never slapped her face or given her a scratch. That's why she is so cocky."

Then, crawling across the bed, he whispered to the young woman beside him,

"Now, stop crying, stop crying, let her cackle! A barren hen is always jealous! If you manage to have a baby boy this time, I'll give you two precious gifts—a blue jade ring and a white jade. . . ." Leaving the last sentence unfinished, he turned to listen to his wife's jeering voice outside the room. He hastily took off his clothes, and, covering his head with the quilt and nestling closer to the young woman, he said,

"I've a white jade. . . ."

The young woman grew bigger and bigger around the waist. The scholar's wife made arrangements with a midwife, and, when other people were around, she would busy herself making baby's clothes out of floral prints.

The hot summer had ended and the cool autumn breeze was blowing over the village. The day finally came when the expectations of the whole household reached their climax and everybody was agog. His heart beating faster than ever, the scholar was pacing the courtyard, reading about horoscopes from an almanac in his hand as intently as if he wanted to commit the whole book to memory. One moment he would look anxiously at the room with its windows closely shut whence came the muffled groans of the expectant mother. The next, he would look at the cloudy sky, and walk up to the kitchen-maid at the door to ask,

"How is everything now?"

Nodding, the maid would reply after a moment's pause,

"It won't be long now, it won't be long now."

He would resume pacing the courtyard and reading the almanac.

The suspense lasted until sunset. Then, when wisps of kitchen smoke were curling up from the roofs and lamps were gleaming in the country houses like so many wild flowers in spring, a baby boy was born. The new-born baby cried at the top of his voice while the scholar sat in a corner of the house, with tears of joy in his eyes. The household was so excited that no one cared about supper.

A month later, the bright and tender-faced baby made his debut in the open. While the young woman was breast-feeding him, womenfolk from the neighbourhood gathered around to feast their eyes upon the boy. Some liked his nose; others, his mouth; still others, his ears. Some praised his mother, saying that she had become whiter and healthier. The scholar's wife, now acting like a granny, said,

"That's enough! You'll make the baby cry!"

As to the baby's name, the scholar racked his brains, but just could not hit upon a suitable one. His wife suggested that the Chinese character *shou,* meaning longevity, or one of its synonyms, should be included in his name. But the scholar did not like it—it was too commonplace. He spent several weeks looking through Chinese classics like the *Book of Changes* and the *Book of History* in search of suitable characters to be used as the baby's name. But all his efforts proved fruitless. It was a difficult problem to solve because he wanted a name which should be auspicious for the baby and would imply at the same time that he was born to him in old age. One evening, while holding the three-month-old baby in his arms, the scholar, with spectacles on, sat down near a lamp and again looked into some book in an effort to find a name for the boy. The baby's mother, sitting quietly in a corner of the room, appeared to be musing. Suddenly she said,

"I suppose you could call him 'Chiu Pao.' " Those in the room turned to look at the young woman and listened intently as she continued, "*Chiu* means autumn and *Pao* means treasure. So since he was born in autumn, you'd better call him 'Chiu Pao.' "

The scholar was silent for a brief moment and then exclaimed,

"A wonderful idea! I've wasted a lot of time looking for a name for the baby! As a man of over fifty, I've reached the *autumn* of my life. The boy too was born in *autumn.* Besides, *autumn* is the time when everything is ripe and the time for harvesting, as the *Book of History* says. 'Chiu Pao' is really a good name for the child."

Then he began to praise the young woman, saying that she was born clever and that it was quite useless to be a bookworm like himself. His remarks made the young woman feel ill at ease. Lowering her head and forcing a smile, she said to herself with tears in her eyes,

"I suggested 'Chiu Pao' simply because I was thinking of my elder son Chun Pao."*

Chiu Pao daily grew handsomer and more attached to his mother. His unusually big eyes which stared tirelessly at strangers would light up joyfully when he saw his mother, even when she was a long distance away. He always clung to her. Although the scholar loved him even more than his mother did, Chiu Pao did not take to him. As to the scholar's wife, although outwardly she showed as much affection for Chiu Pao as if he were her own baby, he would stare at her with the same indefatigable curiosity as he did at strangers. But the more the child grew attached to his mother, the closer drew the time for their separation. Once more it was summer. To everybody in the house, the advent of this season was a reminder of the coming end of the young woman's three-year stay.

The scholar, out of his love for Chiu Pao, suggested to his wife one day that he was willing to offer another hundred dollars to buy the young woman so that she could stay with them permanently. The wife, however, replied curtly,

"No, you'll have to poison me before you do that!"

This made the scholar angry. He remained silent for quite a while. Then, forcing himself to smile, he said,

"It's a pity that our child will be motherless. . . ." His wife smiled wryly and said in an icy and cutting tone,

"Don't you think that I might be a mother to him?"

As to the young woman, there were two conflicting ideas in her mind. On the one hand, she always remembered that she would have to leave after the three years were up. Three years seemed a short time and she had become more of a servant than a temporary wife. Besides, in her mind her elder son Chun Pao had become as sweet and lovely a child as Chiu Pao. She could not bear to remain away from either Chiu Pao or Chun Pao. On the other hand, she was willing to stay on permanently in the scholar's house because she thought her own husband would not live long and might even die in four or five years. So she longed to have the scholar bring Chun Pao into his home so that she could also live with her elder son.

One day, as she was sitting wearily on the veranda with Chiu Pao sleeping at her breast, the hypnotic rays of the early summer sun sent her into a daydream and she thought she saw Chun Pao standing beside her; but when she stretched out her hand to him and was about to speak to her two sons, she saw that her elder boy was not there.

At the door at the other end of the veranda the scholar's wife, with her seemingly kind face but fierce eyes, stood staring at the young woman. The latter came to and said to herself,

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* Meaning "Spring Treasure."

"I'd better leave here as soon as I can. She's always spying on me!"

Later, the scholar changed his plan a little; he decided he would send Mrs. Shen on another mission: to find out whether the young woman's husband was willing to take another thirty dollars—or fifty dollars at most—to let him keep the young woman for another three years. He said to his wife,

"I suppose Chiu Pao's mother could stay on until he is five."

Chanting "Buddha preserve me" with a rosary in her hand, the scholar's wife replied,

"She has got her elder son at home. Besides, you ought to let her go back to her lawful husband."

The scholar hung his head and said brokenly,

"Just imagine, Chiu Pao will be motherless at two. . . ."

Putting away the rosary, his wife snapped,

"I can take care of him, I can manage him. Are you afraid I'm going to murder him?"

Upon hearing the last sentence, the scholar walked away hurriedly. His wife went on grumbling,

"The child has been born for me. Chiu Pao is mine. If the male line of your family came to an end, it would affect me too. You've been bewitched by her. You're old and pigheaded. You don't know what's what. Just think how many more years you may live, and yet you're trying to do everything to keep her with you. I certainly don't want another woman's tablet put side by side with mine in the family shrine!"

It seemed as if she would never stop pouring out the stream of venomous and biting words, but the scholar was too far away to hear them.

Every time Chiu Pao had a pimple on his head or a slight fever, the scholar's wife would go around praying to Buddha and bring back Buddha's medicine in the form of incense ash which she applied to the baby's pimple or dissolved in water for him to drink. He would cry and perspire profusely. The young woman did not like the idea of the scholar's wife making so much fuss when the baby fell slightly ill, and always threw the ash away when she was not there. Sighing deeply, the scholar's wife once said to her husband,

"You see, she really doesn't care a bit about our baby and says that he's not getting thinner. Real love needs no flourishes; she is only pretending that she loves our baby."

The young woman wept when alone, and the scholar kept silent.

On Chiu Pao's first birthday, the celebration lasted the whole day. About forty guests attended the party. The birthday presents they brought included baby clothes, noodles, a silver pendant in the shape of a lion's head to be worn on the baby's chest and a gold-plated image of the God of Longevity to be sewn to the baby's bonnet. The guests wished

the baby good luck and a long life. The host's face flushed with joy as if reflecting the reddening glow of the setting sun.

Late in the afternoon, just before the banquet, there came into the courtyard from the deepening twilight outside an uninvited guest, who attracted the attention of all the others. He was an emaciated-looking peasant, dressed in patched clothes and with unkempt hair, carrying under his arm a paper-parcel. Greatly astonished and puzzled, the host went up to inquire where he hailed from. While the newcomer was stammering, it suddenly occurred to the host that this was none other than the skin dealer—the young woman's husband. Thereupon, the host said in a low voice,

"Why do you bring a gift? You really shouldn't have done this!"

The newcomer looked timidly about, saying,

"I . . . I had to come . . . I've come to wish the baby a long life. . . ."

Before he had finished speaking, he began to open the package he had brought. Tearing off three paper wrappings with his quivering fingers, he took out four bronze-cast and silver-plated Chinese characters, about one square inch in size, which said that the baby would live as long as the South Mountain.

The scholar's wife appeared on the scene, and looked displeased when she saw the skin dealer. The scholar, however, invited the skin dealer to the table, where the guests sat whispering about him.

The guests wined and dined for two hours and everybody was feeling happy and excited. They indulged in noisy drinking games and plied one another with big bowls of wine. The deafening uproar rocked the house. Nobody paid any attention to the skin dealer who sat silently after drinking two cups of wine. Having enjoyed their wine, the guests each hurriedly took a bowl of rice; and, bidding one another farewell, they dispersed in twos and threes, carrying lighted lanterns in their hands.

The skin dealer sat there eating until the servants came to clear the table. Then he walked to a dark corner of the veranda where he found his wife.

"What did you come for?" asked the young woman with an extremely sad note in her voice.

"I didn't want to come, but I just couldn't help it."

"Then why did you come so late?"

"I couldn't get any money to buy a birthday gift. I spent the whole morning begging for a loan and then I had to go to town to buy the gift. I was tired and hungry. That's why I came late."

The young woman asked, "How's Chun Pao?"

Her husband reflected for a moment and then answered,

"It's for Chun Pao's sake that I've come. . . ."

"For Chun Pao's sake!" she echoed in surprise. He went on slowly, "Since this summer Chun Pao has grown very skinny. In the

autumn, he fell sick. I haven't been able to do anything for him because I haven't had any money. So his illness is getting more serious. I'm afraid he won't live unless we try to save him!" He continued after a short pause, "I've come to borrow some money from you. . . ."

Deep inside her, the young woman had the feeling that wild cats were scratching and biting her, gnawing at her very heart. She was on the verge of bursting into tears, but on such an occasion when everybody was celebrating Chiu Pao's birthday she knew she had to keep her emotions under control. She made a brave effort to keep back her tears and said to her husband,

"How can I get hold of any money? They give me twenty cents a month as pocket money here, but I spend every cent of it on my baby. What can we do now?"

Both were speechless for a while, then the young woman asked again,

"Who is taking care of Chun Pao while you're here?"

"One of the neighbours. I've got to go back home tonight. In fact I ought to be going now," he answered, wiping away his tears.

"Wait a moment," she told him tearfully, "let me go and try to borrow some money from him."

And with this she left him.

Three days later, in the evening, the scholar suddenly asked the young woman,

"Where's the blue jade ring I gave you?"

"I gave it to him the other night. He pawned it."

"Didn't I lend you five dollars?" countered the scholar irritably.

The young woman, hanging her head, answered after a moment's pause,

"Five dollars wasn't enough!"

The scholar sighed deeply at this and said, "No matter how good I try to be to you, you still love your husband and your elder son more. I wanted to keep you for another couple of years, but now I think you'd better leave here next spring!"

The young woman stood there silent and tearless.

Several days later, the scholar again reproached her, "That blue jade ring is a treasure. I gave it to you because I wanted Chiu Pao to inherit it from you. I didn't think you would have it pawned! It's lucky my wife doesn't know about it, otherwise she would make scenes for another three months."

After this the young woman became thinner and paler. Her eyes lost their lustre; she was often subjected to sneers and curses. She was forever worrying about Chun Pao's illness. She was always on the lookout for some acquaintance from her home village or some traveller going there. She hoped she could hear about Chun Pao's recovery, but there was no news. She wished she could borrow a couple of dollars or buy

sweets for some traveller to take to Chun Pao, but she could find no one going to her home village. She would often walk outside the gate with Chiu Pao in her arms, and there, standing by the roadside, she would gaze with melancholy eyes at the country paths. This greatly annoyed the scholar's wife who said to her husband,

"She really doesn't want to stay here any longer. She's anxious to get back home as soon as she can."

Sometimes at night, sleeping with Chiu Pao at her bosom, she would suddenly wake up from her dreams and scream until the child too would awake and start crying. Once, the scholar asked her,

"What's happened? What's happened?"

She patted the child without answering. The scholar continued,

"Did you dream your elder son had died? How you screamed! You woke me up!"

She hurriedly answered, "No, no . . . I thought I saw a new grave in front of me!"

He said nothing, but the morbid hallucination continued to loom before her—she saw herself approaching the grave.

Winter was drawing to a close and the birds began twittering at her window, as if urging her to leave quickly. The child was weaned, and her separation from her son—permanent separation—was already a foregone conclusion.

On the day of her departure, the kitchen-maid quietly asked the scholar's wife,

"Shall we hire a sedan-chair to take her home?"

Fingering the rosary in her hand, the scholar's wife said, "Better let her walk. Otherwise she will have to pay the fare herself. And where will she get the money? I understand her husband can't even afford to have three meals a day. She shouldn't try to be showy. It's not very far from here, and I myself have walked some forty *li* a day. She's more used to walking than I am, so she ought to be able to get there in half a day."

In the morning, as the young woman was dressing Chiu Pao, tears kept streaming down her cheeks. The child called, "Auntie, auntie" (the scholar's wife had made him call her "mummy," and his real mother, "auntie"). The young woman could not answer for weeping. She wanted so much to say to the child,

"Good-bye, darling! Your 'mummy' has been good to you, so you should be good to her in the future. Forget about me forever!" But these words she never uttered. The child was only one and a half years old, and she knew that he would never understand what she wanted to say.

The scholar walked up quietly behind her, and put ten twenty-cent silver coins into her palm, saying softly,

"Here are two dollars for you."

Buttoning up the child's clothes, she put the ten silver coins into her pocket.

The scholar's wife also came in, and, staring hard at the back of the retreating scholar, she turned to the young woman, saying,

"Give me Chiu Pao, so that he won't cry when you leave."

The young woman remained silent, but the child was unwilling to leave his mother and kept striking the scholar's wife's face with his little hands. The scholar's wife was piqued and said,

"You can keep him with you until you've had breakfast."

The kitchen-maid urged the young woman to eat as much as possible, saying,

"You've been eating very little for a fortnight. You are thinner than when you first came here. Have you looked at yourself in the mirror? You have to walk thirty *li* today, so finish this bowl of rice!"

The young woman said listlessly, "You're really kind to me!"

It was a fine day and the sun was high in the sky. Chiu Pao continued to cling to his mother. When the scholar's wife angrily snatched him away from her, he yelled at the top of his voice, kicking the elderly woman in the belly and pulling at her hair. The young woman, standing behind, pleaded,

"Let me stay here until after lunch."

The scholar's wife replied fiercely over her shoulder,

"Hurry up with your packing. You've got to leave sooner or later!"

From then on, Chiu Pao's cries gradually receded from the young woman's hearing.

While she was packing, she kept listening to his crying. The kitchen-maid stood beside her, comforting her and watching what she was putting into her parcel. When the young woman left she did so with the same old parcel she had brought.

She heard Chiu Pao crying as she walked out of the gate, and his cries rang in her ears even after she had plodded a distance of three *li*.

Stretching before her lay the sun-bathed country road which seemed to be as long as the sky was boundless. As she was walking along the bank of a river, whose clear water reflected her like a mirror, she thought of stopping there and putting an end to her life by drowning herself. But, after sitting for a while on the bank, she resumed her journey.

It was already afternoon, and an elderly villager told her that she still had fifteen *li* to go before she would reach her own village. She said to him,

"Grandpa, please hire a litter for me. I'm too tired to walk."

"Are you sick?" asked the old man.

"Yes, I am." She was sitting in a pavilion outside a village.

"Where have you walked from?"

She answered after a moment's hesitation,

"I'm on my way home; this morning I thought I would be able to walk the whole way."

The elder lapsed into sympathetic silence and finally hired a litter for her.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when the litter carriers entered a narrow and filthy village street. The young woman, her pale face shrunken and yellowed like an old vegetable leaf, lay with her eyes closed. She was breathing weakly. The villagers eyed her with astonishment and compassion. A group of village urchins noisily followed the litter, the appearance of which stirred the quiet village.

One of the children chasing after the litter was Chun Pao. The children were shouting and squealing like little pigs when the litter carriers suddenly turned into the lane leading to Chun Pao's home. Chun Pao stopped in surprise. As the litter stopped in front of his home, he leaned dazed against a post and looked at it from a distance. The other children gathered around and craned their necks timidly. When the young woman descended from the litter, she felt giddy and at first did not realize that the shabbily dressed child with dishevelled hair standing before her was Chun Pao. He was hardly any taller than when she had left three years before and just as skinny. Then, she blurted out in tears,

"Chun Pao!"

Startled, the children dispersed. Chun Pao, also frightened, ran inside the house to look for his father.

Inside the dingy room, the young woman sat for a long, long while. Both she and her husband were speechless. As night fell, he raised his head and said,

"You'd better prepare supper!"

She rose reluctantly, and, after searching around the house, said in a weak voice,

"There's no rice left in the big jar. . . ."

Her husband looked at her with a sickly smile,

"You've got used to living in a rich man's house all right. We keep our rice in a cardboard box."

That night, the skin dealer said to his son,

"Chun Pao, you go to bed with your mother!"

Chun Pao, standing beside the stove, started crying. His mother walked up to him and called,

"Chun Pao, Chun Pao!" But when she tried to caress him, the boy shunned her. His father hissed,

"You've forgotten your own mother. You ought to get a good beating for that!"

The young woman lay awake on the narrow, dirty plank-bed with Chun Pao lying, like a stranger, beside her. Her mind in a daze, she seemed to see her younger son Chiu Pao—plump, white and lovely—curled up beside her, but as she stretched out her arms to embrace him, she

saw it was Chun Pao, who had just fallen asleep. The boy was breathing faintly, his face pressed against his mother's breast. She hugged him tightly.

The still and chilly night seemed to drag on endlessly. . . .

Translated by Chang Pei-chi

Harvest

YEH TZU

I

It was nearly Ching Ming Festival. The rain had been coming down for days, and the sky remained overcast without the slightest sign of clearing up.

Uncle Yun-pu, still in the shabby padded gown that had seen him through the winter, sat near the entrance of the Tsao Ancestral Temple. He was shaking with a slight tremor, as if his body found it hard to withstand the chill that was penetrating to his bones. Looking up to survey the sky, he muttered incoherently under his breath and looked down again.

"Oh, Heaven! Is it going to be like last year?" he whispered.

Then turning towards his wife who was sitting at the foot of the stage in front of the temple, he said hesitatingly: "Ma, they say after the first thunder shower in spring you should be able to take off your padded clothes. Now it's nearly Ching Ming and it's still too cold to go without them. Could it be that this year will be like last?"

She made no reply. She was busy nursing little Sze-hsi at her breast.

The weather was really dreadful enough to worry anyone to death. The rain had been pattering for more than a month, ever since the lunar calendar marked the beginning of spring. People felt terribly afraid. In the past, it had always been like this: a bitter cold spell around the beginning of spring meant that it would certainly be a flood year again.

"Heaven above, if it's going to be the same. . . ." Uncle Yun-pu once more gazed up at the sky, while with one hand he kept tapping his pipe on the stone steps.

"It couldn't be!" said Mrs. Yun-pu after a pause, in a rather offhand manner, her face still turned towards the child in her arms.

"Why couldn't it be? Didn't we have a cold spell like this at the beginning of spring in 1924 and 1926? Besides, this year Heaven is going to make people really suffer."

Uncle Yun-pu was irritated by his wife's casual answer. He felt as

if this year's fate was already sealed. Had not the oracle in the Kuan Ti* Temple stated clearly that it was going to be a bad year and that death would take a toll of 60 to 70 per cent of the population?

Memories of past suffering, deeply engraved in the mind of Uncle Yun-pu, inspired these fears. He remembered the year 1924 when he had just managed to scrape together one meal a day composed of yams and weeds which he had gathered here and there. The year after was slightly better, but the following year they were again reduced to tree bark and roots. As for previous famine years, they had occurred when he was still very young, so the suffering did not seem quite so bad. But last year—Heavens! It was something Uncle Yun-pu dared not even think about.

The year before, there had been eight mouths to feed in his household; this year there were only six left. Besides Yun-pu and his wife, there was their eldest son, twenty-year-old Li-chiu, who was his father's right-hand man. The second son, Shao-pu, was fourteen. He too had started to help with work in the fields. Ying-ying, the ten-year-old daughter, helped her mother make rain hats, and the youngest was Szehsi, the baby, who was still being breast-fed. Yun-pu's father and the six-year-old child, Tiger, had died the September before from eating Mercy Powder.**

What a jolly family he had, and not a single member who ate without working for it! Who would say Uncle Yun-pu wasn't destined to become rich? Yes, Uncle Yun-pu was meant to spend a comfortable and prosperous old age. It was only tough luck that had brought a succession of wars, droughts and floods, year after year, crushing him so that he could hardly raise his head.

The year before, that dreadful year before, had been worse than a nightmare. Because of wars and natural calamities, he had been compelled, in desperation, to rent seven *mou* of Mr. Ho's land in the hope that his fortune might take a turn for the better. After all, there were many hands in his family; each extra *mou* of land cultivated would mean just so much more at harvest time. He had hoped that after deducting the rent to be paid to Ho there would be some grain left for themselves. If they could have managed to get enough to eat for a year or so, there is no question but that they would have become prosperous. Yun-pu had made up his mind to sell his entire property, which consisted of the little hut they lived in, and become a tenant of Mr. Ho's.

He had moved his whole family into the ancestral temple in March and had become caretaker of the ancestral tablets, for which duty he was

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* Kuan Ti, or Emperor Kuan, was regarded by the peasants in some parts of China as the ruler in Heaven. Originally called Kuan Yu, he was a famous general during the period of the Three Kingdoms in the third century.

** Fine white clay, believed to be edible and sent by Kuanyin, the Goddess of Mercy.

given a string of money at the oblation in spring and autumn. Mr. Ho had taken over his hut and had allowed him to cultivate his seven *mou* of land at the customary rate of 70 per cent of the harvest. Had Yun-pu actually been able to keep the 30 per cent of the harvest in his own hands, he would have considered himself quite lucky.

At first, Yun-pu had really felt extremely happy. He and his sons had laboured unstintingly, and he felt doubly reassured by the fact that the crops were growing well and the rain was just right. If he was careful in his cultivation and they managed a good harvest, everything would be all right, he had thought.

Pretty soon the seedlings took root and started to bud. Quickly, ears of grain appeared; with a few more days of mild south wind he could count on the appearance of a golden field of rice. Yun-pu had been filled with joy. Was this not ample reward for his unceasing hard labour?

He had felt like jumping up and down for joy. But it happened that the day after, Heaven had changed his mind. Huge drops of rain started falling in the southwest, and soon the shower spread to the village. In barely half a day, the water in the ponds had begun to rise. Uncle Yun-pu was suddenly seized with a sense of uneasiness; he was afraid that the precious rice flowers in the fields would be destroyed by the heavy rain, and his harvest ruined. By afternoon the rain had stopped. Yun-pu felt as light-hearted as if a heavy burden had been lifted from his shoulders.

In the middle of the night, however, the sky had suddenly turned so dark that it was impossible to see even two feet ahead. The clanging of gongs sounded from all sides; racing feet and shouting voices clamoured against the whirling of the wind. Uncle Yun-pu knew that some accident had taken place. In great haste, he woke his eldest son, and in the dark they raced towards the sound of the gongs.

They met a neighbour on the way and learnt that both the west stream and the south stream had risen thirty feet. Tsaochialung was threatened by breaks here and there in the dykes surrounding the village. The gongs were sounded to call the people together to reinforce the dykes.

Uncle Yun-pu was stunned. For the water to rise suddenly 10 yards in the night was a rare phenomenon which had not occurred in forty or fifty years. He was in a panic. The faster the gongs beat, the more unsteady his steps became. The night was dark and the path slippery. He fell time and again, and picked himself up with great difficulty. Finally his son took hold of his arm and they ran on together. But they had gone only a few paces when they heard a loud crash, as if heaven itself had burst open. Uncle Yun-pu's legs shook like leaves in the wind. Immediately, waves of turbulent water rushed towards them. Li-chiu quickly lifted his father on his back, turned around and raced home. Just as they entered their door, the water reached the stone steps.

The water had broken through a corner of the dyke at Hsintukou,

forming an opening about 300 feet wide. Tsaochialung's fields of gold had all dissolved in the water.

Yun-pu was half crazed. His proceeds from half a year's hard work and the subsistence of his whole family were in that one instant washed away by the water. All day, he went about moaning, "Heavens, oh my Heavens! My grains of gold have turned into water!"

And so now once again Uncle Yun-pu saw fateful signs of disaster appear. He could not help but feel desperately worried. From June the year before up until that very moment, he had not had one adequate meal of rice. The water had receded in July, and the famine-stricken peasants of the village had gone out together to beg for food. But when they had reached Ninghsiang, they had been taken for political hoodlums and driven away. After this incident no one had been allowed to go far from his front door. It was said that the county government had received 30,000 dollars for famine relief; but actually not a single grain of rice ever reached the peasants in the countryside. Mr. Ho bought seventy piculs of soya beans from the provincial capital for the relief of the famine in the village. Uncle Yun-pu managed to borrow fifty catties at the price of 6.30 dollars to which was added an interest rate of 4.5 per cent per month. But there were eight in Yun-pu's house, and eventually even the grass was all eaten and they simply could not carry on any longer. Yun-pu went down on his knees to Mr. Ho and obtained on loan another thirty catties of beans. In September, Mercy Powder was discovered at Huachia Dyke and the villagers all went down in crowds to dig it up for food. Uncle Yun-pu and Li-chiu managed to get about three piculs. The family fed on that for a day or so, and as a result, the grandfather departed this world taking with him the six-year-old child, Tiger.

When finally the famine-stricken villagers were all on the very brink of starvation, Mr. Ho had talked to the county magistrate and guaranteed on their behalf that they would not become political hoodlums. After innumerable entreaties, a few exit permits had been issued, and thus the peasants had been able to leave their village homes. Uncle Yun-pu and his family had been sent to a busy town where they had spent four months as starving refugees. They had not returned until the end of the year. All this had happened the year before.

At that time, the villagers were making rain hats of bamboo as a temporary measure to keep alive. In the rainy season if a person made ten rain hats a day he could have two meals of thin gruel. Uncle Yun-pu and Li-chiu split the bamboo and Mrs. Yun-pu, with Shao-pu and Ying-ying, worked day and night weaving the hats. Work, work, work, must do all they can with the weaving. What else was there for them but weaving? If only they could keep alive until the autumn harvest!

For over a month now, the spring rain had been pouring down. It

was bitterly cold. Everyone in the village was seized with the same fear.

"Merciful Heavens, is it going to be like last year again?"

II

The sky eventually cleared up; people crept out of the gloomy houses in which they had been hiding for over a month, and looked about. Happy smiles hovered on pale, sallow faces; children ran around in groups under the sun, their bare legs sporting over the soft muddy ground.

Everywhere the water level was high—in the ponds, the fields and the lakes. Young grass was springing up all over the place and sparkling rain drops hung from the rushes like little particles of silvery pearls. The willows too had begun to sprout. Spring sunshine appearing after a long period of rain lent an atmosphere of vitality and freshness to everything in the village.

People promptly started to chatter among themselves and bustle with activity. On the foot-paths near the fields, bare-footed people walked about, loitering here and there, now pointing at the ponds, now examining the ditches and talking of this and that. All of them were making plans and preparations for the work of the coming season.

There was a sudden drop in the market for rain hats since the weather had cleared up in that vicinity. The men could no longer stay at home all day to cut the strips, and as a result work slackened for the women and children. The tight screws of life were immediately felt within the whole village.

Uncle Yun-pu, who had prayed day in and day out for the rain to stop, now had his wish fulfilled. But a smile only flickered fleetingly over his face; it disappeared immediately to be followed by tightly knitted brows. It was still too cold to dispense with his padded gown. The sun only produced a faint tingle of warmth on Uncle Yun-pu's body, but he did not bother about that. He was only worried as to how he could get over the present crisis—how to get a few good meals of rice so as to have strength enough to go to work in the fields.

The drop in the market for rain hats meant cutting out their daily meals of thin gruel. Uncle Yun-pu was therefore more worried than ever. He was convinced that it was his fate to suffer: he had not known an hour of comfort since the day he was born. By the time he was fifty, he had undergone any number of hardships, but he had yet to see one happy day. The fortune-tellers said that his old age would be spent in comfort, but that was something which would come about after he had turned fifty-five. It was hard for him to believe in something so far in the future. Neither of his sons was at all worldly-wise, and he found it

most difficult to maintain a household for six during those years of hard luck.

"I must find a way out somehow!"

Uncle Yun-pu had never completely given up hope. Whenever a tough problem confronted him he would repeat this sentence over and over again in his mind, and sometimes he would be able to think of a good solution. This time, he knew that the crisis was an extremely difficult one, so he was again turning the words over in his mind.

"There's Mr. Ho, Mr. Li, Mr. Chen. . . ." He paced back and forth at the foot of the stage, and one by one the figures of these men floated before his eyes. But how harsh and unrelenting were their faces! They inspired him with uneasiness and dread. He shook his head and sighed, casting the thought of these people aside, and turning his mind in another direction. Suddenly he remembered a person who was of a different sort.

"Li-chiu, will you go right away to see Uncle Yu-wu?"

"What for, Dad?" asked Li-chiu nonchalantly from the door-step, where he sat cutting bamboo.

"Tomorrow the weather will be really fine and warm; everyone is planning to go into the fields. We have to start too. And the first day we should at least have a full meal. It will be a prediction of better things to come and will give us strength to do our work. But there's no more rice in the house, therefore. . . ."

"I don't think Uncle Yu-wu can do anything about it."

"Still, it won't do any harm if you go and see, will it?"

"Why bother to go there for nothing? I don't think they're any better off than we are."

"You're always talking back to your father. How do you know whether they are like us or not? I told you to go and see."

"But Dad, it's true. They are probably harder up than we are."

"Nonsense!"

Recently, Uncle Yun-pu had often felt that his son was not as obedient as before. He seemed to want to argue over everything. Li-chiu had quarreled many times with his father over ordinary household affairs. He was often quite indolent and unwilling to work, and sometimes behaved like an utterly rebellious, unfilial creature.

Uncle Yu-wu was not necessarily in such drastic straits as he, because there was only Yu-wu and his wife in the family, no one else. The year before, when all the peasants in the village had left and become refugees, Yu-wu had stayed at home. All by himself, he had managed to eke out a living for his family of two. Furthermore, he never borrowed from anyone. Three days before, he had been seen with a basket in front of the butcher shop near the ferry. He had bought a piece of meat and some wine, and had walked on, quite pleased with himself. How could anyone say he also had no way out?

Uncle Yun-pu suspected that his son was again behaving like a lazy beggar and refusing to obey orders. He was unable to suppress his anger:

"You wretch, are you going, or aren't you? You're always opposing me in one way or another!"

"It's no use going."

"You'll go if I tell you to go, and I forbid you to talk to me like that!"

Raising his head, Li-chiu gently put down the knife with which he had been cutting bamboo. His young heart was heavy with hidden pain. Unable to stand the worried look on his father's face, he turned and went off without another word.

"Just say: My father sent me to ask Uncle Yu-wu to please help us just a little. Once we tide over this difficult time, we'll promptly return Uncle what we owe!"

"Uh, huh! . . ."

The moon had just peeped out from behind the tree trunks, and in a few minutes it was again swallowed up by dark clouds. Not a single star was in sight. All around, the darkness was like a black lacquer board.

"What did Uncle Yu-wu say?"

"He didn't say much. He only said: Please give my regards to your Dad. I am very sorry, but yesterday we were eating pumpkin and today there's just this bit of thin gruel left."

"Didn't you say I'd pay him back right away?"

"I did, and he even showed me their rice jar. It was empty."

"And what about his wife?"

"She smiled at me but didn't say anything."

"They're lying!" Uncle Yun-pu said indignantly, pounding his fist on the little table. "Only three days before I saw him buying meat, and bless him, he says he has no rice today. Who the devil believes that!"

Nobody made a sound. Mrs. Yun-pu came over, and the children strained their ears to hear the conversation. In the huge ancestral temple there was not a single light. The darkness was oppressive and weighed heavily on their spirits.

"Then what are we to do tomorrow when work in the fields must begin?" Mrs. Yun-pu asked anxiously.

"There's nothing but starvation for all of us. This good-for-nothing has been dashing about for Heaven knows how long, and hasn't brought back even a single grain of rice!"

"But Dad, what could I do?"

"Oh go and die, you worthless fool, and leave me alone!"

Having scolded his son so severely, Uncle Yun-pu was immediately sorry. Die! Ah, what was the good of wishing his son dead? His

heart contracted, and in spite of himself two big tears rolled down his shriveled old cheeks. He groped for his pipe, and turning around, went out.

"Where are you going, Father?"

"Are we to eat sand tomorrow or what, if I don't go out to see what I can do?"

With sorrow in their eyes the family watched the retreating back of Uncle Yun-pu until it was swallowed up by darkness. One by one the children went in to sleep. Like little puppies, they tumbled down here and there in the back room, and lay quiet. Only Aunt Yun-pu and Li-chiu remained in the central hall, their lustreless eyes wide open in the tense atmosphere while they waited for Uncle Yun-pu to return. A tightness had already started to clutch at their hearts.

Late at night, Uncle Yun-pu came back with a mournful look on his face, and swung a little sack down from his back.

"Here is 3.60 dollars' worth of beans."

Three pairs of hungry eyes fixed their gaze on the little sack. Yun-pu's eyes were still wet with tears.

III

Standing beside the mouth of the ditch in one corner of their field, Li-chiu swung his hoe lazily. Following the movement of his arms, the excess water in the field gradually flowed out of the ditch into the pond. But he felt extremely tired, and his arms were devoid of strength. Somehow his usual vitality was missing.

Everything was so uncertain. Moodily he gazed out over the fields spreading towards the distant horizon. It seemed to him that it was just no use working hard; no one could feel sure that hard work would produce anything. The years of war and flood had been a great shock to him, and everything at present made him feel lost and bewildered. Yet he could think of no way out of the distressing situation.

Dragging his hoe behind him, he stepped over to another opening of the ditch. The past rushed to his mind like an incoming tide. As he swung his hoe, every blow seemed to strike into his heart. His father was getting old and his brothers and sister were so young. All that had happened during the past four or five years showed an inevitable trend —their family was heading for disaster.

Suddenly he remembered what Cousin Big Lai, who lived in the front rooms, had whispered to him in secret some time ago. Turning it over carefully in his mind, he found that there was irrefutable logic and reason behind it. True enough, in years like these, unless a person depended on himself, he had no one to depend on. The whole world was

against the poor; unless the poor themselves stood up and did something, there would be no hope for them all their lives. Moreover, Big Lai had stated with great certainty that the world would belong to the poor in the near future.

Thus, Li-chiu was again reminded of the extraordinary events, which had taken place four years before, when the Peasants' Association* was in power.

"Oh, if only that world would come again!"

He smiled. Suddenly a figure passed by him. Startled, he turned and saw Big Lai, the very person he had been thinking about.

"Hey! Where're you going, Elder Cousin?"

"Ah, Li-chiu. So you folks have also started work in the fields."

"Yes, Cousin. Come, let's have a chat." Li-chiu stopped swinging his hoe.

"Where's your Dad?"

"Over there carrying peat. Shao-pu is with him."

"How are you people getting along these days?"

"Miserably, of course! How else? Today, there is no one home making rain hats. All three of us are working in the field. Last night, my Dad went to Mr. Ho and borrowed ten catties of beans which gave us a meal of a sort before we came to work. Otherwise. . . ."

"You're not doing so badly. You still manage to borrow beans from Mr. Ho."

"Who wants to borrow from him? Never again! My Dad had to beg and beg. He kowtowed too, and promised to pay a higher price. And how about you people, Cousin?"

"We too find it hard to manage from one day to the next."

A minute's silence and then the customary smile again returned to Cousin Big Lai's face. He nodded to Li-chiu and said: "Let's continue our chat this evening, Li-chiu."

"All right."

After Big Lai hurried off, Li-chiu continued his work. His hoe swung up and down in the field, from one part of the ditch to another. The sun hung high up in the sky as if to inform the people that it was already noon. The sound of singing voices, so long absent in the village, was again floating in the air. Tired, the peasants made their way home; but smoke—the sign of food cooking—emerged from only very few huts.

Yun-pu's body ached all over although the day before when carrying peat he had only made some twenty or thirty trips. His legs and shoulders hurt as if hundreds of sharp needles were sticking into his joints.

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* In 1926-1927 when the Chinese Communist Party co-operated with the Kuomintang and started the Northern Expedition against feudal warlords, Peasants' Associations were formed in many provinces to oppose the landlords and demand land. These associations were suppressed after the Kuomintang betrayed the revolution.

The pain and discomfort kept him awake practically all night. When he got up at dawn he felt worn and limp. However, he composed himself and pretended there was nothing unusual for fear that signs of weakness on his part would discourage his sons.

"After all, I am getting old," he pondered sorrowfully.

From the kitchen, Li-chiu brought out two bowls of what remained of the beans, and placed them on the table. The smell of the cooked beans made Uncle Yun-pu's mouth water; the three who were working the fields shared the light repast equally, getting over half a bowl each. It tasted much more delicious than usual, but half a bowl was, after all, such a small quantity that when tucked away in the stomach, filled only Heaven knows how small a corner.

The men went to the fields and struggled for a while, exerting great efforts of will, as if to make up for their waning physical powers. They felt as if they were shouldering a heavy yoke which was weighing them down. They could barely manage to lift even a hoe or a small wooden plough. From time to time stars appeared before their eyes and the world would start to go in circles. After a few rounds, the men were forced to return home.

"How can we go on like this?"

The family gathered together, children as well as grown-ups. Six pairs of eyes red from the gnawing pangs of hunger stared at one another sorrowfully. All felt that there was nothing to say.

"Oh, Heaven!"

Gritting his teeth and summoning the remainder of his fading courage, Yun-pu again turned his steps towards Mr. Ho's. On the way he figured out how he was going to approach Mr. Ho and what he was going to say, mentally going over the whole scene step by step. Then he found himself at Mr. Ho's door.

"Well, what is it you want, Yun-pu?" Mr. Ho asked, as he sat enthroned in his massive armchair.

"I—I. . . ."

"What?"

"I would like again to ask Mr. Ho. . . ."

"Beans? I can't lend you any more. There're many people in this village, you know. Do you think I want to feed your family alone?"

"I'll return the debt with added interest."

"Who cares for your interest? You think other people don't pay interest? It's no use."

"Please, Mr. Ho, you must save us. Neither old nor young have eaten in my family. . . ."

"Go away, how can I bother so much about you! Go away!"

"Mr. Ho, oh, save us. . . ."

Uncle Yun-pu burst into desperate tears. Mr. Ho's hired hand came out and pushed him out of the door.

"How dare you come here and cry, and bring us bad luck, you old devil!" said the hired hand fiercely, banging the door in his face.

Dragging his feet along one after the other, Uncle Yun-pu made his way home. He muttered recriminations against himself, reproaching himself for not saying the things he had planned to say and for not broaching the subject gradually step by step. Now he had bungled the whole thing and got nothing out of his visit.

At the foot of the Square Pond he suddenly stopped in his tracks. Gazing longingly at this dark green pond, he was seized with a strong impulse to take a simple little jump into the water and thus end the remaining sad bit of his life. But the thought of his family, the old and the young, kept him from taking the plunge.

Aunt Yun-pu and the children stood by the entrance of the ancestral temple, anxiously waiting for the appearance of Uncle Yun-pu, who, they trusted, would bring them good news. Pangs of hunger burned within them like a consuming flame. Their eyes were red and they felt dizzy.

Ching-ching, otherwise known as Baldy, came into the room, accompanied by a man with a thick beard. Immediately, Uncle Yun-pu felt as if a thousand sharp daggers had been thrust into his heart. His legs and hands shook nervously, and tears streamed down his face. Having ushered the guests into the front room and seated them on a bench, he took himself into a corner and stood there. Aunt Yun-pu was still hiding inside. Her eyes had long since become red and swollen from weeping. The two younger children, too weak to get up, were still in bed; their thin pale faces were as yellow as wilted cabbage leaves.

Li-chiu stood near the door with Shao-pu behind him. The eyes of both were wet. They looked at the bearded man dully and quickly turned their heads away.

After a few minutes of silence the bearded man said impatiently: "Baldy, where is the child?"

"She's still inside. A ten-year-old called Ying-ying." The bald-headed man nodded as if to tell him not to be impatient.

Aunt Yun-pu emerged from the back room, walking as if her feet were dragging a half-ton weight, and holding in her hands a little suit of clothes, newly patched. She was trembling so much she was hardly able to make her way across the room. Catching sight of the bald-headed man, she somehow managed to address him. Then hot tears welled out of her eyes and she was unable to go on. Yun-pu quietly hid his face in his sleeves and both Li-chiu and Shao-pu hung their heads and wept silently.

The bald-headed man became worried. Glancing quickly at his companion, he turned to Aunt Yun-pu and said comfortingly:

"Why should you feel so heartbroken, Sister? Won't Ying-ying be better off to go along with Mr. Hsia than at home? She'll have plenty

of food and clothing and if she happens to get a good master, she'll live a comfortable life. Didn't all go well with Kuei-sheng's daughter, Chu-erh, and Ling Tao-san's Tao-shiu? Besides, Mr. Hsia. . . ."

"Cousin, now I feel I just simply cannot sell her. Last year when we were so hard up, we even went begging to Hupeh, but we still refused to sell her. There's more reason why I can't sell her this year. She, my baby Ying, my flesh and blood, oh. . . ."

"Ah!" said Hsia, the bearded man, shooting a quick glance at Baldy.

"What, Yun-pu?" cut in Baldy hurriedly. "Changed your mind? Last night it was all decided. . . ." But before he finished the sentence Mrs. Yun-pu rushed at her husband crying and cursing at the same time:

"It's all your fault, you old devil! You can't even support your children and you call yourself a man! Now that you have nothing to put into your stomach, you go ahead and sell my daughter! Oh, you're just good for nothing, and fit only to die. Oh, you wretch! We might as well all die together and be done with it. Sell my daughter, will you? No, a thousand times no!"

"Didn't you agree to it last night? I didn't make the decision alone. Baldy, isn't she a shrew!" Yun-pu backed away from his wife, his face stained with tears.

"Let's go," said the bearded man impatiently. He stood up.

But Baldy quickly stopped him: "Wait a little. She'll think better of it in a moment. Come, Yun-pu, let's talk outside."

Baldy dragged Uncle Yun-pu away, but Mrs. Yun-pu continued to cry and rave. Li-chiu went up to her and helped her to a bench. He knew that the factors leading to this tragedy were not simple. The family had had nothing to eat for three days. No one wanted to buy rain hats any more, yet the work in the field could not be left undone. Therefore when Baldy came last night and made the proposition, Li-chiu had not opposed it with much heat. Although he was heartbroken about his sister and hated to have her sold, there was no other way to help them out of the present predicament outside of this last resort. He had lain awake the whole night, torn by the sorrow and conflict in his heart. He had felt that he couldn't bear to even look at his poor little sister who was soon to be sold, and had got up before daybreak. Now that his mother was crying so bitterly, he had not the heart to tell her that it was all necessary and unavoidable.

"Come, Mama, just let them go!"

Mrs. Yun-pu made no reply. Baldy and Uncle Yun-pu returned; once again everyone was silent.

"Well, Sister, what is your final decision?" asked Baldy.

"Cousin, will my Ying-ying be able to come home sometime once she is gone?"

"She will if she finds a master near by. Besides, you people can go to see her often."

"But if she has to go far?"

"That will not happen, Sister."

"It's all the old devil's fault, why didn't he die an early death. . . ."

Ying-ying came out from the back room carrying baby Sze-hsi in her arms. With surprise and suspicion she glanced at the strange scene around her. She handed the baby to her mother and then stared at everyone in the room with big round eyes.

With the exception of the two outsiders, all present were again seized with heartache and remorse.

"Is she the one?" asked Hsia, the bearded man, who, having been nudged by Baldy, now began to stare at Ying-ying.

After much negotiation, Hsia agreed to pay only two dollars for each year of the child's life. Ying-ying was ten, so the price was set at twenty dollars. Both parties had to pay one dollar each to Baldy as commission.

"Ah, ah! What kind of a world is this?"

Uncle Yun-pu held the nineteen pieces of snow white silver in his hand, but he was so stunned by what had happened that he turned numb as a wooden block. With one sleeve he kept wiping the tears that welled from his eyes, and at the same time he stared unbelievingly at the money. "Oh, God! Is this the money for my precious, my Ying-ying!"

Mrs. Yun-pu changed Ying-ying into the clean patched suit and told her that she was going to Uncle Hsia's house to have a few good meals and that she'd be coming back. But still Ying-ying could not hold back the rapidly flowing tears.

"Mama, can I come home tomorrow? I don't want to go away alone and have things to eat."

With tears in their eyes the family kept looking at Ying-ying. They couldn't take their eyes off her. It was, after all, their last look at their little girl.

After Baldy had taken Ying-ying away, Mrs. Yun-pu behaved as one completely possessed. Several times she started out as if to chase after them. They heard Ying-ying turn back and call to them from a distance: "Oh, Mama, I don't want to have a full stomach all by myself! I want to come home tomorrow. . . ."

Thus, for the time being, the family was able to keep alive. With the nineteen dollars they bought a little over two piculs of grain. It was enough to feed the five members of the family for about sixty days or more. The father and sons had to work hard on the farm to find new sources of income.

It was three days before Ching Ming that the sowing was to begin, but there was not a single household in the village that had the seeds to sow. For the solution of this problem, Mr. Ho went to the county seat to seek out the county magistrate. Unless the sowing was done in time there would be no harvest in the autumn.

Everyone was expecting good news from Mr. Ho. In this, the people knew they would not be disappointed, because every year they had been able to get seeds on loan. The county magistrate himself was clearly aware that "the magistrates depend on the people, and the people depend on the land." If nothing was done about seeds for sowing, in the end no one would benefit. Therefore Mr. Ho was readily able to get the magistrate's promise whereby one thousand piculs of grain were to be issued to Tsaochialung to be handled by Mr. Ho.

"What! The seed grain costs eleven dollars per picul, on top of which the money must be repaid at 4 per cent interest? This must be the work of that scoundrel Ho."

All the villagers were cursing Ho, but all of them, nevertheless, quietly carried off seed grain from his house.

Life and work soon engulfed the village in an ever increasing whirl of activity. The people were all struggling desperately; all their hopes lay in the great coming harvest.

IV

The seedlings were transplanted, then the fields were weeded twice. But Heaven again made sport of the hardships of the poor. For more than ten days there was not even the slightest drizzle. The sun hung in the air like a ball of fire. The water in the fields had dried up; the soil was only slightly moist.

Having sold his daughter and obtained seed grain on loan, Uncle Yun-pu worked hard to get his seedlings transplanted. By now he was so busy he could hardly find time to breathe. He still had no notion as to where to get fertilizer, and nature had not been generous with rain. Really, it was worrisome. If it was going to be a drought year, they must make preparations early.

He told Li-chiu to go up on the stage and bring the water-wheel down so that they could mend them. If in three more days there was no rain, it would be impossible to get along without using the water-wheel.

Everyone was praying in his heart: Oh Heaven, please take pity on us and send us just a little bit of rain.

One day, two days . . . how hard-hearted Heaven was! He just pretended not to hear the people's prayers. The horizon was still cloudless and the burning sun seemed to challenge the very existence of the universe. Scorched by the sun, everything had begun to wilt. The soil in the fields dried up; now and again one would come across a great crack which looked like the gaping mouth of some ferocious animal panting and emitting a burning hot breath.

The fields could wait no longer. The splashing of water-wheels could

be heard in both Changchiachai and at Hsintukou. The seedlings hung their heads as if complaining about their thirst. Their blades had become dry and curled up.

After breakfast, Uncle Yun-pu walked to the Square Pond in silence, carrying the frame of the water-wheel, his two sons beside him carrying the other parts of the water-wheel. The sun beating on their backs made their flesh burn and itch. Even the ground underfoot was scorching hot.

The sound of water-wheels turning came from all directions. The water in the ponds was being transported to the fields by manpower. Uncle Yun-pu fixed his water-wheel and father and sons got on. The wheel started to move, water went up the track and flowed into the fields.

The peasants were covered with sweat from head to foot. The sun gradually travelled to the middle of the sky and blazed upon the earth like a fierce fire. Little wisps of blue smoke seemed to curl up from the people's mouths. Their feet felt heavier and heavier. Eventually the water-wheel seemed as heavy as a half-ton rock and it required ever so much effort to press down on the foot pedals. Starting upwards from the ankles, the aching of the muscles spread over the whole body, finally reaching the neck. At times, it felt as if a little knife was cutting and scraping the ankles and the legs. It was especially hard for Shao-pu, whose not yet full-grown young body suffered agonies. Yun-pu too—was he not feeling just as tired? His feeble old legs were tired through and through before the work had proceeded more than a few minutes. But he refused to show any signs of weakness. If Heaven wanted him to suffer, he had to bear it even if it meant giving up his old life. The morale of his sons depended on his courage. Besides, it was the first day they worked the water-wheels, and he couldn't afford to set them a bad example by groaning and complaining. He had to bear up no matter how much he was suffering. "Step hard, Shao-pu!" He kept on reminding his younger son, while he himself gritted his teeth and stepped hard. When the pain in his legs was too much to bear, he would let the long restrained tears flow, and they would roll down his cheeks mixed with the sweat from his brows.

At long last Aunt Yun-pu arrived with their lunch. The father and sons got off the water-wheel.

"Heaven, why must you always work against us poor people?" Yun-pu queried, as he lightly massaged his aching legs.

"Mama," Shao-pu said to his mother with a woeful face, "my two legs are already useless."

"Never mind, have a good meal now and come back home early in the afternoon. With a little rest you'll be all right again."

Shao-pu said nothing more. He took up a bowl and filled it full of rice.

Uncle Yun-pu and Shao-pu were practically cripples after the hard

labour of those few days. And Heaven remained as hard-hearted as ever! The water churned up each day was enough only to keep the seedlings from dying on that particular day. Li-chiu was the strongest of them all. He was not tormented by the aches and sores that bothered his father and brother. But he continued to be indolent and unwilling to exert his strength, as if such labour as the turning of the water-wheels and the working of the fields was not the kind of thing he preferred doing. He was often away from home. When his father wanted him for something, it was necessary to look all around for him. Uncle Yun-pu was therefore doubly vexed with him: "He is a lazy-bones, a rebellious, unfilial good-for-nothing!"

The moon emerged from behind the tree leaves and scattered its sheaves of silvery light. It was no longer as hot as during the day; a gentle breeze whispered in the fields. Besides some women and children, there were a few people sitting leisurely around to get a breath of air.

Taking advantage of the cool moonlit night, people were doing a double amount of work. The sound of water-wheels splashing mixed with melodious singing could be distinctly heard. To the peasants, summer nights were marvellous for field work; no heat, hubbub or confusion as during the day.

Uncle Yun-pu, again unable to find Li-chiu, was as mad as a bull which had seen red. At dinner he had told Li-chiu that since it was a fine evening they must plan to put in some night work. He hoped Li-chiu would not go gadding about again. Who would have thought that the lad would again disappear in the twinkling of an eye and leave Uncle Yun-pu mad enough to burst! Recently, several people had come to Uncle Yun-pu to tell him that his son, Li-chiu, had gone bad, and that they didn't know what he did every night running around with Big Lai and his kind. They all advised Yun-pu to use a strong hand with his son before something serious happened. Uncle Yun-pu had listened; several times he had become so enraged he could have bit his tongue off. The more he thought about it now, the angrier he got. He went up and down the village calling for Li-chiu but there was no answer. He failed to catch even the slightest glimpse of the boy. Then he told Shao-pu to go along ahead, and wait for them at the water-wheel. Even if he couldn't find Li-chiu, the two of them together would have to get to work and pump some water into the fields. Gritting his teeth with rage he went out again to look for that unfilial son of his.

He made a few more rounds, but there was still no trace of Li-chiu. He turned back in disgust. Then suddenly, from the distance he heard their water-wheel turning. Rushing back, he saw that Li-chiu and Shao-pu were already busily working the wheels. Choking with rage, he was at first unable to utter a word. But after a pause he shouted furiously: "You worthless wretch, where have you been keeping yourself!"

"What? Am I not here working the water-wheel as I should be?" Li-chiu replied gravely.

Uncle Yun-pu gave him a fierce look and with an oath climbed up on the wheel himself to join in the work.

The moon crept further up the tree tops and gradually moved towards the west. Slowly, silence took over the fields.

In the east, pearl-white clouds had already made their appearance. A few stars were still lingering in the sky, blinking and twinkling away. The cock had crowed twice. Uncle Yun-pu sat up in the dark and sighed deeply after gazing at the pale sky. Hard work both day and night had left him feeling as if he simply could not keep it up any longer. His bones and muscles all seemed to ache even in his dreams, but nevertheless he would not relax for a minute nor would he complain about fatigue for fear such weakness would affect his sons.

The demands of livelihood lashed him onwards to toil and toil. He could blame no one for it. Now at least he had within his grasp a bit of new hope. He could now look forward to the autumn. Perhaps then, he would be able to realize his dreams.

But at present it was necessary for him to get up very early. It was still summer, a long time before autumn and that world of his dreams.

His children slept as soundly as piglets. How deeply the young slumber! How he envied them their sweet dreams! However, for the harvest in autumn, for that dream world, he had to harden his heart and wake his sons even before the new day had scarcely begun.

"Hey, get up, Li-chiu!"

". . . ."

"Shao-pu, Shao-pu, it's time to get up."

"What is it, Dad? It's not even dawn yet," muttered Shao-pu stirring in his sleep.

"It's long since daybreak. We must go and work the water-wheels."

"But we've just fallen asleep. I haven't even had time to turn over. How can it be daybreak so soon?"

"Li-chiu, Li-chiu!"

". . . ."

"Get up!"

"Uh, huh. . . ."

"Hey, get up, you laggard!"

Finally Uncle Yun-pu had to pull them up by the ears before he could get them out of bed.

"What's the matter with you, it's still pitch dark outside!" said Li-chiu, discovering that it was not yet light. He rubbed his eyes and felt extremely annoyed.

"You lazy-bones, it took me all this time to wake you, and now you complain about its being too early!"

"'Get up, get up!' I don't know what we get up in the dark for. We can toil our lives away, but we'll only be slaving for others."

"You're just lazy. Who's slaving for others?"

"We are. Isn't it so? Once the rice is threshed, see how much you get from the crop."

"Nonsense. I suppose you think a bunch of robbers will come and take everything? You're a fool, and you're just talking rubbish. You've been doing nothing but gadding about outside lately. You're so irresponsible you neglect everything at home. You've changed for the worse. People all say you are mixing with Big Lai and his likes all the time. You've probably become what they call a . . . communist!"

Uncle Yun-pu was really angry. He wanted to grab his son by the neck and give him a good beating so as to relieve the pent-up anger within him. His voice grew louder and louder as he fumed and cursed. Aunt Yun-pu was also awakened.

"What are you fussing about in the middle of the night? The children have worked hard all day. You should at least let them sleep a while. Look, it's not even daylight yet."

"It's all your fault, you old witch, you produced these good-for-nothing devils."

"Whom are you cursing?"

"It's you I'm cursing. You do nothing but spoil them."

"All right! You hate them, do you? Take them and kill them one by one! Why torture them to death slowly? Or else you can sell them all so that they won't be eyesores to you any longer. But why fuss and fume like this in the middle of the night?"

Uncle Yun-pu was now in a towering rage. He felt that recently his wife had been unreasonably lenient with the children, to the detriment of their family interests.

"You're completely crazy. Don't you want to eat? You. . . ."

"What if I am crazy? But you, you sell your own daughter so as to eat; now perhaps you'll want to sell your sons! You just give me back my Ying-ying. Oh, I simply don't want to live any more! Ah . . . ah. . . ."

Crying and screaming she rushed at Yun-pu. The thought of her daughter Ying-ying made her hate Yun-pu so much that she wanted to scratch his eyes out.

"Why bring up Ying-ying? After all we didn't sell Ying-ying for my sake alone." Uncle Yun-pu turned away from her, and left. But the thought of Ying-ying brought involuntary tears to his eyes.

"Give me back my Ying-ying. . . ."

Dawn was breaking in the east. The sons stood there rooted to the

ground listening to the quarrel between their parents. Mention of their sister also brought painful tears to their eyes.

The day was again extremely fine. Li-chiu nudged Shao-pu, and together they walked out carrying their tools. Uncle Yun-pu, looking extremely sorrowful, followed them out of the door.

"Ah, ah, ah! . . . " The mother's voice trailed balefully out of the inner room after them.

The morning breeze swept across the fields and the luscious green rice seedlings rippled like waves. There was a special coolness of morning in the air.

"Where shall we work today?"

"Let's go in the direction of Huachia Dyke."

V

"Li-chiu, you are not pious enough. You'd better not carry it."

"Uncle Yun-pu, you carry the canopy, and you, Hsiao-erh, beat the gong."

"There is no one to play the flute! Old Wang, where is your instrument?"

"Damn it! Nobody's willing to help! We still need three more sedan-bearers."

"Count me as one!"

"I'll be one."

"Me too."

"All right, you three be the sedan-bearers. Everyone must wash his face. Hsiao-erh, be sure you wash yourself clean. Otherwise the god will feel offended."

"Now sound the gong and start playing the flute."

"Sound the gong, Hsiao-erh, don't you hear? What's the matter with you, are you deaf?"

"Dong, dong, dong!"

"Wu, li-la, la!"

A group of people carrying the image of Kuan Ti made for the fields.

For over twenty days there had not been a single trace of clouds. The ponds and streams nearby had all gone dry. The fields were yawning with inch-thick cracks here and there. Most of the rice plants were dry and curled up. If this continued for another three or four days everything would be finished.

Kuan Ti's image had been brought to the village three days before. The villagers had killed an ox and burned a catty and a half of incense for the occasion. But there was still no sign of rain, while more rice plants wilted.

That was why everyone felt there must be a reason for the god's

reluctance to send them rain. After a great deal of consultation by those in charge of the prayer for rain, many more prayers and entreaties were sent up accompanied by kneeling and kowtowing, yet none of this produced any effect whatsoever.

"Does this mean everything is finished this year?"

"Don't worry! Let's carry the god out and let his lordship take a look around. See whether he can bear the sorrowful sight of the fields."

"All right, perhaps the god has not seen the condition of the fields. Three years ago when there was a drought, it started to rain only after we took the god out to survey the scene. Yun-pu, you go and get a few young people; we also need a gong, a drum and a flute."

"Ah!"

Very quickly the provisional troupe was organized, and following the banners, gong, drum and canopy, the green sedan-chair carrying the image of Kuan Ti was borne aloft on the shoulders of four stalwart men.

They started from Hsintukou and Huachia Dyke, went as far as Hungmiao and made several rounds before they returned. But the sun was still as hot as fire and made the people feel as if they were being roasted. The ground was so hot one could hardly bear to put his foot down. There seemed to be fire everywhere and the people seemed to be struggling in the flames.

Not a drop of rain appeared after all their efforts. Then Kuan Ti was taken by the people in Motzewan, the next village. People everywhere were busy carrying it around and praying for rain.

"Oh, Heaven, we've had a year of flood and a year of drought. Now what exactly do you want of us?"

Suddenly the wind shifted and blew from the northeast, whistling and whining above the tree tops. The stars and moon were gone. Many people stood outside looking at the sky.

"There's lightning over in that direction."

"'Lightning in the east; no break in the west.' I doubt if we'll have rain!"

"But that is in the north."

"Good! 'Lightning in the south, opens the fire door; lightning in the north, and the rain will pour!' Tonight there should be some rain. Oh Heaven! . . ."

"We'll have to depend on the mercy of Heaven."

"Yes. After all, none of us has committed any sins. Why should Heaven wish to see us starve?"

"It's not likely that we will."

The sound of rain pattered on the roof amidst the clamour of human voices. There was a coolness in the air and every drop of rain seemed to fall on happy cheerful hearts.

"This is surely the mercy of Heaven!"

The heavy weight oppressing the hearts of the people was gradually

melted to nothing by the rain drops. Then immediately a storm broke out. Loudly rumbling thunder and blinding flashes of lightning lashed out at the world.

The rain lasted only twenty-four hours or so, but it was enough to save the crops. The fields were again replete with water, and the shriveled blades of the rice plants straightened out once more. They swayed and danced in the wind like young maidens in fluttering gowns. The plants were going through their period of most rapid growth. There was a silent prayer on every lip for at least twenty more days of good luck. Then the golden grain would appear and only then could it be considered wealth in hand.

The rain was heaviest in the southwest; there, the sky remained dark and overcast. Dread welled up again in the people's hearts. Too much rain in the southwest made people again apprehensive of flood. The peasants had no peace of mind whatsoever.

The water in the west stream was gradually swelling as it flowed downward. The Dyke Administration only sent a few people to patrol the dykes. There was no need to worry about the west stream as long as there was no added trouble from the south stream. It could just go ahead and rise. One day, two days passed and the water continued to rise. Slowly it became nearly level with the dykes. Uncle Yun-pu began to worry like everyone else.

"What! How could the west stream alone rise to such a height!"

All the people started to clamour: "Hurry, we had better do something about it! What happened last year must not happen again."

The bitter experience of the previous year had taught them that they must take precautionary measures against flood early. Again the gongs sounded stridently. Crowds upon crowds of people carrying hoes and cotton bedding ran towards the dykes.

"Any one who doesn't come out to work on the dyke deserves to be dragged out and given a good beating," fumed Uncle Yun-pu, so busy that he was sweating all over.

"Even the women must come out. If it turns out like last year, none of us will survive. . . ."

"Come, everybody must come and reinforce the dykes!"

Gongs sounded in every village.

In the night, torches and lanterns lit up the dyke, making it look like a long coiling snake. During the day, noisy groups of people gathered here and there in great confusion. The officers from the Security Bureau and their deputies rode around on their horses patrolling the locality. They were, after all, charged with the heavy responsibility of maintaining order. They were afraid that there might be hoodlums mixed up in the crowd—something they must guard against.

"Those low-down dogs! Acting like lords and bullying people! They

live on our grain and do nothing but think of ways to harm us. Every single one of them. . . ."

"I feel like tearing them to pieces. One of these days I'm just going to. . . ."

Most of the people who had suffered at the hands of the Security Bureau men cursed silently after letting them by. Even after they had gone quite a distance, Li-chiu was still making faces at them behind their backs.

The water was still rising, and at places it had already spilt over the dyke. The yellow muddy water, which more than once had robbed the peasants of their lives, was regarded by them with great fear and dread. They watched the overflowing water with the deepest of hatred and aversion.

"As long as the south stream doesn't rush down, it'll be all right," people tried to comfort each other, as they continued to work with hoes and shovels.

The water stopped spilling over.

Suddenly the stream seemed to flow backwards in a few places. As soon as this was noticed a great commotion spread among the people.

"Where does it start flowing the other way?"

"At the mouth of the Lanchi rivulet!"

"Oh dear! None of us will live through this."

"Oh Heaven, is this the end of us all?"

"Kuan Ti, if this year is going to be like last year. . . ."

The water in the south stream was swelling. The west stream encountering a heavier flow from the south stream, was unable to accommodate it, and the result was a continuous rise in both streams.

The beating of the gong became more frantic. Peal upon peal, it rent the air, awakening again in people's minds the terror and misery of previous disasters. Even the women and children went to the dyke and helped by piling up earth with their hands. Most of the older people like Uncle Yun-pu were already on their knees: "Heaven and the all-forgiving Goddess of Mercy! Please, please, let us not have a flood this year."

"Buddha, if you protect us against this flood, we'll act ten plays in your honour."

"Heaven is punishing us!"

After two days and nights of desperate struggle, everybody's eyes were bloodshot and their bodies felt like flabby cotton wool, they were so tired. The west stream, however, was no longer at the peak of its turbulence, and with the influx of water from the south stream, it flowed backwards and retreated a long distance. The south stream flowed down and met with no resistance.

The water level dropped.

Thousands of hearts which had been beating apprehensively for

days were set at ease. The people opened their mouths and breathed a sigh of relief. Carrying hoes and cotton bedding, the peasants dragged their limp bodies home. Smiles of victory lit up their faces.

"Hey, Cousin Big Lai, come on over this evening. Let's have a little chat." Li-chiu said to Big Lai before they parted at the cross-roads.

VI

The burden of life and work weighed down upon the whole village like a heavy yoke. When the rice plants started to flower, all the peasants worked desperately. The people would be saved if they could only last through the next twenty critical days.

Although there was not a single grain of rice at home, Uncle Yun-pu was still all smiles. His heart was at ease; after the two false alarms there was ninety per cent certainty of a good harvest. The rice plants were strong and thick, and the flowers seemed sturdy—better than any in the past ten years. To Uncle Yun-pu, the world was full of joy and great expectations.

But he did not indulge in excessive day-dreaming. He simply seized upon the present and estimated what it would be like in twenty days or so. Gazing at the green fields, the big sturdy rice plants and the heads of rice about to turn golden, he could scarcely believe his own eyes, and he wondered whether or not he was dreaming. But there they were, the rice plants, actually standing, before his eyes! Real, not imaginary. He was practically intoxicated with happiness.

"Ha, ha, can life this year really be so wonderful?"

Now he would get some results from the fatigue and hard work of the past. From the time they started sowing up until then, Uncle Yun-pu actually had not had a moment's leisure. Immediately after the seedlings were planted, there was the drought. Just when they had some rain, there was the threat of flood. Like a pail that went ceaselessly up and down the well, his heart had thumped and had not known any peace or rest. He was as tired as a dead snake. He had not had one decent, satisfying meal in all that time. Even after Ying-ying was sold the family still ate thin gruel, to say nothing of the days before that when they had had nothing to eat. He could hardly lift his legs when working in the fields and his body had wasted away to practically nothing but skin and bones. Only after all that fear and privation was Uncle Yun-pu privileged to see those long ears of rice plants. How could he feel anything but delighted? The crops could now be considered wealth in hand. He must carefully think over what to do with it.

First they must have a few good meals. The children really were too dreadfully starved, poor things. He must arrange to see that they have a few substantial meals to restore their energy. Then a few piculs

of rice could be sold, so that they could get a few suits of clothes made. The children were hardly clothed like human beings. They would have a jolly, cheerful mid-autumn festival, pay back all their debts, and save the remainder for the New Year. Of course preparations must be made for the few winter months next year, and then the new. . . .

He must arrange to have both Li-chiu and Shao-pu betrothed. Indeed, Li-chiu showed every sign of being in need of a wife. Let it be the latter part of next year then. He would get both of them married. The year after that there would be grandsons. He'd be a grandfather!

Everything was all right except that Ying-ying was missing. Uncle Yun-pu's heart ached with sorrow. If he had known that the harvest this year was going to be so good, he would not have sold Ying-ying for anything. Of all his children, Ying-ying was his favourite, the one who was always so filial and obedient. Now, he himself had sold dear little Ying-ying to that old man, Hsia, whose face was all covered with beard. She was taken away in a little boat, but where to, Uncle Yun-pu had not yet been able to find out.

Ying-ying's fate was indeed pitiful, poor little thing! They had heard nothing about her since she left. The better the year, the more food they had, the more sorrowfully would Yun-pu think of Ying-ying. It was all because Ying-ying had been destined by fate never to have even one decent meal at home. If Ying-ying had suddenly appeared in front of Uncle Yun-pu, he would have taken the poor child to his breast and wept away his sorrow. But it was no longer possible to find Ying-ying and bring her back. She could never be found again. Only her tiny thin image would remain in Uncle Yun-pu's heart, a scar which would never heal.

Except for this one thing, there was nothing but happiness and joy for Uncle Yun-pu. Everything was fine. He told his sons repeatedly that they must not mention Ying-ying's name. They must not prick his heart and reopen the old wound.

There was no more rice in the house, but Uncle Yun-pu was not worried in the least, because he already had a way out. In a couple of days they would be able to really eat. With what he had to show in the field, he was not afraid that people would refuse to lend him a little grain.

Mr. Ho tried desperately to get people to borrow his grain. He was ready to send eight or ten piculs to anyone and not at such a high price either—only six dollars per picul. Mr. Li also had grain for loan at six dollars per picul and without interest. It was pretty good grain, too.

The people in the village had to eat. They had to try to tide over the next fortnight or so somehow. But no one wanted to borrow grain from Mr. Ho or Mr. Li. It would be a great pity to do so, because one

picul borrowed now would mean three piculs to be returned in less than a fortnight.

It was better to tighten one's belt and get over this fortnight or so without borrowing.

"It's all the doings of landlords! They live by exploiting us. When we were practically starving, they wouldn't lend us a bit of grain even though we kowtowed to them. Now, when the crops in the fields are a certainty, they look all over the place for people to lend their stuff to. For something over ten days they want three piculs for every picul borrowed. If these dogs don't die an early, painful death, Heaven has no eyes. . . ."

"Uncle Big Nose, didn't you borrow grain from him too? Yes, Heaven has no eyes. The more wicked these people, the more prosperous they are."

"You're right! Heaven will not punish them. If we wish to get them punished, we must depend on ourselves to do it."

"How do we depend on ourselves? When you say that, Li-chiu, you must have something up your sleeve. Come, tell us what's on your mind."

"I've nothing up my sleeve. But my way of thinking is like this. The grain we reap from the harvest, we'll eat ourselves; we won't let these parasites have one grain of rent. Nor will we pay back what we borrowed. Really, what right do they have to demand things of us?"

"That's child's talk. After all, the land belongs to them," Erh Lai Tze said grandiosely, as if lecturing him.

"Belong to them? Why don't they cultivate their own land then? What sort of land would it be if other people didn't cultivate it for them? Erh Lai Tze, you are so dumb! Do you really think the land is theirs?"

"Then whose land is it?"

"Yours and mine. The land belongs to whoever tills it."

"Ha, ha, Li-chiu, this is the kind of thing they said when there was the Peasants' Association in 1926-1927. You fool, ha, ha. . . ."

"What are you laughing at, Uncle Big Nose? Are you saying the Peasants' Association was no good?"

"It was good, but they'll chop your head off for saying so. Aren't you scared?"

"What is there to be scared of? As long as we are united and work together, we are stronger than they. Don't you know how it is in Kiangsi Province?"*

"'Unite and work together'—what you say is right. But . . . ha. . . ."

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* Referring to the revolutionary base in Kiangsi Province, where, under the Workers' and Peasants' Government, the peasants rose against the landlords and distributed the land.

After chatting a while, Uncle Big Nose, Erh Lai Tze and everyone else all agreed that what Li-chiu had said was correct. The Peasants' Association formed in 1927 was really good, except that it had not lasted long. And besides, many people had suffered because of it. If there were to be another such association, it should be permanent. It ought to be made to last.

"Well, Li-chiu, and what about the guns in the Security Bureau?"

"Pooh, when the time came, couldn't we disarm them?"

Since his eldest son was away from home all day, Uncle Yun-pu had to attend to everything himself. There was no more rice in the house, and he had to go over to Mr. Li's to borrow a picul. "You have five or six to feed in your family! Will one picul be enough? Why not take a couple of piculs more?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Li."

In the end Uncle Yun-pu took only one picul. When they needed fat and salt, they could now get them from the store on credit. Tien, the butcher, his face wreathed in smiles, often asked with hypocritical concern, "Brother Yun-pu, would you like some meat for your table?"

"Oh, no! We are a long way from eating meat."

"Never mind, you just come and get some any time!"

From then on Uncle Yun-pu began to feel that he was getting to be quite a big man. Whoever he met in the street would nod and greet him with a smile. At home things had also begun to improve. There was one thing, however, which marred his happiness; his eldest son had turned out to be such a disappointment. He was never around when there was any work to be done, and Uncle Yun-pu had to take care of everything himself. Dashed were all his hopes of enjoying a leisurely old age.

The heads of rice turned more golden day by day; the smile on Uncle Yun-pu's face broadened. He was ever so busy. He mended the winnowing-machine and also the mat for sunning the grain. Then he asked one neighbour to help with threshing, and another to help bind the straw. He was busy from morning till night, but always smiling. This year, his life was really three times better than that of ordinary years. He could expect to reap at least thirty-four to thirty-five piculs of grain per picul of seed. This certainly was a good year for the poor.

The year before, all because the dykes had not been maintained in good repair, there had been a flood. This year it was very important to repair the dyke, and make it one foot thicker. Then there would be no need to worry about flood. This was of course the responsibility of the peasants. Men from the Dyke Administration had already long ago come and reminded them of it.

"Tsao Yun-pu, you must pay 8.58 dollars for the repair of the dykes."

"Of course we must pay up. It's a little more than a picul of grain.

I'll bring it to the Administration myself after the harvest. Thanks for coming. It's our duty to pay . . . " Yun-pu replied, smiling. Unless the dykes were repaired, it would not be possible to prevent a flood next year.

The *chia chang** also came to contact Uncle Yun-pu in the name of the director of the Security Bureau. "Uncle Yun-pu, you pay 8.40 dollars security tax this year. The Bureau has already sent down a notice."

"Why so much, Chief?"

"We're collecting for two years. Did you pay last year?"

"Oh! Last year! All right, I'll send it over by and by."

"There's also a patriotic tax of 5.72, and an anti-communist tax of 3.07 dollars."

"Oh! And what are these taxes for, Chief?"

"Bah, old man, you're so old you're quite muddle-headed. Are you still in the dark at a time when the Japanese have already reached Peking? The money will be used to buy arms to save the country and to fight the communist bandits, stupid!"

"I know, I know. . . . I—I'll send it over."

Uncle Yun-pu was not worried, was not going to let such petty sums of money bother him. He would reap a huge harvest and in four or five days his pockets would be lined with gold. What was there for him to worry about?

VII

Yun-pu now felt that his disobedient eldest son was his one great disappointment in life. Whenever work reached a critical stage, Li-chiu was always absent from home. This made Uncle Yun-pu so mad that he would pace the room in fury. He could never find out what his son did outside. The lad would go out early in the morning and would not come back even by midnight. The sound of threshing had begun all around them and their grain was already so ripe and golden that it would fall off by itself unless it was reaped soon. "That dog, away from home all day. He doesn't care how urgent the work is at home."

Now he was forced to go out and hire a team of harvesters. He cursed roundly as he walked towards the main dyke. The sun was just right. It would indeed be a pity not to get the grain reaped and threshed. Ordinarily, when Li-chiu was home, the father and sons could have managed as a three-man harvesting team. But with Li-chiu away, Uncle Yun-pu had to go to the dyke and hire professional harvesters who came from outside the locality.

Most of these harvesters came from Hsianghsiang and around there.

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* Head of ten households under the Kuomintang regime.

Carrying their simple baggage, they would usually come in teams of four at the beginning of autumn. They would roam around the counties bordering the lake, specializing in reaping and threshing rice for the local people. Their wages were not excessive, but it was customary to feed them fairly well.

Very quickly, Uncle Yun-pu hired a team. Four strong men with shabby baggage on their shoulders followed him back. By the time they had started to work the sun was already quite high. Uncle Yun-pu told Shao-pu to stay in the field and supervise the hired men while he himself went around to look for Li-chiu.

It was getting dark and the grain from an area planted with twenty catties of seeds had been harvested. He had to pay four strings of money as wages. And still Li-chiu was nowhere to be found. It made Uncle Yun-pu quite beside himself with rage. The harvest, though, was unexpectedly bountiful—twelve piculs of rough grain were reaped from twenty catties of seeds. His happiness was spoiled only by his irritation with his son, who was such a disappointment.

It really was not worthwhile hiring a team to work. Besides the wages, the harvesters devoured bowls and bowls of luscious white rice, and the thought of it all made Yun-pu's heart sink. When he remembered how in the past they themselves had faced starvation he was ready to grab Li-chiu by the neck and choke him to death. They certainly must not hire harvesters again. Even if he were to depend only on Shao-pu and himself, he could still manage to get the grain harvested from an area planted with a few catties of seeds at least.

It was getting quite late. Uncle Yun-pu was finding it hard to fall asleep. Faintly and indistinctly he heard Li-chiu outside whispering to someone. Anger again took possession of him. Opening his eyes he shouted: "You wastrel! You nighthawk! So you still dare to come back! You neglect everything at home, leaving me, an old man, to struggle along alone. I don't care to live any longer! Today it's either your life or mine! See what you can do against an old grey head!" So saying, he snatched up a wooden stick, and dashed at his son in fury. Behind the swing of the stick lay the power of all his resentment at the loss of four strings of money and all the precious white rice consumed by the harvesters.

"Uncle Yun-pu, please don't hold it against him. This time it's really because we asked him to help us with some business."

"What sort of business? And what business have you taking him away from his work? You, who are you . . . Cousin Big Lai, don't you know how heavy our work is these days? And he, the scoundrel, just went off like that!" He was really beside himself with fury, and the stick trembled violently in his hand.

"You're right of course, Uncle Yun-pu, but this time he was really

helping us in some very important matter . . . " put in another, in an attempt to placate the old man.

"So you people connive with him to make me suffer! The chicken knows nothing of the troubles of the duck; do you people understand our affairs? You. . . ."

"Yes, Uncle, but he is back now, and tomorrow he'll help you in the fields."

"Work in the fields!" Li-chiu said indignantly. "We'll work ourselves into the grave, but we won't even get a square meal for it, while those parasites get everything ready-made. Just you wait and see. We work our fingers to the bone, but will we get anything out of it? I made up my mind long ago."

"Who's going to rob you of it, you swine?"

"There are plenty of people who'll rob us. Our bit of grain won't even be enough to go round. We can go on working like this for some eight or ten years, and still we won't have anything to show for it."

"You swine, you're just lazy, and can only talk rubbish. Since you don't want to work for a living, do you think food will drop from heaven for you to eat? You dare to argue with me!"

Once again Uncle Yun-pu swung his stick, ready to smash the head of his unfilial son.

"Now, now, Li-chiu, you mustn't argue any more," put in one of the men. "Old Uncle, why don't you go and get some rest? But it's true, the world is no longer what it used to be. The peasants simply can't hold up their heads. All their lives they work the year round, but whatever they reap is sent off to others picul after picul. Taxes, levies, payment for this and payment for that—what is left for themselves? To make matters worse, the market price of grain has been dropping steadily. Unless we think of a way out, we'll be up against it again. That's why we. . . ."

"Nonsense! All my life, I've thought of only one thing—work. All I know is, we must work. Otherwise there will be nothing to eat. . . ."

"Yes . . . Li-chiu, you pay attention to what your Dad says. We'll see you again."

After the young people had gone, Li-chiu went to sleep with his clothes on. But Uncle Yun-pu's mind was uneasy, as if an entirely new and strange burden were weighing on it.

The day after Li-chiu's return, the grain was carried back from the fields picul after picul. Fat and yellow, it really resembled gold.

There was not a single person in the village who did not rejoice. This year's harvest was at least three times better than that of ordinary years. No wonder people smiled and laughed. After all, this rich harvest was the result of struggling on empty stomachs, of toiling day and night under great stress and worry over a series of calamities.

When people met one another, they smiled and nodded. They com-

mented on the fact that Heaven, after all, was not blind, and would not let the poor people starve. They talked about their past sufferings: flood, drought, hard work, fear and the pangs of a hungry stomach . . . but now everything was going to be all right.

The market gradually began to show changes, too, but of a less auspicious nature. Commodity prices rose over one hundred per cent within two or three days. On the other hand, the price of rice dropped alarmingly day by day. Six dollars, four dollars, three dollars . . . it dropped until it was only 1.50 dollars for the best quality, late crop rice.

"How can it drop like that?"

With the drop in the price of grain, the hopes and joys of but a few days before gradually died down. People's hearts tightened with each drop in price. Furthermore, the rise in commodity prices made life for the peasants, in this year of bumper harvest, just as hard as in ordinary years, if not more so. This grain, the fruit of their hard struggle, gained at the cost of their sweat and blood—who would be willing to sell it at such a low price?

When Uncle Yun-pu first heard the news, he was not very much alarmed. His eyes were already dazed by the golden grain, and he did not believe that such wonderful life-saving treasure would not sell for a good price. When Li-chiu told him that the price of rice was dropping fast, he remained undaunted. His eyes staring with anger, he shouted, "It's only you bunch of ne'er-do-wells creating alarm by spreading rumours. Only a drop in the price of rice! What is there to get excited about? If nobody wants to pay a good price for rice, can't we keep it and eat it ourselves? If they don't want it, let them all starve."

However, it's one thing to give vent to one's feelings, and quite another to stop the drop in the price of rice. Uncle Yun-pu could do nothing about the latter. The news that the late crop was priced at 1.20 dollars per picul gradually spread throughout the vast countryside.

"One dollar twenty cents! Only a fool would sell at that price."

Even if the price of rice had dropped, even if the grain was not worth a cent, Uncle Yun-pu still urged his sons to work hard. After the crop was threshed, the straw had to be dried and the grain spread out under the sun. It then went through the winnowing-machine and was stored in the barn. They toiled ceaselessly all day under the burning sun, so that eventually the moist, dirty, rough grain became sturdy, clean, golden grain. He kept assuring himself that if necessary, he would keep this precious life-saving treasure as food in the house for the next three years, rather than sell it at such a low price. The grain was, after all, the fruit of his sweat and labour over the past six months.

The fields after the autumn harvest resembled the devastation following a battle. Everything was topsyturvy, nothing was in order. The whole countryside seemed to have settled down temporarily—settled

down to waiting expectantly for an impending wave which would destroy it.

VIII

Li-chiu, the eldest son, was unalterably opposed to inviting the landlords to dinner to discuss the rent. He stamped out of the house in disgust. Uncle Yun-pu, although he felt upset about it, nevertheless continued to make preparations for the dinner with great care. He believed that at the dinner he would beyond a doubt get a little pity and sympathy from them. He was old, and in the eyes of his creditors, his age would perhaps get some consideration.

A chicken, a duck and two bowls of fat pork! The dinner was so good that Uncle Yun-pu himself found his mouth watering. He changed into a neatly patched suit of clothes and made Shao-pu sweep the front room clean. The sun had not yet reached the middle of the sky.

Earlier in the morning, Uncle Yun-pu had been to Mr. Ho's and Mr. Li's house. After he had tendered his verbal invitation with as great ceremony as he could master, both Mr. Li and Mr. Ho promised to come. Director Chen of the Dyke Administration was also invited and Mr. Ho promised to bring along enough people to fill the table.

The table was already laid, but the guests had not yet arrived. Uncle Yun-pu stood by the door and peered around expectantly for a while. In the distance he seemed to see two lines of dark shadows moving in their direction. He quickly rushed inside and told Shao-pu and Sze-hsi to stay in the back room. They must not stand around outside and irritate the guests. Once more he wiped the four benches and made sure that everything was tidy. Then he stood by the door and awaited the arrival of his guests.

There were seven altogether. Besides Messrs. Ho and Li and Director Chen, the two landlords each brought his bookkeeper. There were also two strangers, one with a beard who looked like a Buddha, and another, a handsome young gentleman.

"Yun-pu, you really shouldn't have gone to so much trouble!" said Mr. Li, squinting through small beady eyes like a mouse, his sparse, whiskers straggling.

"Not at all, not at all. This is not half good enough. I hope you will excuse such an ordinary meal. I'm too old now, really, to do very much." Yun-pu replied with utmost humility, his body huddled into a small knot and his tone stressing the word "old." His face was shrouded in a forced, unnatural smile.

"We told you not to go to any trouble, but you insisted! Ha, ha!" Mr. Ho laughed, revealing bloodless lips and uneven, yellow teeth.

"Oh, Mr. Ho, this is nothing! It's just to show a tenant's gratitude. Mr. Ho must pardon any slips. . . ."

"Ha! Ha!"

Director Chen followed with a few added formalities. Then Shao-pu started to bring out the food.

"Please help yourselves!"

The chopsticks and spoons sank into the food and it was swept up as in a hurricane. Uncle Yun-pu and Shao-pu, who acted as waiters, stood by respectfully, on either side, their eyes fixed on the delicacies spread out.

Their mouths watered, and they had to swallow hard, as they watched the guests chew up large pieces of fat pork with great relish. At length Shao-pu almost broke down in tears, he was so overcome by an intense craving for just one little taste. If Uncle Yun-pu had not been around, he would have gone to the table and snatched up a piece of meat for himself.

For half an hour they stood watching excitedly as if on a battlefield. Then all was over. The guests had finished their meal. Shao-pu cleared the table and went off to make tea. The guests walked around a bit, and then gathered around the table again.

With bowed head, Uncle Yun-pu stood by the door, waiting respectfully for the guests to begin the conversation.

"Well, Yun-pu, now the meal is over, what is it you want to say? You can tell us now."

"Mr. Ho, Mr. Li and Mr. Chen, I'm sure you must know about all my difficulties. Yun-pu can only beg of you. . . ."

"But this year's harvest is good."

"That's true, Mr. Ho. Yes, it is."

"Then what is it you want to say?"

"I—I want to beg of you. . . ."

"Well, go ahead and say it."

"Honestly, it was very hard for us last year, and for the time being we still suffer from it. My family, both old and young, must eat everyday. I have no way of making money, but must depend on what I get from the land. I would like to ask Mr. Ho and Mr. Li. . . ."

"And what is your wish?"

"I can only ask Mr. Ho to be lenient and cut down on the rent just a little. And I beseech Mr. Ho to be kind and merciful in regard to the seed grain and beans I borrowed this year and last . . . and Mr. Li, I beg you. . . ."

"Oh, I see. Now I fully understand what you mean. You only want us to collect a smaller amount of grain from you, is that it? But Yun-pu, you should also realize that last year everybody suffered from the flood. Perhaps it was harder for us than for you, and therefore it is harder for us to get over it. Our expenses are at least thirty times greater than yours, but who will earn extra money for us? We have to depend on the grain we get from rent. . . . As for the beans I loaned

you last year, it's hardly right for you to ask me to be merciful now, because those beans actually saved your lives. Wasn't I merciful to have made you the loan in the first place? Do you have the face to say you're not willing to pay back the debt?"

"It isn't that I don't want to pay back the debt. But I beg Mr. Ho to please be lenient on the interest. . . ."

"I know, I know. I certainly can't permit you to suffer in any way. But you were not the only person who borrowed beans. If I let you pay less, other people would also want to pay less, and that would never do. As for the seed grain, that certainly is not my business. I was only handling it. It belonged to the county granary, so how can I make a decision about that? . . ."

"Yes, of course, I know how it is, Mr. Ho. But Yun-pu is getting old. This time I only ask Mr. Ho and Mr. Li to be specially charitable. If the harvest is good next year, I certainly will not hold back anything. This time everything depends on your mercy."

Yun-pu's face wore an extremely pathetic expression, and a sob rattled in his throat as he talked. Whatever happened, he had to plead and beg and get all he could then and there. At the very least, he had to beg to be left with enough to feed and clothe his family for the rest of the year.

"No, nothing doing. In ordinary years, I might be a little lenient, but this year, I simply can't. If everyone were going to be as troublesome as you, what would happen? Besides, I haven't the time to bother with them all. Still, I am sorry for you. I cannot let you suffer. How much will you have left in your hands after paying your debts and taxes? Why not give me the figures and let me see."

"It couldn't be that Mr. Ho doesn't already know what the calculations are. I reaped altogether 150 piculs of grain from which Mr. Li will demand payment, Mr. Chen will demand payment, and from which must also be deducted the money for the Security Bureau, taxes. . . ."

"How come you only got such a little?"

"That's all, I can swear. . . ."

"Then let me do some calculations for you."

Mr. Ho then turned around and called to his bookkeeper in the blue gown: "Please calculate the amount of rent and money Yun-pu owes me."

"Master, the figures are ready. The money he owes for the rent, the seed grain and the beans borrowed plus interest comes up to 103.56 piculs of grain altogether. We price Yun-pu's grain at 1.36 dollars per picul."

"Well Mr. Li, how about you?"

"Not more than thirty piculs I should think."

"He must pay the Dyke Administration about ten piculs," added Director Chen.

"Then Yun-pu, you are still not in the red. Why are you being so troublesome?"

"Please, Mr. Ho, don't you think my family have to eat! There's also the taxes to pay. Please, Mr. Ho, I must beg of you to be merciful. . . ."

Tears were streaming out of Uncle Yun-pu's eyes. At this critical moment, he could only try to arouse the pity of his creditors by begging until the bitter end. He finally went down on his knees before them, and kowtowed several times, knocking his head hard on the ground as if he were worshipping Buddha.

"Please, Mr. Ho and Mr. Li, you must save my old skin. . . ."

"Uh! uh . . . all right, Yun-pu, I promise you. But you must not keep back a single kernel of the grain you owe me under the rent and debt. When you really find it hard to manage in the future, I'll again lend you some grain to feed your family. Furthermore, you must send in your grain by tomorrow. One day's delay and I shall charge one day's interest, 4.5%, 4.5%! . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Ho."

Early the next morning, Uncle Yun-pu, his eyes full of tears, woke Shao-pu, and together they opened the door of the barn. Mr. Li's and Mr. Ho's hired hands were waiting outside. This showed how considerate they were. They were afraid that Uncle Yun-pu could not manage to transport so much grain in one day by himself and had sent their own hired hands over to help carry it.

Golden, sturdy grain was measured picul by picul and taken from the barn. Yun-pu felt that a thousand sharp knives were stabbing into his heart. Tears trickled down one by one and shivers shook him wave after wave. Ying-ying's tear-stained face, his aching muscles, the burning sun, the storming flood, Mercy Powder, tree bark . . . memories of all these crowded into his mind.

Every hired hand had already slung the carrying pole, which balanced two baskets of rice, onto his shoulders. Turning back, they said to Uncle Yun-pu, "Let's go."

Uncle Yun-pu heaved a pole to his shoulder with all his strength. The grain seemed to weigh a thousand catties, and sweat poured down his face. He glared with hatred towards the farmstead of Mr. Ho and stepped out of his own door. His feet barely managed to take a few steps, and then they felt as if they were treading on nails. He wanted to put down his load and rest a moment, but his head was swimming, and the aching in his heart was too much to bear.

"Oh, Heaven!" he shrieked as he fell to the ground, spilling the grain everywhere.

"Shao-pu, Shao-pu, your Dad has fainted."

"Dad, Dad, oh Daddy. . . ."

"Yun-pu, Yun-pu. . . ."

"Mama, Mama come quick, something's happened to Dad."

Mrs. Yun-pu dashed out from the house and they carried Uncle Yun-pu to a board lying at the foot of the stage. She massaged his limbs gently.

"Have you any pain anywhere?"

"Huh. . . ."

Uncle Yun-pu kept his eyes closed. The hired hands carried off the grain picul by picul. They walked past the place where Uncle Yun-pu lay, and the sound of their footsteps pounded upon Yun-pu's heart. Slowly, blood oozed out of his mouth.

Just then, the *chia chang* burst in with a committeeman and two armed soldiers. They were followed by five or six men with baskets and carrying poles.

"How come? Is Yun-pu ill?"

Shao-pu walked over and greeted them: "No, he just worked a bit and had a stroke!"

"Oh! . . ."

"Yun-pu, Yun-pu!"

"What is it, Chief?" Shao-pu asked in his father's stead.

"We're collecting the taxes. The anti-communist tax, the patriotic tax and the security tax. Altogether your Dad owes 17.19 dollars, which, computed in grain, is 14.303 piculs priced at 1.20 per picul."

"Oh! When must you have it?"

"We'll take it right away."

"Oh! Oh. . . ."

Shao-pu looked at his Dad, then he turned to the soldiers and the *chia chang*; he was at a complete loss. Mr. Ho's and Mr. Li's hired hands had jumped into the barn and were measuring the grain by themselves and taking it away. The *chia chang* quickly pushed in also.

"Come!"

The men with the baskets swarmed in and got ready to take the grain.

"Are they all robbers then?" Shao-pu's head cleared, and great indignation filled his heart. With bloodshot eyes, he stared at them, and rage swept over him. He simply could not understand why the grain they had reaped by hard labour was given to other people to be carried away picul by picul. And such beastly, unreasonable people at that! He gritted his teeth. So intense was his desire to grab one or the other of these robbers and give him a good beating, that he was able to restrain himself only because of the armed soldiers who were glaring threateningly at him.

"Oh, oh. . . ."

"Dad, are you feeling better?"

"Oh! . . ."

In only half an hour, the hired hands and the men were all gone. The *chia chang* slowly stepped out of the barn, and with his eyes on the committeeman, said: "It's all gone. After Ho and Li took the rent and the payment due to the Dyke Administration, that left us short of 3.35 piculs for the taxes."

"Then give him three days' time limit to have the shortage brought to town. You notify him."

"Shao-pu, remember to tell your Dad that he's short of 3.35 piculs for taxes. He must send it to the Bureau himself within three days, otherwise soldiers will come to arrest him," the *chia chang* said fiercely.

"Oh!"

They disappeared before Shao-pu's hazy eyes. He turned towards the barn door. There was nothing left but the thin bare boards of the floor. His head felt dizzy, and the whole world seemed to be going in circles.

"Oh, oh! . . ."

"Dad, oh Dad! . . ."

IX

Li-chiu came back at midnight.

"So there really are robbers who steal grain, just as I said." Uncle Yun-pu had been in a coma on and off. He took hold of Li-chiu's wrist in a tight grip and said tremulously: "Li-chiu, where is our grain? This year, this year, we've had an unusually rich harvest."

Li-chiu's heart was heavy. He set his teeth, and in an effort to comfort his father, said: "Never mind, Dad, why feel so bad? Didn't I tell you it would happen like this? Sooner or later there's going to be a day of reckoning, as long as we don't allow ourselves to be fooled again. Up until now most of the people in the village have decided not to pay any rent or taxes. There's no doubt but that it will lead to a real struggle. Tonight I must go to a meeting."

"Ah! . . ."

Dimly, Uncle Yun-pu felt as if he'd come through a horrible nightmare. Vaguely he seemed to understand why his son Li-chiu had been absent from home so often. The thought of the Peasants' Association formed in 1926–1927 suddenly came into his head. With much effort he opened his eyes and with a bitter smile said hesitatingly: "Well, good, good! You go. And I hope Heaven will bless all of you."

Translated by Tang Sheng

"New Life"

CHANG TIEN-YI

When Mr. Li I-mo first came to this middle school to see Principal Pan, many teachers and students gasped in surprise. What? Was this the writer and artist Li I-mo?

The heavy overcoat in which he was clad, and the two small but heavy suitcases he was carrying were overlaid with dust. A rather dark-complexioned face showed over his tall and lean frame. It seemed he had not shaved for weeks, for a stubbly beard stood on his chin. Although only around forty, he looked ten years older. Even the myopic lenses of his spectacles were yellow with dust, like window-panes that had not been cleaned for a whole year.

If you had read some of his exquisite short essays; if you had been told that a certain publication once called him "the purest artist," you would certainly have felt that his appearance was completely at odds with his works.

Now Mr. Li was saying to Principal Pan, in a voice full of emotion:

"My former self died yesterday and what happened in the past died with it. Old Pan, I was dreaming for a long time, but I am awake now. Really I must thank the Japanese brigands. Were it not for their cannon shots that woke me up, I would still be leading the life of a hermit."

He talked about conditions in his native place when it was about to fall into the hands of the Japanese and how he had fled. He was speaking very rapidly. The skin over his prominent cheek-bones glowed slightly. Sometimes he stopped suddenly, as if, for the moment, he had forgotten what had happened next. Then he gave an uneasy jerk and resumed his narration hastily. Old Pan could see that his old friend was full of deep indignation but it showed as impatience because he was usually a very calm person and did not easily lose his temper.

Mr. Li had fled with his wife and daughter when the Japanese were only about twenty miles from his native place. Usually he collected seven hundred piculs of rice every year from his tenants as rent, but this year he would get nothing. He had left his wife and daughter with his in-laws in a village somewhere in the southern part of Chekiang Province, and come here alone to look up his old friend.

"It would be meaningless to bury myself in a village with my wife and daughter. My decision is made: I want to do some work in the rear. I want to begin a new life!"

He had heard that the senior section of this middle school needed a teacher for art classes, four periods per week, and he offered to take this

job, for he considered it quite proper under the circumstances to accept such a minor position.

"Aya!" Old Pan said, half jokingly and half seriously. "You condescend to teach in our school! I am really overwhelmed with the honour. . . ."

Mr. Li stood up and said solemnly:

"What nonsense! . . . The present I-mo is no longer what he was before. The I-mo of the past followed the poet Tao Chien who led the life of a literary recluse; but the I-mo of the present will emulate Mo Ti with his philosophy of service for the country and the people. I want to work. I want to suffer. Millions of people are suffering now, while I—I. . . . In fact, even the life of a middle school teacher cannot be considered hard. I would be willing to teach even in a primary school!"

Old Pan assigned a small house in the school garden, formerly used by people who needed quiet and rest, for Mr. Li to live in, and Mr. Li began his new life. He joined the literature and art group of the school as one of its directors. He wrote a few articles for a little weekly magazine issued by this group. He also intended to do some pictures—pictures to suit propaganda purposes.

"We must propagandize everyone," he said to the students agitatedly, his hands twitching nervously. "We must show the whole world that China is straightforward, tolerant and peace-loving, while our enemy is a cruel beast. We must make everybody understand that we are struggling not only for the continued existence of our country, but also for maintaining the dignity of mankind."

He walked back and forth uneasily in the classroom, as if he were looking for something. He concentrated all his strength in his right hand, now clenching his fist, now stretching the fingers again. His cheeks were burning and in his nose there was a queer tickling as if he were going to cry.

Several of the students were watching him intently. He glanced at them, and his eyes met theirs. A mute clash. He walked to the window and looked out for about five minutes to avoid another visual encounter.

The weather here was always bad. Dark clouds hung overhead like a leaden plate. In the school garden bare branches, adorned only with some crows, were trembling in the cold wind. Inside the room, it was already very dark although it was not yet five o'clock, but outside there was still a cold, grey-greenish light in the sky which made one shiver in spite of oneself.

Suddenly Mr. Li's thoughts wandered to his native place; he thought how he used to stand for a while by the window of his study and look out at his charming, little garden when he felt tired from his work. He could remember that the moss in the gold-fish pond had stayed green, even through the winter.

"That Japan allspice is probably in bloom now," he said to himself.

He shot a glance at the student nearest to him as though he were afraid that they might guess what was on his mind. Then, his arms crossed, he tried to put himself into the proper frame of mind, telling himself coolly that in a great era like the present one when there was so much suffering, nobody should long for the comforts he had enjoyed before, and nobody could lead a leisurely life behind closed doors any longer.

But here, the circumstances were so completely different from those he had been used to before. . . .

Quietly, he heaved a deep sigh. He didn't quite know what, but he felt that these new circumstances definitely lacked something. He suffered from a kind of oppression that prevented him from being active, both physically and mentally. Even his righteous indignation was not a fiery wrath. It had become something very sombre, deeply mixed with melancholy.

In order to divert these unpleasant feelings, he turned his thoughts to something else intentionally.

"Really, why should these four lessons be put all together on Wednesday afternoons?"

A hissing sound issued suddenly from the end of the room. It was not clear whether a student had laughed or just blown his nose. Mr. Li was startled and turned around slowly. On his face there was an embarrassed expression such as a sensitive child would put on before strangers after crying. Mr. Li asked the students rather too casually:

"Are you . . . eh, do you paint anything outside class?"

Several of the students exchanged glances with a smile.

"Those of you who are in the second and third year take art as an optional course," Mr. Li said with some displeasure. "Since you have chosen this course, you must have some interest in art. But I do hope you will do more propaganda pictures to be shown outside the school, in order to rouse the general public. So long as you can make your meaning clear in your pictures, it doesn't matter even if your technique is rather childish. Anyway, this is . . . this is not the time for us to talk about art. Art is useless now."

The students again looked at one another, obviously exchanging meaningful glances. Then a student, with hair closely cropped like that of a Buddhist monk, lifted himself up only a little from his seat instead of standing up and asked:

"And what about propaganda pictures, Mr. Li? Aren't they also supposed to be works of art?"

"No, they definitely are not!" Mr. Li answered, with some agitation.

"You mean that no propaganda pictures can be considered as works of art?"

As a teacher, Mr. Li pitied that student somewhat. What ignorance!

YANG TAI-YANG: Rafting on the Lichiang River

Still he explained patiently. A propaganda picture or poster was only an instrument of propaganda. It had nothing whatever to do with art. He also repeated over and over again that what was needed was merely something to encourage the people, something to wake them up. He sawed the air with his right hand and spoke more and more rapidly.

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth! Our enemies are bombarding us with big guns. We must answer them with big guns. The greatest people now are the soldiers on the frontline, and the most useless people are we, the so-called artists. We must hurry and give up art for the time being and do something which every Chinese ought to do. . . ."

"Mr. Li!" This time the student with the closely cropped hair didn't even bother to lift himself up from his seat. He just sat before his easel and said, in a hoarse voice: "Then what about the drawings by Käthe Kollwitz and Soviet woodcuts? They are meant for propaganda. Can they be considered works of art?"

"Aha, another follower of Lu Hsun!" thought Mr. Li.

Teacher and student glared at each other. There was an embarrassing silence. A crow flew over the roof, cawing. Perhaps it had been listening secretly for quite some time and broken into sound, because it found the silence too oppressive.

Mr. Li guessed that the expression on his own face must have been rather strange, for one student laughed softly and glanced out of the window. With a great effort, Mr. Li put on a smile to show that he was indifferent to what had happened, but he found his voice rather unnatural when he said:

"About this question . . . this . . . this . . . well, it can't be clearly explained in a short time. This . . . this is a question of aesthetics. Why art is art . . . is a complicated subject. . . . If you come to see me after class, I shall help you to clarify this point gradually."

But the student never came to see him. But every Wednesday afternoon thereafter, several cartoons were handed in for his opinion. The question of art was never raised again.

The students did not try to approach him. It might have been that they considered him too great a man to be bothered but they might also have looked down upon him. Sometimes, a few students came to ask him to write an article for that little weekly, or consulted him about its layout and make-up. But they went away every time just as soon as business was finished.

When he walked through places where students gathered, he would hear someone say behind him: "This is Li I-mo." But from the way it was said, he could not be sure whether it was said in awe or in ridicule.

However, Mr. Chen, the teacher of physics and mathematics, seemed to be well liked by the students. Short in stature, with a few pockmarks on his face, Mr. Chen had many things to occupy him. He led discussion groups and study groups, and every Saturday evening he lectured in the

Public Education Centre for an hour on war-time precautions. The topics he wrote about were many, one imparted knowledge about dumdum bullets, another discussed Japan's economic crisis. Mr. Chen always inclined his head respectfully whenever he met Mr. Li.

Old Pan, the school principal, had mentioned Mr. Chen several times to Mr. Li:

"He has the best spirit among the teachers here. He is enthusiastic about his work and not at all stuck-up. And he knows his stuff on social problems. . . . Wouldn't you like to talk to him?"

"I think Mr. Chen is living a hard life, and a very dull one at that." Mr. Li paused for a while. He smiled out of the corners of his mouth. "I suppose you are fond of those kind of people because your life is exactly the same."

He was actually right in that. Old Pan had sat in the principal's chair of this middle school for nineteen years. Recently he had even sent his family away to the countryside and now spent all his time at the school doing the same things day in and day out. Perhaps it was only this kind of life that did go well with the grey school buildings and the grey sky. And the seven or eight teachers who lived in the school dormitory led the same sort of monotonous life. . . .

One Saturday evening, Mr. Li simply could not stand all this dreariness any more. He appeared in the principal's room like a man walking in his sleep.

"Old Pan, there is a queer disease about your place—I've caught it already! Monotony or the grey disease, you may call it. . . . I am bored to distraction. . . . Let's go out and drink some wine!"

"All right," Old Pan nodded gently. "Only I dare not drink, with my heart trouble. . . . Shall I ask somebody else to keep you company? How about asking Mr. Chen along?"

"Does he drink?"

The principal shook his head with a forced smile and then said, rather apologetically:

"In our school . . . hm, there's perhaps only old Mr. Chang who can drink a few cups. . . ."

"Get him to come with us then, eh? Is he an interesting person?"

"Interesting?" Old Pan gave a laugh. "Eight words will describe him: His sayings are insipid; his appearance is repulsive."

Then Old Pan gave an appraisal of old Mr. Chang from a school principal's viewpoint. The old man might be quite a scholar. He wrote beautiful enough calligraphy. But he definitely was not a good teacher of Chinese. He strictly forbade the students to write in the modern vernacular. When once a student used the modern term "purpose" in an essay, Mr. Chang furiously struck out the two written characters denoting the idea.

Old Pan struck his knees with his palms.

"Just think! There's a teacher for you! And he has been teaching here for sixteen years now! But I can't cancel his contract . . . an influential member of the local gentry supports him. Such is our sacred educational field! At that, to tell the truth, conditions here in this school are still considered better than elsewhere. What can one do? Unless you have no intention whatever to do any work for the public, you have to compromise, bow your head and keep your temper! . . ."

The other yawned, lighted a cigarette and cast a pitying glance at Old Pan.

"That old man is rotten all through, one hundred per cent," Old Pan added. "When you talk to him about current events, about the war of resistance to Japanese aggression, he . . . the ideas he expresses are really those of a traitor!"

That evening, the two friends sat in a restaurant for over two hours. Mr. Li alone consumed one catty of yellow rice wine, sipping at his cup continually and refilling it from the pewter wine pot as soon as it was empty. His thin face turned more and more pale as he drank.

When Old Pan warned him that he might be drinking too much, he clutched at the wine pot and said:

"Old Pan, let me tell you a story. A hard drinker once said, 'Hot wine hurts my lungs. Cold wine hurts my liver. But not to drink would hurt my heart. I'd rather have my lungs and liver hurt than my heart.' This man really knew how to live. . . . I am sorry for you people who never drink."

He sipped some of the wine, smacking his lips loudly and leaning back in his chair with an air of great ease. He half-closed his eyes with an expression of bliss, but their bloodshot sockets made one suspect that he had wept not long ago.

"At first, I did not intend to drink the wine produced on this soil." He pointed to the ground. "I thought it would be bad. But, really, it's quite all right. . . . Old Pan, do have a drop! You must savour it. . . ."

Old Pan obligingly took a tiny sip. Then he said, ashamedly:

"I used to drink a little. But I could never tell whether a wine was good or bad."

"This wine certainly does not compare with that of my native place. I had nine jars of old Shaohsing wine at home, said to have ripened for sixty years. Perhaps its vintage was of only thirty or forty years ago, but definitely not less than that. I often invited friends to stay for a few days in our little town. We would talk and drink. . . . I can't drink much, but I like the feeling one has when one is drinking. . . . Oh, you've been to Hangchow, did you go to a wine shop there?"

"No."

"Oh, but you should have gone!" Mr. Li raised his hand excitedly. "The people who go to drink there . . . that kind of . . . that kind of. . . . Oh, they really know how to drink. One dish of dried beancurd

prepared in mushroom juice and two bowls of old wine can last one for over two hours. . . . You should not have missed the chance to understand that joy!"

He closed his eyes and sighed wearily. He remembered the fine porcelain set of wine jug and cups he had at home. He also recalled the finely carved seals, books, the masterpieces of old calligraphy and paintings he owned. Then suddenly he thought how interesting the painters and engravers had been in his little town. Where were they now?

He sighed again. He felt the need to talk, so he told his friend of his family life and how his 13-year-old daughter had always stood by his table, bent over and taken a sip from his cup when he was drinking, while his wife would scold her smilingly, "Look at this imp!"

Old Pan listened to him very patiently, like a diligent student attending lessons in the classroom. Mr. Li realized that his remarks could not be of any interest to his friend, but he just had to say all these things. He felt there were a great many things pressing on his mind that he had to get rid of.

He was dizzy. Leaning his arms on the edge of table, he laid his head on them.

"Drunk?" his companion asked him. "Shall we go back to the school?"

He shook his head.

All the other customers had gone. The place had become very quiet, not like a restaurant at all. And obviously there were not many people in the street either. Only sometimes a swishing sound came from outside, difficult to tell whether it was the wind blowing or a car passing by.

Mr. Li suddenly raised his head and asked:

"Eh, Old Pan, where is your wife staying now? Is she with her family or with yours?"

"With mine. Why?"

"That's good. That's good," he muttered. "The most unpleasant people in the world are one's in-laws. I have nothing against marriage, but parents-in-law. . . . I'm really afraid of them!" At this point, he opened his eyes quite wide and continued: "If our town had not fallen into the hands of the Japanese, I would not have sent my wife to her family, even if I'd had to beg for food! My wife's family, her family . . . from her father down to her little nephew . . . all of them are despicable, nasty, mean and selfish! And how vulgar they are! None resembles a human being in any way! . . . And then she . . . she . . . in a letter . . . grumbles . . . complains. . . . She cannot get used to living with them again. . . . She wants to come here. . . . What am I to do! If my wife and daughter come, what will they live on? What work can they do? If they don't work, why should they come here? . . . If I hadn't thought I'd do some work, I would not have come here, either.

Let the devil come, instead! What . . . what a dead place this is! Absolutely without any life! And so grey! . . ."

The two of them got back to the school after nine o'clock in the evening. All the shops had closed their doors. The street lamps shed such a feeble, dim light that it made one feel gloomier than if there had not been any light at all.

Mr. Li thought of the house he was occupying, and his heart sank.

The little house stood all alone. It seemed to Mr. Li that, aside from himself, there were no other creatures in the world. The walls of this place were painted lemon colour. They were clean but their cleanliness only increased the monotony of the room in which there were no decorations of any kind, just a few simple pieces of furniture, the necessary utensils for writing and his two small suitcases. When the bright electric light was on, it made one feel only colder and more lonely.

And in such surroundings, he had to begin his "new life."

He felt suddenly sick at heart, all alone, without any relative or friend. Nobody was concerned about him. Nobody looked after him. This was really the first time he was in such a strange situation. When he was small, there were his mother and elder sister, and later, his wife, who had always known his wishes and desires simply by looking at him. And his friends had gathered around him, making him their centre. But now. . . .

"Perhaps it's all just a dream . . ." he muttered to himself wretchedly.

He hoped he was only dreaming and would wake up to find himself still at home, lying on his own soft, warm bed; and on the table beside his bed, there would be a pot of strong black tea which his wife had prepared for him, a tin of the "Three Castles" cigarettes he liked and a volume of Wu Mei-tsun, his favourite poet. His daughter would put a cigarette between his lips, light it for him and then say, with her childish smile:

"What a long time you've slept, daddy!"

Everything would be exactly the same as it used to be every morning. The curtain on the window would be halfdrawn to let in the sunshine. The bamboo outside the window would be scattering a slanting pattern across the floor, giving the room a hint of fresh greenery. He would, as usual, remain in bed until he finished smoking, reading a few of Wu Mei-tsun's poems. Then he would get up leisurely.

The world, just like himself, would all be peaceful and undisturbed.

"How unthinkable that war should break out in such a tranquil world! . . ." he thought. "This is indeed a very long dream. . . . But then, Chunyu Fung in the story *Governor of the Southern Tributary State* . . . passed several scores of years in his dream . . . and yet it actually . . . actually . . . was only a short while. . . ."

He belched, drew a handkerchief from his sleeve and wiped his

mouth. He was still sitting on the old sofa in the principal's room, for he had refused to go to his own. The servants of the school were all asleep. Old Pan had gone to the kitchen to boil some water for Mr. Li to drink.

Mr. Li tried desperately to steady his confused mind, wanting to recollect when this dream of his had started.

The Marco Polo Bridge Incident on July 7, 1937, that started the war with the Japanese, it must be just a dream. . . . The Battle of Shanghai in the following month just couldn't have happened. . . .

What about the September 18th Incident of 1931 by which the Japanese occupied China's Northeast? He had to think that over carefully. And there was also the January 28th Incident in 1932 when the Japanese attacked Shanghai. . . . How could China lose four of her provinces without hitting back at the aggressor at all? At this point in his reflections, he stood up resolutely, wiped his lips hard with his handkerchief, and told himself firmly:

"No, no, impossible! The September 18th Incident cannot have actually happened. Neither did the January 28th Incident happen. It must still be . . . still the time before September 1931 now!"

"Here's a potful of strong tea I've made for you, I-mo," Old Pan came in, looking at him cheerily. "Hadn't you better take a piece of *Pa-kua-tan* against your headache first?"

Mr. Li sighed, took a small piece of the medicine from Old Pan's hand, and put it into his mouth absent-mindedly. Then he sat down again and felt his right temple with his finger. It was throbbing. He said to his old friend, with some remorse:

"I really don't know what I have been thinking about just now. I am too sensitive, too full of fancies. My nerves haven't been too good lately."

"Go to bed early. I think you've been drinking too much wine."

"That's got nothing to do with it," he said rather impatiently. "You don't understand me. . . . My. . . ."

With a look at the principal's face, he checked himself. They had become friends in Peking at the time of the May 4th Movement in 1919. Since then, they had followed different courses in life and developed in different ways. Now . . . Mr. Li considered that he could see through Old Pan at one glance, while Old Pan never understood him, Mr. Li, at all.

But in the whole school, in the whole town, there was only Old Pan who sometimes talked to him. When he wanted company, he had to put up with Old Pan's longish, honest face before his eyes and Old Pan's high-pitched voice in his ears. It was like having the same dish at every meal every day, with no change allowed. He hoped some other colleague might join him. Little Mr. Chen would be all right. Even old Mr. Chang would be welcome. Otherwise. . . .

"Otherwise my stomach will really be upset."

After that Mr. Li drank some wine every day. Sometimes he went to a restaurant; sometimes he asked the servant to go out and buy some for him, but still Old Pan remained his sole companion. One day he nearly lost his temper and asked Old Pan in a loud voice:

"Isn't there anyone else in this school, besides that old Mr. Chang, who can drink? Can't some one be found among the students, or even among the servants?"

Eventually he did get acquainted with that short Mr. Chen. But he was a thoroughly uninteresting fellow. All he cared for was how to keep himself busy. All he talked to Mr. Li about was how to improve that little weekly magazine, or to ask for more articles for it. And as soon as business was finished, he nodded respectfully to Mr. Li and went away, as if he had been in mortal fear that Mr. Li might seize him and force him to drink wine!

"After all, this magazine also represents work," Mr. Li told himself.

Though he was not quite pleased with this kind of work, he did once draw a cartoon after he had had his wine, showing a soldier walking hand in hand with a civilian. For a heading, he wrote: "The military forces and the people co-operate." But suddenly he felt rather ashamed of it. So, after some hesitation, he decided to give it to the periodical without signing his name.

"How rotten of them!" When he saw his cartoon in the periodical with his name printed under it, he felt as if someone had slapped his face. "They've dared to put my real name under it . . . those scoundrels! From now on, the name 'I-mo' will be a disgrace. How could I-mo draw such a picture! . . . Oh, what scoundrels! . . . scoundrels! . . ."

He suspected that Mr. Chen and some others were maliciously trying to undermine his reputation. That student with closely cropped hair was certainly one of the gang, for this Wednesday afternoon he had dared to ask Mr. Li in class for more pictures for the periodical.

"No!" Mr. Li had answered coldly. "I am in a bad mood and I can't produce anything!"

As soon as the class was over, he returned to his quarters, greatly annoyed by the injustice done him. He took out a less expensive "Golden Dragon" cigarette from the tin that had once contained the fancier "Three Castles" brand and lighted it. He lay down on the bed. A copy of the day's newspaper fell to the ground. He did not pick it up. This was the paper he subscribed for with money out of his own pocket. The school took in seven or eight newspapers, but they were all put in the reading-room and there were always groups of people around them. He simply could not get accustomed to reading newspapers in a crowd.

None of the ways in which things were done in the school suited him, as if they were on purpose trying to outrage him. The cooks should have been sentenced to several years' imprisonment for preparing always the same, tasteless food. Mr. Li disliked eating in the mess hall with

a great many people around, so he had his meals brought to his own room. And because of that, they played more tricks on him so that he would get angry as soon as he saw the food sent. Every morning, when he wanted his tea, he had such trouble getting the servant to brew it! The tea leaves which he had bought himself tasted bitter and had not the slightest fragrance although they were supposed to be the best kind, from Chimen in Anhwei Province.

"How very strange!" He threw away the cigarette in his hand. "How can these people be so happy here, so energetic!"

He stretched himself, got up and sipped some of the cold tea. Then he set the cup down on the table with an angry knock. Better to go and have a few cups of wine. He locked his door and went out.

Whom could he get to go with him? Old Pan again? Mr. Li hesitated. As soon as he thought of the principal, he had a queer, sickly feeling in his throat right down to his stomach, the kind of feeling one has after eating something too sweet.

He slowed down his steps, pretending that he was just taking a walk and happened to drop in on the principal quite accidentally.

The row of willow trees in the school garden had put forth buds and, under the dark-red clouds in the sky, they looked like strips of soiled green cloth. The grey school buildings seemed to have been washed with purple water, looking most incongruous.

Happy shouts came from the basket-ball field. Some students were singing a marching song with great zest. Laughter was also heard from the teachers' quarters. Then he heard someone say: "How can the general public understand these abstract theories you expound? . . ." Probably that little Mr. Chen again! Talking over some more business!

Mr. Li walked on purpose by the window from which the noise came and looked in. He hoped Mr. Chen might see him and ask him in. He walked even more slowly than before, fixing his eyes on the ground as if he were measuring the path. For a moment, he almost wanted to overcome his habitual reserve and walk into Mr. Chen's room without being invited.

But he did not stop, after all.

"Why can't they come to me? Why must I go to them?"

And so, that evening, when he was drinking wine, he had nobody but Old Pan for company—the same dish all over again!

"I really can't get used to living here. It's too boring!" He cast a complaining and almost censuring glance at Old Pan, as if the latter were responsible for his misfortunes. "I want to go away. . . . But where can I go? . . . I have no friends elsewhere and it is difficult to make a living. . . . I am tied to this place! . . ."

He neither wrote nor painted anything. He was not in the proper mood for these things. When he finally got acquainted with old Mr. Chang, he borrowed from him a lithographic copy of rubbings of ancient

stone inscriptions and, using its ideographs as models, practised his calligraphy every day.

Mr. Chang was an old man with a ruddy complexion, slightly lame and hunchbacked. To Mr. Li, this teacher of Chinese did not appear so repulsive as Old Pan had described him to be. He and Mr. Li even had some interests in common. Mr. Chang also liked to buy stone-rubbings and collect seals. When they discovered by chance that they both were enthusiastic about the rubbings made on paper from the stone engravings of the Buddhist Diamond Sutra on sacred Mt. Taishan in Shantung Province, they became quite drawn to each other.

"I'd collected rubbings of one thousand and five ideographs of this sutra. Even museum director Yi Pei-chi had fewer than mine in his collection. But now. . . ." Mr. Li sighed deeply. "Now my collection may have been burnt or stolen by the Japanese."

"That's why," old Mr. Chang responded quickly, narrowing his eyes in disgust, "I am discouraged. I haven't been looking for such things recently. What can one do about it in such chaotic times? This is really a predestined calamity! Some people simply can't stand peace in the world, so they must stir up war. Ai!"

Mr. Li, smiling politely, ventured to refute him:

"But when others invade our country, if we don't offer any resistance. . . ."

"Hm, resistance!" The corners of old Mr. Chang's mouth were drooping. "Can we resist and win? Or are we just inviting troubles and sufferings?"

"Then we should just let them come and occupy China?"

"This is not a question of our 'letting' them or not. . . . In a word . . . in a word . . . well, if you can't win by fighting, why fight and get into trouble? You're bound to suffer more when you fight. . . ."

"No wonder Old Pan says he thinks like a traitor!" thought Mr. Li.

Foam appeared at one corner of the old man's mouth. He wiped it off with the scholar's long nail on his little finger and went on indignantly:

"For instance, when the Japanese first came to a place, they didn't really harm the inhabitants. But later guerillas and anti-Japanese elements showed up, so the Japanese of course had to make searches and arrests, some people even got killed and so the inhabitants could no longer go about their business in peace. . . . What's the use of guerillas? They can't possibly defeat the Japanese, but they just rush around and make attacks, now here, now there. When the Japanese come in bigger numbers, they always run away. It's only innocent people who get sacrificed when the Japanese search for guerillas. . . ."

"But there's news from many sources that the people do welcome the guerillas," said Mr. Li, still smiling. He thought this argument very ludicrous and a waste of words, so far as he was concerned. Still he could not help saying something. "In many places, the guerillas really

are self-defence units organized by the people themselves. Naturally they are not willing to stand by and have their own places ravaged before their eyes."

"Hm, self-defence! Hm! Do they have big guns? Are they as well armed as the Japanese troops? . . . Self-defence! Self-defence indeed! All they actually do is to create disturbances wherever they are!"

"So your idea is that our people should become obedient slaves to the Japanese and traitors to China!" thought Mr. Li, but he did not say these words to old Mr. Chang. He suddenly remembered an article "On a Certain Kind of Traitors" he had seen in that little periodical. Whoever wrote that must have had this old man in mind. Now that Mr. Li himself had heard the old man's arguments, he thought that article very powerful and pertinent.

Impatiently Mr. Li lighted a cigarette. Impatiently he sat down on a chair. His fingers trembled with indignation and his cheeks burned. He considered it his duty to refute this man Chang from the standpoint of a human being at least. He wanted to teach this man some common sense, tell him the facts, explain to him what blows our guerillas had dealt the enemy, how they had turned his rear into another frontline, and how useless it was for the Japanese to occupy a few big cities. He felt it didn't matter even if he used harsh words. Perhaps he should lecture this old fool severely with words like: You should know this is a difficult period, and everyone, as long as he is Chinese, as long as he wants to be called a human being and not a beast, should struggle with clenched teeth. . . .

But he did not open his mouth. He was not used to quarrelling with others on such topics. And besides, these were not words he had thought up himself. People might sneer when they heard him and say: "Ha, Mr. Li is only parroting others!"

He also remembered Voltaire had said that the first person who compared a woman to a flower was a genius and that the second person who did the same thing was an idiot. The ideas he wanted to express were contained in that article, very lucidly and very adequately.

"That weekly magazine . . . Mr. Chang, do you ever read it?"

"I don't understand things written in modern vernacular!"

After that retort, both of them fell silent. Mr. Li wanted to leave, but he felt it was not quite the polite thing to do. So he kept looking at the door now and then, hoping that some one would come in to end the embarrassing situation. Suddenly he noticed Mr. Chang was staring at the cigarette in his hand. He got the hint, took out his case and offered the other a smoke.

The old man lighted a cigarette and took one pull at it. Then, holding it at a distance, he squinted to read the name of the brand. His tense, ruddy face gradually relaxed. But he held on to the cigarette firm-

ly with his stained fingers, as if he were afraid that it would run away unless he made it stay by force. At each whiff he took, he made a loud noise.

Thinking, perhaps, that he had to make some polite remark to the man who had offered him the thing he was enjoying, old Mr. Chang asked how many cigarettes Mr. Li smoked per day. Then he mentioned wine.

"I heard you like to drink a few cups too. . . ."

"Yes," Mr. Li hastened to answer. "Only I can't find a drinking companion." He looked at the other with an expression of expectancy.

"I'll invite you to my house some day for a drink."

Mr. Li suggested that they go to a restaurant that evening. Old Mr. Chang said, very frankly:

"Unfortunately, I haven't any money on me today. . . . I'd like to invite you to my place, but my family hasn't been told to prepare anything. . . ."

So they went to a Tientsin restaurant and Mr. Li paid for the wine and food. Friends who drink wine together do not have to stand on ceremonies.

Thus they became boon companions and thereafter frequented small restaurants together. Old Mr. Chang always happened to have no money on him, and never invited Mr. Li to his house for a drink. The first time Mr. Li went there was to return the copy of stone-rubbings. They talked from five o'clock in the afternoon until seven-thirty. The women in Mr. Chang's family were whispering uneasily in the next room, sometimes peeping in through the door and window. In the end, the visitor asked the host to go out with him. When they arrived at the restaurant, old Mr. Chang pretended he had to go back because he had forgotten to bring his wallet. "Oh, how stupid of me!" The old man reproached himself as he limped into the restaurant. "I really should be the host this time!"

But his drinking capacity was not impaired. He gulped down one cup after another without batting an eyelid. And all the time he smoked the cigarettes from Mr. Li's case on the table. When the case was empty, it was old Mr. Chang who ordered the waiter to go out and buy some more. His words were still coherent and clear, and the more he drank, the more slowly he spoke. Only his nose turned purple.

And with such a man Mr. Li had become friends! Old Pan was really surprised.

"How did this happen? Do you find old Mr. Chang congenial to talk to?"

"Just so so," said Mr. Li, looking at his friend's longish face with some annoyance because he thought Old Pan was using his authority as school principal to interfere in other people's private affairs.

Mr. Li therefore explained his attitude with great self-confidence: "It doesn't matter if friends have different views. Life is richer when people are unlike one another. If you had many, many friends and all

looked at things in more or less the same way, wouldn't your life be very monotonous? Tell me now, wouldn't it? . . . Besides current events there are a lot of things I can talk about with old Mr. Chang—poetry, carvings of seals, calligraphy and painting. . . ."

But in the last few days Mr. Li had been able to see for himself that there wasn't much left to talk about with his drinking companion. Old Mr. Chang kept boasting about his private collections. He had a seal carved and given him by Wu Chang-shih, well-known as a painter and seal-carver. He also had a landscape by Ni Yun-lin of the Yuan Dynasty that had calligraphy by Chang Ting-chi of the Ching Dynasty on it. Always this sort of remarks.

"He is only bragging," thought Mr. Li. "I've been to his house several times. Why didn't he show these things to me then?"

Mr. Li made no reply. Bending his head to his cup, he sipped some wine. This suddenly reminded him of his young daughter and he heaved a deep sigh.

Old Mr. Chang obviously felt he had to say something to cheer his companion up. Perhaps he wanted to compensate Mr. Li for the many entertainments he had had at the other's expense, and at the same time fulfil his duty as a drinking companion. So he began to talk about the school and to impart its secrets with the most confidential air.

The people in the accounting office were experts in making money on the side. They always deducted the income tax from the salary and gave stamps instead of cash for the small change. In this way, they were lining their own pockets. . . .

"Let me tell you, Mr. Li." He moved so close that his bad breath nearly suffocated Mr. Li. "Next time you go to get your salary, have the amount for income tax ready and give it to them. Then you will get a round sum. That's what I always do. I don't want their stamps."

He paused and thought for a while. Then he drew even closer. Mr. Li had to lean back just to be a little farther away from this old man's face.

"Principal Pan used to have great confidence in me. But recently he has surrounded himself with a group of scoundrels. Mr. Chen is one of them. Do you know him? Mr. Li, let me warn you. You must be careful. He is a reactionary, that Mr. Chen."

He closed his mouth tightly and nodded significantly, repeating:

"Re-ac-tion-a-ry."

Mr. Li considered all these so-called secrets as involving other people's personal affairs and never mentioned them to anyone else.

"Oh, how monotonous it all is!" he complained. Why did he have so few friends? Why must he seek this old man's company as he had sought Old Pan's before? Why always the same dish?

His drinking with old Mr. Chang for companion grew into an unavoidable obligation to himself which he had to fulfil.

And this obligation added to his financial burden. He was the host every time he went out with Mr. Chang. He had come to the school with some four hundred dollars in his pocket. Now over a hundred were gone. If he went out with Old Pan he could save some money, for Old Pan insisted on paying for both of them.

"Let me pay," Old Pan always said. "You are harder up than I am."

This Saturday evening, asking nobody to go with him, Mr. Li had one catty and a half of wine in a small restaurant all by himself. When he returned to the school, he went straight to his own room and bolted the door.

The light shed by the blue bulb mixed with the lemon colour of the walls to give the room a tint of pale green. Somewhere in the distance a night-watchman was beating his bamboo. Every stroke seemed to fall on Mr. Li's heart. He fancied he could hear the watchman's steps echoing from the long, dark lane. . . .

As usual, Mr. Li lay down and smoked. Recently a few cups of wine had been making him sensitive and irritable. He no longer reached that stage of elation he used to at home after drinking. Something was now gently prickling in him all the way from his heart to his nose. He longed to roll on the ground, clutch something in his arms and cry till he would feel better.

Formerly he had made friends with only a few people who shared his interests. He had never helped anybody, and there had never been an occasion that made him ask others to help him. Loneliness, something that used to be unimaginable, now stabbed at him with excruciating pain.

"Except for Old Pan who is a warm-hearted person and willing to lend a hand, I have no friend at all," he muttered sadly. "I don't get along well with other people."

He became rather remorseful when he remembered how aloof and haughty his own attitude had been when he played the part of a "pure artist." But . . . oh, how could he foresee then that this war would break out? Now, he and his family did not get along well even with their nearest relatives, his in-laws.

He got up, unlocked his small leather suitcase and took out the express letter he had received from his wife that day. Always the same remarks, the same complaints! She even warned him that she might get seriously ill if she had to stay with her family any longer.

Mr. Li bit his lower lip. His bloodshot eyes fixed on the window for a while. Then he crumpled up the letter into a ball and threw it on the floor with force.

"Why complain to me like this? As though I were to blame for all her troubles!"

The cigarette in his hand dropped to the floor. When he bent down to pick it up, he picked up the paper ball at the same time. He had con-

cluded that their not getting along well with relatives and friends was chiefly due to his wife's stinginess. He remembered how severely she had treated the tenants on his land every year when she collected the rent. He also remembered how one of his old classmates had asked him for the loan of ten dollars and how his wife would not allow it. At that time, the reasons she gave him had seemed adequate, though.

"To help friends is the proper thing to do," she said. "But your help often becomes an obligation instead of a favour if you extend it many times. And if once, for some reason, you can't do as the friends ask you to, he will bear you a grudge; therefore it is much better for friends not to lend money to each other. Anyway, we have enough to live on. So it is unlikely we shall ever have to borrow from anybody."

Formerly Mr. Li was very grateful to his wife for being so shrewd. Sometimes he had even helped her in her calculations and offered suggestions. But now he considered his wife alone was to blame for the difficult position in which he found himself.

He sat down and began a reply to her. With the brush Old Pan had given him as a present, he wrote very slowly in the manner of the calligrapher Li Pei-hai, choosing his words as carefully as when he wrote essays, smoking one cigarette after another meanwhile. He told his wife that he himself was leading a very hard life, but that everyone should be patient at this time when the war of resistance was being fought.

"I have repeatedly asked you to be patient. I'm asking you again to be patient."

He sighed and took another whiff. The smoke from the cigarette in his hand made him knit his eyebrows slightly while he continued to write. He said that all the members of his wife's family were vulgar and grasping, and had nothing but their own interests at heart. Since he was afraid that one of his in-laws might open the letter, he wrote on the envelope, "Anyone who opens this letter without permission is a brute" and put an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. But after a while he thought the mark too evident a sign of bad temper and blotted it out again.

That night he slept worse than usual. Again and again the two questions nagged at him:

"When will this war come to an end? How can victory be brought about more quickly?"

He tossed and turned. The old mattress on his bed was very hard and made him uncomfortable. He turned again. He found it too hot to keep his arms under the cotton quilt, but too cold to put them outside. His head was burning. He felt dizzy. He had thought he could find the correct answers by following a straight line of reasoning, but now this line seemed to be clogged up with a disorderly lot of things.

Suddenly he remembered Washington Irving's story of Rip Van Winkle. Oh, if only he, Mr. Li, could fall into such a sleep . . . for what

seemed a few minutes only . . . and then walk out of the cave when he woke up to find a happy China, a China with the hard struggles of fifty years behind her. . . .

Then he reproached himself: "This is too negative a way of thinking!"

Yes, he, too, ought to contribute some of his own strength. He ought to take part in this hard struggle, so that China could be liberated more quickly. Then he thought of Aladdin's lamp. If he had that, all he would have to do was to rub the lamp and an omnipotent genie would be at his disposal. . . . After a while, some other beautiful fairy tales came to his mind. An angel might grant him three wishes. He tried to put his confused thoughts in order, to decide what these three wishes should be, wishes for positive things. . . .

It was already ten o'clock in the morning when he woke up. There was a bitter taste in his mouth. He remembered the wild fancies he had had the previous night and how they had kept him awake for a long time. He was bored by these reflections. He stretched, walked over to the calendar and tore off a sheet.

"Sunday again, alas!"

Little Mr. Chen had gone out early that morning, leaving a note asking Mr. Li to come to a meeting at one o'clock that afternoon to discuss something about the weekly magazine. A servant of the school handed the note to Mr. Li.

"Hm," he threw the slip of paper on his desk. "Business again, always business!"

Sunshine came through the window on the southern side, and shadows danced in his room. In the school garden, the twittering of the sparrows blended with the students' singing and shouting. How could they be so cheerful!

Mr. Li stayed in his room all alone, reading the newspaper and sipping his flavourless tea. He seemed to be angry with someone for something and unwilling to see anybody.

"The people in the occupied areas. . . . How do they live?" he asked himself.

Perhaps some were carrying on their business as usual, while others were cultivating their land as before. And if he had not left his native place, perhaps he could have collected the rent from his tenants as usual, could have painted pictures and carved seals as before. All these things had nothing to do with military actions and politics. So long as he expressed no anti-Japanese sentiments in his essays, he might not have been molested.

But then he sighed in despair, for he remembered the atrocities committed by the Japanese.

Only Peiping, he thought, seemed to have escaped this kind of fate. Peiping and Tientsin fell into the hands of the Japanese without a battle,

and so people could continue to live there peacefully. Some scholars who could not get used to life in the interior had gone back to Peiping.

Mr. Li sipped some more tea, frowned and read through the letter he had written the evening before. He decided not to post it, after all, and locked it into his suitcase.

"Why reproach her? She is miserable enough as it is! . . ."

Sitting on the hard chair hurt him. He lay down again on the bed. The ticking of the watch by his pillow seemed to beat against his brain so that he almost suspected the noise came from the throbbing of his own temples. Often he had tried to think of his wife's good points only when he was away from her, and now he did the same thing. He recollected how capable she was and how attentive to his comforts. If she could have seen the hard life he was leading. . . . Aya!

"Perhaps so-called enemy atrocities are not committed everywhere," he said to himself.

But then he paused, bewildered. What did he mean by these words? If his wife and daughter had remained in his native place. . . . He shivered.

He was hoping that the reports about enemy atrocities in occupied areas were exaggerated; yet he immediately corrected such a thought. If the enemy troops had behaved in a well-disciplined manner, perhaps the Chinese people would not have risen so resolutely to defend themselves.

"The guerillas are very active in my native place." He often had said that to Old Pan.

He lighted another cigarette and asked the servant to make him another potful of tea. Then he tried to compose his thoughts so they would not run wild. The idea flashed strangely through his mind:

"Perhaps I'd better go home and see? . . ."

It had been said the occupied areas remained peaceful and quiet at first. Atrocities were committed only later when guerillas had appeared and the Japanese were searching for them. . . . All this seemed to be true, but who set this kind of talk in motion?

When he remembered that old Mr. Chang had spoken of these things, he felt as if someone had suddenly hollowed out his whole inside. He was seized by a sudden emptiness and despair. He felt furious for no apparent reason. Like one who had been fooled, he lost his temper, and at the same time wanted to explain it away.

"Traitor! Traitor!" He tried very hard to bend the fingers of his hand which held the cigarette, as if he wanted to clench them into a fist but could not. "These kinds of ideas must be rooted out! I shall certainly report what he said at the meeting this afternoon and ask everybody to write articles against him! . . ."

He put out his cigarette carefully. Then he folded Mr. Chen's note twice over into a tiny square and stroked it with his finger.

White clouds were sailing across the sky. The sunlight now vanish-

ed from the room, now reappeared, and Mr. Li's face darkened and brightened, too, at intervals.

He rubbed his hands. He intended to write a short article and deal old Mr. Chang's ideas a telling blow; yet he did not take up his brush, and did not even begin to think out what he wanted to say because he suddenly felt that it was somehow not quite the thing for him to write such an article. Perhaps he felt this way because he had not written anything for a long time and might not put his thoughts as well as he should. Or perhaps it was just because he was in such a bad mood? No, probably it was because he feared people might discover from his article that the ideas he attacked were exactly those unconsciously he had adopted himself.

He took his handkerchief out of his sleeve, wiped his lips and sighed gloomily.

"Really, he who has too cool a head and too analytical a mind is often unhappy."

Yes, he had gone too far in analysing himself. He was not writing this article, so he tried to convince himself, simply because of the black mood he was in.

"Oh, what a rotten mood I'm in!" he repeated, firmly. "Unless I join the guerillas, there is no point in my going back to my native place. But I can't join the guerillas. Artists are useless. I can't help it."

He sighed in relief. And since he could not find a way out of this dilemma, he decided to take a stroll to the principal's office. He had to amuse himself somehow in order to while away the time. He could not stay in this rotten mood all day long.

But Old Pan was talking to a visitor, obviously a stranger, for the two of them faced each other very solemnly. Business again! Evidently they were discussing problems of war-time education.

When Mr. Li sauntered in, the formality in the air disconcerted him. He felt that his whole body congealed, and he was in despair.

"What am I here for?" And then he scolded himself. "They are discussing important matters. Did you have to break in like this? Do you mean to ask Old Pan again to go to have a drink with you? . . ."

He made a meaningless gesture to Old Pan, turned around and went out. He walked very fast but he didn't know where he was going. His quick steps sounded on the pebbly lane. His shadow quivered and jerked on the ground as if it had great difficulty to catch up with him.

It was no fun, really, to continue with Old Pan as a boon companion. He did not take a single drop and worried all the time that Mr. Li was drinking too much, probably because he was unwilling to spend that much money!

Mr. Li walked out of the gate of the school. He remembered his drinking alone the evening before and drew a deep breath, allowing his feet to move towards the house of his other drinking companion.

Some students walked towards him, in groups of threes and fives. They were probably coming back for lunch. Mr. Li lowered his head, pretending that he did not see them. Somehow he felt rather awkward. Something seemed to have a hold on him. What was it? Ah, yes! There was a meeting he should attend that afternoon.

He heard someone whispering and then a loud laugh. Startled, he turned back and looked. Two students had just entered the gate of the school.

"Hm, am I not allowed any freedom even on Sundays?" he thought, indignantly. "I just won't go to the meeting! Why should I take orders from that fellow Chen? . . . Let them say anything they like about me. I am not afraid. Quite frankly, I am not the man for trifle business. Every person has his own way of living. I have mine! After all, is it a crime to go and ask old Mr. Chang to drink a few cups of wine with me? Bah!"

And he quickened his steps.

Translated by Tso Cheng

New Poems

"Ashma," the Oldest Shani Ballad

Kueishan District of Lunan County, a remote region in Yunnan Province, is the home of the Shani folk—a branch of the Yi people, one of China's fraternal nationalities. A brave, hard-working people with high ideals, who have their own written and spoken language, they are a race of singers. All Shani lads know how to make a simple musical instrument out of bamboo, called a *mosheen*, by blowing on which they can produce beautiful melodies to express their love and longing. In this district which abounds in singers, one of the oldest songs and that most widely known is *Ashma*.

Ashma is a narrative poem of over four thousand lines. Through the portrayal of Ashma and Ahay, the true son and daughter of the toiling people, this ballad extols labour, courage, freedom and love, expressing the indomitable resistance to oppression, the passionate longing for freedom and happiness, and the optimism and confidence of the Shani people. It is not yet possible to state with certainty the exact date at which this poem took shape: all we know is that old folk who are seventy or eighty today heard this song when they were young from their elders. *Ashma* is, without doubt, a product of actual life. It probably started as a legend which, in the course of time, was set to music and sung, growing richer from generation to generation like a tinkling stream which finally becomes a mighty river. Today *Ashma* can be heard everywhere, whether on the hillsides where the peasants work or in the communal hostels* where the young folk make love. It is especially moving at a wedding to watch an old man squat on a stool to sing *Ashma* while the young folk listen quietly, sharing Ashma's sorrow and joy. Thus young women say: "Ashma's sorrow is the sorrow of all us Shani girls." For *Ashma* is a song from the heart of the Shani people.

The story of this long poem is a simple one. In Ajdee where the

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* From the age of twelve till the time of their marriage, Shani lads and lasses usually sleep away from home with friends of their own age. There are separate hostels or camps for girls and boys where they can go in the evening to sing, play the flute and some stringed instruments, and enjoy themselves as they please. These hostels are also the scenes of courtship.

Shani live were three plots of untilled land, three unoccupied rooms, three pools of clear water no man had tasted, and three thickets no man had walked through. This beautiful, quiet place was destined for true lovers: Klujnay and his wife were the happy couple who settled here; and here they had a son whom they named Ahay and a daughter whom they named Ashma. Ahay was industrious, brave, intelligent and gay, besides being a first-rate singer and hunter. Because he refused to give way to any difficulties, he was the hero of the other young men.

Ashma was even more of a favourite of fortune: from her very birth she gave the Shani people great joy. At five months she could crawl like a harrow on the ground; at seven months she could run as beautifully as a rolling ball of yarn. When she was six or seven, she started to help her mother by gathering wild herbs on the hillside, later learning to mow hay, tend sheep, sow seeds, spin and sew; and in everything she set her hand to she excelled.

Ashma grew to be so beautiful that her friends said:

Among ten thousand lovely flowers
Ashma is the best.

When she was seventeen, she took her *mosheen* to the young folks' camp where she began to learn the meaning of love; and there her clear singing drew all the young men round her. Ashma's parents were willing to let her choose her own sweetheart, and would not have interfered with her choice: but of all the young men who longed for her, which would she choose? "A working man for me!" said Ashma, and stipulated that her lover must be straight as the straightest tree, must dance more lightly than cotton floss, and must play the flute so well that birds would flock to hear him.

At the other end of Ajdee lived Rabubalore, whose family was so wicked that even ants dared not enter his gate. He was rich and powerful; but no matter how many flowers bloomed in his courtyard, no bees would go there. Rabubalore's son Adgy was as small and ugly as a monkey; but, like the toad which wanted to eat a swan, Rabubalore determined to win Ashma as his daughter-in-law; and with rich gifts and feasts he prevailed on a bad local official, Hajow, to go to Ashma's home to arrange the match. Hajow was as cunning as a weasel and as poisonous as a wasp. With a serpent's tongue and the glibness of a parrot, he dilated on Rabubalore's wealth to impress Klujnay and his wife; but Ashma's parents were unwilling to part with her. As for Ashma, she did not hesitate to refuse this shameless offer, declaring:

Though we are poor, no rich man's wife
Will I consent to be!

Clear water will not mix with foul;
I will not have his son!

Finally, high-handed Rabubalore ordered his underlings to sweep down on that happy and peaceful home to carry Ashma off by force.

Ashma's brother Ahay, who had taken his flute to herd his sheep far away, had a strange dream one night in which he saw his home flooded and a monstrous snake coiling in the yard. He hurried home to find out what had happened and, when he learned that his sister had been carried off three days before, he caught up his bow and arrows, leapt onto a swift steed and galloped off like lightning in pursuit of the kidnappers.

After Ashma was taken to Rabubalore's house, he and his son tried first to tempt her with gold and silver and then to intimidate her with threats and blows; but to all their blandishments and threats she answered firmly:

Ninety-nine times I answer No!
Your son I will not wed!

So finally they locked her up in a dark dungeon, hoping by so doing to break the spirit of this lovely girl, the pride of the Shani people. Just then, however, Ahay, who had crossed many mountains and streams, arrived at Rabubalore's door. He shouted Ashma's name, in a voice like an earthquake, louder than thunder; and his cry not only aroused the whole of Rabubalore's household, but penetrated into the damp, icy dungeon.

Rabubalore and his son Adgy immediately closed the big iron gate to keep Ahay out; then made him compete with them in singing, felling trees, sowing seeds and picking them up again, saying that only if he won would they let him in. In the end, when Rabubalore and his son were beaten, Ahay shot three arrows into their house which pierced the gate, the sacrificial table and the wall. The whole household was powerless to remove these arrows, and Rabubalore had to let Ashma out from the dark dungeon in order to beg her to pull the arrows out: thus Ashma was able to see her brother again.

Pretending, then, to be friendly, Rabubalore invited Ahay to spend the night with them, but that night let loose three tigers to kill him. Ahay, however, killed the tigers instead; and the next morning Rabubalore had to let him take Ashma away in triumph. Even then, these wicked bandits would not give up their evil design, for they invoked the water god to flood the road along which the brother and sister had to pass; and although Ahay eventually conquered the flood, Ashma was carried off by the raging water. Fortunately, on the cliff nearby there lived Skadulma, who had become an echo. Formerly a hard-working, beautiful girl like Ashma, she had run away from her cruel father and

mother-in-law to live on the cliff; and now, when she heard Ashma's cries of distress, she leapt into the stream to rescue her. Then bright, rosy clouds appeared in the sky, and the two girls emerged high on the cliff, like twin flowers on a single stem. Ashma was changed into an echo too; and whenever Ahay or her parents called her, she would answer them.

The striking and effectively portrayed figures of Ashma and Ahay stand magnificently before us; and these highly realistic characters, personifying as they do the goodness and fearlessness of the whole Shani people, possess incomparable vitality. Pouring into this poem their own thoughts and emotions, love and hate, experience and aspirations, the Shani people magnified all that was beautiful and lovable in the hero and heroine and gave a penetrating exposure of the cruelty, selfishness and cowardice of their oppressors. From the creation of this song and from its singing, the people have drawn strength to battle with their enemies; and there can be no doubt that at the conclusion of the ballad when Ashma is made to live on in peace above the lofty cliff, her clear voice and cheerful laughter echoing forever through the hills and woods, the Shani people in their bitter struggles expressed their passionate longing for freedom and happiness and affirmed their belief in victory.

This long ballad has a strongly lyrical flavour. Since it has grown out of songs describing the industry and courage of the Shani people, it has something of the grandeur of an epic; on the other hand, its plot, mode of expression and slightly elliptical style are reminiscent of a good folk-song, particularly in the opening and closing stanzas. Again, in addition to the magnificence of its broad delineations, *Ashma* contains many deft and penetrating touches, such as the following description of Ashma's feelings in the dark dungeon:

Why cannot I hear the winds that blow,
Or see the birds that fly?
Why cannot I feel the sun's warm rays,
Or see the moon on high?

O, what is that call beyond the wall?
Is it my parents dear?
Ah no, for when I listen well,
'Tis only the crickets I hear.

What are those steps beyond the wall?
Is it my friends so dear?
Ah no, for when I listen well,
'Tis only my heart I hear.

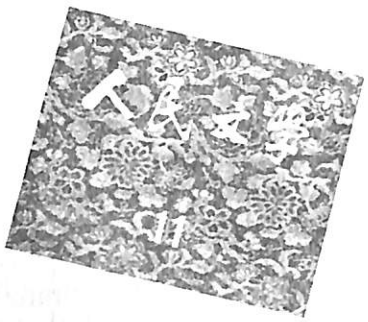
What is that flashing beyond the wall?
A flying charger bright?
Ah no, for when I look more close,
'Tis only two glowworms' light.

The poem contains many beautiful lines like these, which illustrate the splendid realism of popular art.

The language of *Ashma* is simple, beautiful and graphic. The poem depicts vividly the simplicity of the working people, their blameless love, their goodness and their indomitable courage. As a Chinese poet has said, *Ashma* is like a garden filled with all the bright colours and pungent odours of life; and these are rare and admirable qualities.

Originally *Ashma*, in spite of its popularity with the Shani people, possessed no written text. In 1953, however, literary workers in Yunnan Province sent a group to Kueishan District to take down all existing versions of this poem and to compile a standard text to be translated into Chinese. These literary workers mixed freely with the Shani people, living and working with them until they were able to share their thoughts and understand their customs and cultural tradition. After its translation into Chinese, *Ashma* was published first in the magazine *Southwest Literature* and then in *People's Literature*, where its appearance aroused widespread enthusiasm among both ordinary readers and writers, who hail this as yet another achievement in the discovery and editing of the fraternal peoples' literature. China possesses a rich, multi-national literature; and today, even as we develop creative writing, we are making every effort to discover and edit folk-songs, stories and ballads which will enrich our literature still further.

Introducing



"PEOPLE'S LITERATURE"

People's Literature, the monthly organ of the Chinese Writers' Union, was five years old last October.

When the All-China Association of Literary Workers, the predecessor of what is now the Chinese Writers' Union, was founded in 1949, it decided to publish this magazine to provide writers with a forum and an outlet for their creative activities. *People's Literature* reached the hands of its readers for the first time on October 25, 1949, barely a month after the People's Republic of China had been proclaimed.

The policy and tasks of the magazine are based on the programme of the Chinese Writers' Union. They are in keeping with the militant traditions of the revolutionary realist literature born after the May Fourth Movement in 1919, and with the literary guidance given in 1942 by Mao Tse-tung in his *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art.*

In its very first issue *People's Literature* carried the facsimile of a message in Chairman Mao Tse-tung's own handwriting: "For more and better literary works in future!" This not only showed how much concern the leader of our people shows for literature, but also indicated the aim of the magazine—to fight for the development and enrichment of literary creation.

People's Literature has won the support of writers throughout the country and has published many of their best works. Many of China's best-known writers and poets have at one time or another served with distinction on its editorial board. The present editor and assistant editor are the critic Shao Chuan-lin, and the short-story writer Yen Wen-ching.

The magazine is not merely enthusiastically read by a host of readers; they also show their abiding interest and support by frequent comments and criticisms on contents and presentation.

Because *People's Literature* enjoys the full support of writers and their organization, and broad masses of readers; because it has, in its five years' existence, carried out its tasks with success, it has been able to play a lively part in promoting a people's literature, and become an indispensable stimulus to our literary endeavours.

Most of the magazine is devoted to publication of creative writing in many forms and styles. The criterion applied to all original writing and literary criticism is general adherence to the principle of socialist realism.

Ever since the May Fourth Movement of 1919, when the progressive intellectual currents of the time became linked with the revolutionary movement of the rising Chinese proletariat, Chinese literature has been developing along this path, guided by working-class ways of thought. In 1942 at the Yenan forum on literature and art Mao Tse-tung specifically pointed out that the creative method of our working-class writers must be that of socialist realism. China's new literature was thus given an impetus towards further development.

Since the birth of New China changes in political and economic conditions have been tremendous. The socialist factor in people's lives is growing and exerting an ever greater influence. Our writers have, by careful study and long practice, laid a sound foundation for their acceptance of socialist realism. This makes it possible, and necessary, for us to regard socialist realism as the highest standard for our entire literary creation and criticism, and as the goal towards which we all must strive together.

While insisting on the principle of socialist realism in general, *People's Literature,* as an important vehicle for bringing writers together, extends a welcome to all works that will benefit the people. The magazine helps all forward-looking, truly patriotic writers to turn gradually to socialist realism in their creative endeavours. Every writer's life, experience, viewpoint and personal style are given due consideration. The magazine recognizes, and indeed welcomes, variety of style and form. It aims to help writers perfect their individual styles, by a process of mutual aid and emulation. The principle which Chairman Mao Tse-tung laid down for the reform of drama: "Let all flowers blossom in full glory," also guides efforts to develop literature in New China. It goes without saying, however, that while permitting its writers freedom of expression and friendly competition of styles on its pages *People's Literature* encourages and commends mature works which are ideologically sound and reflect real life adequately and fully.

Many writers took an active part in the armed revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people which led to the founding of the People's Republic. They thus got an intimate knowledge of the people and events of those years of struggle. It is only natural, therefore, that more books are written on the theme of the revolutionary war than on any other. For instance, Liu Pai-yu's *Flames Ahead,** published in the very first two issues of *People's Literature,* deals with the historic crossing of the Yangtse by the People's Liberation Army. It gives a vivid, detailed and

* English translation published by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking.

powerful portrayal of the commanders and men of the People's Liberation Army and their revolutionary heroism. The author, Liu Pai-yu, worked as a newspaper reporter with the people's armed forces throughout the War of Liberation, and he has written a number of features and short stories about it in addition to *Flames Ahead.*

People's Literature also published "The Battle at Shachiatien," the most exciting part of the novel *Wall of Bronze* by Liu Ching.* Here the author realistically describes one phase in the People's War of Liberation through the work at a grain depot supporting the front. The book shows the armed forces and the people of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region working as one under the leadership of the Communist Party and Chairman Mao Tse-tung, and thus winning through to victory despite heavy odds. Not only well-established writers like Liu Pai-yu and Liu Ching have written books around the War of Liberation. Many young writers have also turned out fine books on the same theme. For instance, the chapter "Fighting Along the Great Wall" from the novel *Defence of Yenan* by Tu Peng-chen, the story about the soldier *Yin Ching-chun* by Han Feng** and the play *Steeled in Battle* by Hu Ko stand out, and have won wide acclaim. *Steeled in Battle* has been successfully staged not only in many parts of China, but also in the Soviet Union, in Korea, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

When the war in Korea forced the Chinese people to launch their campaign to resist American aggression and aid Korea, to defend their country and safeguard world peace, the heroic exploits of the Chinese People's Volunteers and the whole nation in this mighty struggle fired the imagination of writers. The novel *A Thousand Long Miles* by the well-known writer Yang Suo, which appeared in instalments in *People's Literature* towards the end of 1952, is one of the best. The story tells of a corps of Chinese railwaymen who went to Korea and showed in deeds the deep friendship which binds the people of China and Korea, the love the Chinese working class have for their country, and how well they understand the need to defend peace and justice. The novel shows, too, that this deep love of country, this international brotherhood, are shared by every one of the Chinese People's Volunteers.

A great many short stories, features and poems have been written on the theme of the Korean war. A good example is the story *Comrade Huang Wen-yuan* by the veteran writer Pa Chin*** which describes an ordinary young Chinese fighter in all his glory. Stories like the young writer Hai Mo's *Breaking Through at the 38th Parallel, The Icy Chan*

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* English translation published by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking.

** For English translation see *Registration and Other Stories,* published by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking.

*** For English translation see *Living Amongst Heroes,* published by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking.

*River** by Ching Ni, and poems by Tien Chien and Yen Cheng, because they mirror this mighty struggle from different angles, are eagerly read and applauded by the reading public.

A good deal of space is given by *People's Literature* to writing which reflects the life of New China in all its aspects.

World-shaking changes have occurred in five short years. The Chinese people have carried out a series of far-reaching social reforms, tearing out the economic roots of feudalism and imperialism, and overcoming the ideology of reaction. The great advances China has made in socialist industrialization and transformation of the country—are banishing forever the poverty and backwardness which darkened the life of old China. The people of New China are engaged in new creative tasks, building a happy, splendid life of peace and socialism.

These new realities constantly inspire our writers. It is their honour and glory to portray these epoch-making changes, the great achievements of our people in building their country, their ever-new life, and the struggle between what is new and progressive and what is backward and reactionary. A brief review of past issues of *People's Literature* will show that our writers have increasingly availed themselves of the privilege of choosing themes from this rich panorama.

Village Vignettes by Chin Chao-yang** are stories written in a fresh and vivid style, that sing the praises of the growth and triumph of this new life, these new ways of thinking in China's villages. One of our young writers, Shih Kuo, in his short story of a marriage, *Tempest*, realistically portrays the sharp conflict between old and new going on in the countryside. Other tales, like *Not That Road* by another young writer, Li Chun;*** *Night at Huangnikang*** and *New Year Holiday* by Lo Pin-chi; *Sister Chun* by Liu Chen; *Uncle Chao, the Stockman* by Ma Feng,***** and the film scenario *Rich Harvest* by Sun Chien, have in their different ways successfully described the changed rural life, revealed the struggle with outworn ideas which the peasants go through in advancing towards co-operative forms of farming, and extolled the new heroes coming to the fore in China's villages.

Every day too, more works are appearing which reflect the life and strivings of our working class. *Li Lo-ying*,****** by the well-known woman writer Ting Ling, tells of an old man of peasant stock, who starts life as a shepherd boy, fought in several wars, and ends up by working on one of China's great water conservancy projects. The story tellingly reveals how his outlook and ideas gradually change, and shows his deep

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* For English translation see *Racing Towards Victory*, published by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking.

** See *Chinese Literature* No. 1, 1954.

*** For English translation see *People's China* No. 6, 1954.

**** See *Chinese Literature* No. 3, 1954.

***** See *Chinese Literature* No. 4, 1954.

****** See *People's China* No. 1, 1954.

love for life and firm confidence in an ever brighter and better future. The film scenario *Three Years* by another woman writer, Ko Chin, describes how workers in a private enterprise in China today wage a determined struggle against the illegal practices which the capitalist owners engage in to the detriment of the people's state. Ai Wu's *A New Home** and *Return at Night,* two short stories written in this veteran writer's distinctive style, are succinct glimpses of life through which the author succeeds in expressing his admiration for the ways of the younger generation. Li Jo-ping's *North Shensi Sketches*** and *At the Foot of the Chilien Mountain* reflect one important aspect of our national construction—the work of geological survey teams.

In his four-act play *Test,* the playwright Hsia Yen shows one aspect of the conflict of ideologies which inevitably occurs in the course of China's industrial construction. The author takes as his hero the new type of industrial leader who is modest enough to learn from others, who keeps in close touch with the workers under him and is always ready to back new, progressive ideas with all his authority. The "villain" of the piece is another administrator in the same enterprise whose arrogance, smugness and individualistic ways are completely out of place in the new China.

There have also been successful poems and songs on all these themes. *People's Literature* has proudly carried many of them which are rich in realistic detail and show a wide variety of form and style.

Our writers have indeed expressed their response to the world about them more readily in verse and song than in any other literary form. And the emotion they most frequently express is one shared by the whole people in our own time—love for their country.

Yuan Chang-ching's *Water in the Chang River* and Chang Chin-min's *General and His Steed,* and other patriotic poems by contemporary poets like Ai Ching, Tien Chien, Li Chi and Yuan Shui-pai, have all received a warm response from their readers.

Love for one's country and readiness to defend it are inseparable from the defence of world peace. This fact is well understood by Chinese poets and many of their poems deal with the struggle for a peaceful world.

Among the poems and songs printed in *People's Literature* in these five years are Ai Ching's *Jewelled Red Star* and other poems which sing of the Soviet Union as the bulwark of world peace. There are poems by Tien Chien and Yen Chen about heroes fighting for peace on the Korean battlefield. There are poems about the new construction going on all over China, which make us feel the Chinese people's ardent love for peace, their courage and confidence in the ultimate outcome of the struggle for peace. Our poets constantly sing the praises of peace and friendship,

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* See *People's China* No. 2, 1954.
** See *Chinese Literature* No. 2, 1954.

and vigorously express their detestation of aggressive war. In his epic poem of nearly five hundred lines, *The Strongest Note for Peace,* the young poet Shih Fang-yu says, in praise of the power of peace:

We are the common people but not
to be bullied because our name
happens to be "the people";
we are of all those in our world
the great majority; and in all the world
our voice strikes the strongest note; we do not
have to beg them: Give us peace; we can command them
not to start their wars.

Tien Chien's *I Am a Singer of Peace* has this to say about the people's fervent hope:

On land and sea, our law and faith are: Peace.
The doves of peace, carved into rocks and cliffs,
Turn mountains into galleries of art.

Because China is a state with many nationalities within her borders, and because each nationality has its own traditions and culture, a magazine like *People's Literature* has a duty not only to introduce its readers to the best in the literature of each and every one of the nationalities, but also to encourage their development and growth.

During the years of reactionary rule, national minorities in China were discriminated against and oppressed in many ways—politically, economically and culturally. Only when the new China came into being did the national minorities win complete emancipation, did their rich treasures of literature begin to be discovered.

People's Literature has published two outstanding narrative poems from two of the national minorities. *Gada Mirin,* which has been popular for generations, tells the story of a national hero of the Mongolian people. *Ashma* is sung by the Shani people of Yunnan Province about the heroic exploits of two brave and resourceful young people in their unyielding fight against feudal forces. Like many other products of folk art, these works are the collective creation of the people.

People's Literature also fosters literary creation by individual writers belonging to the national minorities who are trying to picture the new life of their people. *On the Kholchin Grasslands** is a short novel by the young Mongolian writer Malchinhu about the life and struggle of his people against Kuomintang saboteurs. The appearance of writers like Malchinhu is a milestone in the literary development of the Chinese national minorities. The publication of stories and poems like these does much to foster the study and development of the literature of China's brother nationalities.

* See *Registration and Other Stories.*

Although *People's Literature* concerns itself chiefly with creative writing, in every issue it gives space to literary criticism. To help both writers and readers get to know the best in China's classical literature, the magazine makes a special study of works like *Dream of the Red Chamber, Water Margin, Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Pilgrimage to the West,* and *The Lives of the Scholars.**

The magazine also plays an important role in introducing the progressive literature of other countries to Chinese readers. From the start it published representative selections from the revolutionary literature and theoretical articles from the Soviet Union, the People's Democracies, and other countries.

Thus Chinese readers have been given the chance of reading contemporary poets and writers like Pablo Neruda, Nazim Hikmet, Louis Aragon, Jorge Amado, Albert Maltz, Sunao Tokunaga, Paul Eluard, Krishan Chandar, Zo Ki Chun, Orlin Orlinov, Zsigmond Moricz and Francis Charles Weiskopf, as well as the classics of world literature.

The Chinese people appreciate these works from foreign lands as much as they do their own. The writings of outstanding Soviet writers have been an important medium for Chinese writers and readers alike to come to understand the Soviet Union. They have learnt a great deal about the art of writing from Soviet literature.

The emergence of so many new writers is a happy augury for China's literature. *People's Literature* gives these new writers full rein, as the impressive list of new authors mentioned in this article shows. Although they are just beginning to write, they show great promise. To help them attain stature and maturity is one of the most important tasks of the magazine.

Throughout these five years, *People's Literature* has improved in quality and grown in popularity. It now enjoys the largest circulation of any literary magazine in China. Its readers are not confined to a limited number of writers and intellectuals, but include large numbers of workers, peasants, soldiers, government workers and students all over the country.

The new and exciting life of China today makes new demands on this young literary magazine. It seeks to mirror more intensively and more extensively what is actually happening in the life of New China, to be more critical, more militant. It seeks in this period of transition to socialism to continue to inspire the people with enthusiasm for the construction of their country, that great task in which they are privileged to participate. It seeks through literary delineation of the new man and woman to raise the political consciousness of its readers, so that they will be able to work still better for the good of all.

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* For excerpts from *The Lives of the Scholars* see *Chinese Literature* No. 4, 1954.

Cultural Events

Conference of Translators

In August 1954 a national conference of people doing translation work, sponsored by the Chinese Writers' Union, was held in Peking. Among the 102 people present were Tsao Ching-hua, a translator who has for over thirty years devoted his life to introducing Russian and Soviet literature; Ko Pao-chuan, translator of a collection of Pushkin's poems; Kuo Mo-jo, translator of Goethe's *Faust;* Professor Lo Nien-sheng, translator of the Greek classics, *Prometheus* and *Medea;* and Na Hsun, translator of *The Thousand and One Nights.* Every translator present was a specialist in his own field. There were translators from the Russian, English, French, German, Japanese and Spanish, and also experts in Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and Arabic.

The introduction of foreign literature to China in translation made a tremendous impact on Chinese writers and inspired a new growth of our own literature. After our new literary movement, which started with the May 4th Movement in 1919, many a work took shape by drawing on the rich store of realist, democratic and socialist ideas embodied in modern world literature. That is why the People's Government has always attached great importance to and encouraged translation of literary works, a work which has been progressing rapidly during the past five years.

Available statistics show that 2,151 translated literary works were published between October 1949 and December 1953. No title had a print of less than thirty or forty thousand, and in some cases the print ran into a million. In 1953, *I Wen* (Translations), a monthly magazine published by the Chinese Writers' Union for the purpose of introducing world literature, made its first appearance. At the beginning of 1954, twelve volumes of Shakespeare's Collected Works, thirty-one in all, were published separately. The whole short life of the translator Chu Sheng-hao—he died at 32—was a struggle against grinding poverty and illness. During the period of Kuomintang rule no attention was paid to his translations. But today, ten years after his death, edited and published by the Writers' Press, they have been warmly and enthusiastically welcomed by the reading public everywhere. Articles on Chu Sheng-hao and his devoted work published in the newspapers and reviews have aroused widespread interest and sincere respect.

During the translators' conference, Mao Tun, Chairman of the Chinese Writers' Union, referred to the long history and glorious tradition of translation work in our country. Brilliant translations of Buddhist scriptures were made as early as the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A. D.). Translation of modern foreign literature started towards the end of the 19th century, when Lin Shu's translation of Dumas' *La Dame aux Camellias* was printed in wood block form in 1889. But at that time, generally speaking, translations did not attain a very high standard. It was not until after the May 4th Movement that serious and conscientious work, led by Lu Hsun, the pioneer and mentor of China's new literary movement, was undertaken to introduce world literature. Since then, outstanding foreign works have been constantly introduced to Chinese readers in large numbers.

At this conference, translators of world literature throughout China met for the first time and exchanged information on their experience. At the same time, group discussion helped all of them understand better how important literary translation work is in the development of China's new culture and in the promotion

of cultural intercourse between nations. Everyone felt that now, when a vast amount of work in industry and education has been set afoot in an organized, planned fashion, it was high time that translation of literary works, too, should be carried out in a far more systematic way. The conference, therefore, bearing in mind the needs of our country, thoroughly discussed a plan to introduce famous world literature. This plan lists over seven hundred outstanding works, from ancient Greek, Roman, Indian and Egyptian classics down to works of the world's leading writers of the early 20th century. A separate plan will deal with works of contemporary writers.

To introduce famous world literature to the Chinese is no easy task. The translators attending the conference spent much time in discussing how the quality of translation could be improved. They were unanimous in their conviction that in translating literary works, the job of translators was to convey, accurately and faithfully, the content and spirit of the original, striving to reproduce the style of the original by the use of appropriate literary language, so that in reading translations readers will be as greatly inspired, as deeply moved, and receive as much aesthetic satisfaction as if they were reading the original.

The holding of this conference shows how keen the Chinese people are to make every possible effort to understand the life, customs, thoughts and feelings of people in other parts of the world. They respect the cultural glories of other nations. They wish to assimilate the best of other peoples' cultural traditions in order to enrich their own new culture. And furthermore, they hope through the works of the great writers of the world to strengthen the ties of friendship with the peoples of all lands.

Classics for Everyman

"We must properly edit and systematically publish Chinese classics of a popular nature, as well as all worthwhile and sound research work on these classics and their writers." This was one of the important tasks outlined by Chou Yang, Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Writers' Union and China's outstanding literary critic, at the second (1953) all-China conference of writers and artists. To make available and assess the best traditions of China's classical literature is an essential step to the creation of China's new culture.

At the end of 1952, the People's Literary Press brought out a popular edition, containing seventy-one chapters, of *Water Margin* by Shih Nai-an, a classical writer. This novel is outstanding in our national literary heritage for its strongly popular character. It has as its theme the peasant uprising. In it the author incorporates pen portraits of one hundred and eight popular heroes, skilfully suggesting the character of each as an individual and at the same time showing the part they played together against the general historical background. For centuries different editions of this novel were eagerly read by the masses. Before the present edition was printed experts working for the People's Literary Press referred to various earlier editions, systematically collating the texts, eliminating the many errors which had crept into the manuscript, and restoring the novel to its original form. How successfully they performed this task is evidenced by a flood of congratulatory letters from readers. The consensus of opinion was that: this edition of *Water Margin*, lovingly edited and restored, is a more perfect edition of the novel than any we have ever read.

To meet the needs of people engaged in literary research, there was also published a complete edition of the novel. This contains 120 chapters, some of which were added by later writers.

In 1953, the Writers' Press edited and published the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by Lo Kuan-chung, a writer of the fourteenth century, and the *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Tsao

Hsueh-chin (1723-1763 A.D.); both masterpieces among the classical novels. The former recounts traditional tales from the history of the Three Kingdoms (220-280 A.D.), while the latter, telling of the rise and fall of a great feudal family in the 18th century, through the theme of a tragedy of frustrated love exposes the decadence of the feudal aristocracy.

Last year, too, the Writers' Press published the *Pilgrimage to the West*, which is a great fairy tale and allegory, by Wu Cheng-en of the Ming Dynasty. The author collected and embodied in one story various versions of legends about the trip of the Tang monk, Hsuan Chuang, to India in search of Buddhist scriptures. These legends were very popular among the people from the Tang to the Ming Dynasty. This is the well-loved fairy tale of Sun Wu-kung, the monkey who dared to challenge the powerful realm of the gods and manifested such undaunted courage, ingenuity and optimism. It is pervaded by the rich imagination, the earthy wisdom and dreams of the working people, besides being a satire on the absurdities of the society in which they lived.

Another publication was a *Selection of Ballads and Poems* compiled and edited by Professor Yu Kuan-ying. It is mainly composed of folk songs of the Han Dynasty to the epoch of division between North and South (covering the period from 206 B.C. to 581 A.D.). The book of the well-known opera, *The Western Chamber*, by Wang Shih-fu, a writer of the Ming Dynasty, was also published after some re-editing. Other reprints were *The Lives of the Scholars*, by Wu Ching-tze, and *Tales from a Chinese Studio*, by Pu Sung-ling, both writers of the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.), and the selected works of our great poets of old, Li Po and Tu Fu. These new editions of famous classics were all published with detailed annotations and brief notes on the authors.

Since these new editions of the classics were printed, the publishing houses have received many letters from readers asking them to publish special works of research on these classics as well as biographies of famous writers throughout the ages. Those engaged in literature and publishing are now striving to meet this request. Works already in preparation are an annotated selection from *The Book of Songs*, *A Study of the "Water Margin,"* *The Evolution of the "Water Margin,"* *A Study of Li Po*, *Biography of Hsin Chi-chi*, a well-known poet of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), and other works. The editing, annotation, research into and publication of the best of China's classical literature is an arduous, detailed, and complex task, but it has already been given a flying start in New China.

Writing for the Children

On their holidays the children of Peking, besides going to parks and recreational centres, love to visit the libraries and bookshops, because there they always find reading material written specially for them. In the children's department of the Hsinhua Bookshop on a Sunday or any other holiday one can always find at least fifty to sixty school children and students poring over the books and magazines. Among all the crowded shelves the most popular corner is the shelf of prize winning children's books written during the past four years.

Here are displayed works which won prizes in the recent contest for the best children's literature. Their subject-matter, language, illustrations, and lay-out are all designed to one end—to please and educate young readers. As a result, they have become the best loved of all children's books. *How Lo Wen-ying Became a Young Pioneer*, winner of a first prize, is one of the latest works of veteran writer Chang Tien-yi. Its hero, Lo Wen-ying, is a schoolboy who, as is

not so very uncommon, was far too fond of wasting time and playing about, so that he was always at the bottom of the class. We read how his schoolmates put their heads together and did their best to help him, how he gradually learnt to overcome his shortcomings and was finally accepted as a member of the Young Pioneers. It is a simple, original and vivid story. In a very short time, Lo Wen-ying has become a character familiar to millions of Chinese children.

Our Mother Earth, by Kao Shih-chi, was also a prize winner. Kao is a scientist who, while carrying out research on bacteria, became paralyzed as a result of an accidental infection of his higher nervous centre. But he did not abandon the work he dearly loved. He now writes short and simple stories about science in a language that children easily understand. The children of New China love Kao Shih-chi and his books.

Lu Hsun and His Boyhood Friends, by Feng Hsueh-feng, an outstanding literary critic, is a story dealing with the childhood of our great writer Lu Hsun and the close touch he kept with the working people of China.

The Travels of the Little Swallows by Chin Chao-yang, a young writer, is a book which, telling of the travels of two little swallows all over China, sings the praises of our beautiful motherland and teaches children to be dauntless in overcoming difficulties. *Commander Yang's Young Pioneers*, by Kuo Hsu, is a story dealing with a group of young orphans in the forests of Northeast China who helped the guerrilla fighters against the Japanese invaders during the occupation. This book takes children back into the past and enables them, while reading an exciting tale, to realize that the happiness they enjoy today has not been easily won.

All these books were first-prize winners in a nation-wide contest for the best works of literature and art for children, as a result of which 46 works of literature, art and music were chosen from over 420 entries.

Throughout the long history of China, children's needs were never properly catered for. In the old days, children of the rich were made to recite poems and prose which were above their heads, while children of working people had to sweat for a living from a tender age. China's new children's literature goes back only about thirty years. In 1922, Yeh Sheng-tao in his story, *The Scarecrow*, described the hardships of village life as seen through the eyes of a straw man standing beside the fields. It was the first children's book which not only told a good tale but also conveyed worthwhile lessons. Following in his footsteps, writers Ping Hsin, Lao Sheh, Pa Chin, Mao Tun and Chang Tien-yi all started writing books specially for children. But in the old society no proper attention was paid to these works. The old, mystic, weird and often cruel stories continued to hold the field. It was only after the liberation that the situation changed completely. The government attached great importance to books for children and encouraged writers to devote their talents to writing for the younger generation. According to available statistics, between 1950 to 1952 alone more than 2,300 children's books with a total print of 41,600,000 appeared.

One-act Plays

Last year the monthly magazine, *Drama*, run jointly by the Playwrights' Union and the Ministry of Culture, ran a competition for new one-act plays. It was highly successful. No less than 667 entries were submitted, nine out of every ten of them by amateurs.

Why this sudden demand for one-act plays? Why the extraordinary interest?

The Chinese drama, with its rich heritage, was given new life after liberation. More than one hundred thousand amateur dramatic troupes have been organized among the workers and peasants

throughout the country. As mass dramatic activities grow in popularity, dramatic workers were faced with the urgent task of producing short plays, particularly up-to-date plays which reflect and comment on the rapidly changing life of China today. The competition was to encourage playwrights, both established and amateur, to extend the repertoire rapidly in order to meet the popular demand.

Nine plays were awarded prizes, and it is no accident that all of them, despite differences in treatment, centre round the dynamic new life of present-day China with all its growing pains, its aspirations and achievements.

The first-prize winning play was *The Woman Delegate* by Sun Yu. Superficially it is the old story of conflict between husband, wife and mother-in-law, but the real conflict is between the old feudal ideas in the Chinese countryside and the new life of today. The woman deputy is Chang Kui-yung, who on the strength of her record is elected local deputy, to the vast annoyance of her husband and his mother, who still hold very strong ideas about "woman's place." They do their utmost to impede her activities, but all in vain. Finally the husband swears he will turn her out of doors, but is flabbergasted when Chang Kui-yung gathers together her worldly goods, including the title-deed for the land she received in land reform, and prepares to take him at his word. It is only then that husband and mother-in-law really wake up to the fact that the old days of women's servitude are a thing of the past, and they all settle down, with Chang's help, to building the new society in which they can all "live happily ever after."

The play that won the second prize, *Quality First*, traces the growth of industry in New China through the story of an old worker and his insistence that quality comes first in building a factory, not dogma and red tape. Although the story itself is very simple, it is racy and convincing, and does present in dramatic form some of the fundamental problems that crop up in the course of industrializing China and building socialism.

Another prize winner is *The Meeting*. Its hero is a peasant leader in local government whose good intentions are spoilt because he is such a bumptious busy-body, "organizing" everything himself, knowing best about everything and taking nobody else into his confidence. When his half-baked plans to organize the peasants to meet a threatened drought come to grief it is high time for a showdown, which does everyone, including himself, a great deal of good. This play has been warmly received by literary and art circles, and not less by peasant audience, who knows such types from personal experience. The play is, in fact, a riotously funny dramatization of that process of criticism and self-criticism which smooths out all difficulties and makes the wheels go round in China today.

Other prize winning plays include *Man Goes Forward*, the theme of which is the two roads before the peasants: regression to capitalism or advance to socialism. *A Race with Floods* is a gripping drama showing how the people conquer the hazards of nature by team work and dogged fighting spirit. *Between Husband and Wife* trenchantly denounces the old idea that used to be prevalent among the working class that the husband is master and encourages women stay-at-homes to learn to read and take part in the life about them; while *She Who Stood Up*, an opera, depicts a peasant woman's resolute struggle against the feudal marriage system.

Paper-cuts

Recently the Chinese Artists' Union held a national exhibition of folk paper-cuts in the Palace Museum at Peking.

Paper-cuts are dearly loved by peasants all over China. They are generally prepared for use as window or wall designs. At the Spring Festival and other celebrations they are used to decorate lintels,

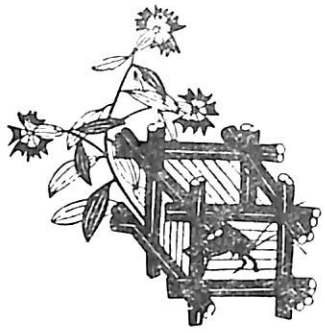
lanterns and other things, and are reckoned as symbols of happiness that brighten the home. They can also be used as patterns for embroidery.

The paper-cut, this exquisite form of folk art, is, for all its beauty, produced by the simplest means—sheets of paper and scissors or a sharp knife. Details of the method vary widely from district to district or according to the fancy of the artist, who is usually one of the women members of a peasant household. In their simplest form paper-cuts are made from a single sheet of coloured paper. For monochrome cuts a rich red is the most favoured colour. Sometimes cuts are made on papers of different colours which are then pasted together. In some cases extra tints are added later by hand, while in others the whole design is cut from white paper, and the whole subsequently coloured by hand.

As might be expected, typical paper-cut designs depict the things most familiar in peasant life: human figures, livestock, poultry, crops and flowers, birds, fish, crabs and insects, trees and houses. The peasant artists transcend the limitations of the medium by ingeniously blending conventionalized images and startling realism.

In China, in the North and Northwest particularly, the peasants have been making paper-cuts for centuries, but the old ruling classes and the intellectuals seldom or never condescended to notice them. It was not till 1940, when teachers and students of the Lu Hsun Academy of Art in Yenan began to draw attention to the intrinsic beauty of paper-cuts, that people outside the villages began to take an interest in them. Artists and students started combing the countryside for specimens, accumulating a wealth of different types and designs. Since then many others have gone to the villages to learn the art from the peasants themselves, and a great number of new designs have been worked out.

Since China was liberated, paper-cuts have been constantly collected and introduced to the public by cultural and educational bodies, artists and publishers. This has been a two-way process. Artists from the towns have learnt much from the peasants and enriched their own art, while the peasants have assimilated much from the towns and from other forms of decorative art.



Sound of Autumn **By Tsung Lin**

At the exhibition many hundreds of paper-cuts were shown, from many different provinces, displayed in such a way as to reveal the beauties and differences of the various forms. Those from Northwest China, for example, generally take simple forms and are rough and bold in execution, whereas those which come from south of the Yangtse are generally more delicate and subtle. Those from Northeast and North China fall midway between these extremes, and grace and neatness are their special feature.

A brief note on one or two of the most striking designs may be in place here. One paper-cut by Wang Lao-shang, a peasant from the province of Hopei, depicting typical characters from Chinese folk drama, vividly conveys the expressions and emotions of the characters. Another design entitled *Sound of Autumn*, by Tsung Lin from Shantung Province, shows a cicada cage and a spray of wistaria. *Forsaken Beauty*, by Pu Chiang from Chekiang, recalls the story of Wang Chao-chun, a lady-in-waiting at court in the Han Dynasty, whom the emperor forced to leave the country to marry a chieftain of the Huns.

The artist has depicted her grief with consummate skill. Another design, done by Chang Yung-shou from Kiangsu, showing chrysanthemums standing, lively and beautiful, in spite of frost, is dexterously cut in a style revealing modern influences.

Some of the cuts in the exhibition showed a marked departure from traditional designs. They reflect the many new trends in China today, the improvement in the peasants' standard of living, their increased political awareness and confidence in the happy life towards which all their efforts are directed. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the cuts depict ploughing with tractors, peasants learning to read and write, the alliance of workers and peasants, and so on. Because of this infusion of new ideas and sentiments, as a result of the collaboration between professional artists and peasants and the study and improvement of the art, an already rich art form is becoming even richer and more expressive.

A Beautiful Folk Tale on the Screen

A splendid rainbow and flowers in bloom,
A pair of butterflies flutter among the flowers,
For ever together, never to part,
Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai.

Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai, the lovely Chinese colour film which won a prize at the eighth international film festival held at Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia in 1954, is based on an old folk tale probably originating some time during the Eastern Chin Dynasty (around 400 A.D.). For centuries its hero and heroine, who fought for freedom of choice in marriage under the feudal system, have been loved by the people. Over and over again their tragic yet inspiring story has inspired writers, dramatists and musicians, and has been embodied in at least thirty different types of plays.

The film version is based on the form it takes in local Shaohsing opera, and the opening sequence shows the stage of a theatre about to produce it. The curtain slowly rises on a scene somewhere south of the Yangtse River over a thousand years ago. We move to the house of a lovely and talented girl, Chu Ying-tai, and her father. Chu is desperately anxious to go to the school and study. But the difficulties seem insuperable: in feudal society women were despised and schools for women unheard of. Finally she manages to get round her father and secure his consent. He agrees to let her dress as a man in order to attend school at Hangchow.

On her way she meets a handsome young man, Liang Shan-po, going to the same school. They are immediately attracted to each other and pledge sworn brotherhood.

For three years they study together. Liang never once suspects that his schoolmate is a girl, but Chu falls deeply in love with him. Then a blow falls. A letter from Chu's home demands her instant return. Before leaving she has a heart-to-heart talk with the schoolmaster's wife, who proves sympathetic. Chu asks her help in arranging their union.

Liang accompanies Chu part of the way home. Chu does her best to open Liang's eyes without actually disclosing her secret. She draws his attention to the birds, drawn together by the power of love; she comments pointedly on their close reflections in the water as they bend over a well . . . but Liang suspects nothing. He thinks she is being a little sentimental. Finally, just before they part, Chu thinks of a plan. She tells Liang that she has a younger sister, the very image of herself, and that she would like to arrange a match between them. With that they part, on the understanding that Liang shall visit her at an appointed time to claim her sister's hand.

Scene from "Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai"

When Liang gets back to school, he, too, has a talk with the schoolmaster's wife. Chu, she tells him, has no younger sister: she is a girl herself. Liang is overjoyed.

But when he presents himself at Chu's home he has a rude awakening. Chu Ying-tai is torn with sorrow. Her father has betrothed her, against her will, to the son of a rich and powerful local magnate. By all the standards of the time it is a splendid match, and despite Chu's pleadings and tears her father insists that the marriage shall take place. The two lovers bid one another a sad farewell. Since they cannot marry in life, they vow to be together to death.

Not long after, Liang Shan-po dies of a broken heart. Chu Ying-tai's wedding day comes, but she refuses to proceed to the bridegroom's home until she is allowed to dress in mourning and visit Liang's tomb. She throws herself down before it, weeping bitterly. A sudden storm arises. Lightning rends the tomb, and Chu throws herself into the gaping hole, and the tomb once more closes over her.

The storm passes as suddenly as it arose. A brilliant rainbow spans the sky. The sun shines from a clear sky. From the tomb emerge two butterflies—the transformed lovers—and sport happily among the flowers. Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai are united at last.

The film is directed by Sang Hu. The title roles are played by Yuan Hsueh-fen and Fan Jui-chuan, the most famous actresses in Shaohsing opera. (It should be noted that in this class of opera all roles are played by women.) The film brings to the screen all the features which have made Shaohsing opera so popular—its vivid characterisation, its splendid costumes and stage-craft, its delicate blend of song, dance and mime, perhaps even heightened by the closer impact of the screen and by a judicious shortening of the full-length opera.

The art director of the film is Professor Chang Kuang-yu of the Central Institute of Fine Arts, who has gone to enormous pains to reproduce the authentic architecture, drawings, costumes and embroidery of the period.

Four Great Men of World Art

In late November 1953 the World Peace Council, meeting in Vienna, passed a resolution to commemorate in 1954 four supremely gifted representatives of human culture whose anniversaries fell that year. So this year the Chinese people commemorated the 200th anniversary of the death of Henry Fielding, English realist writer; the 50th anniversary of the death of Antonin Dvorāk, Czechoslovak composer; the 50th anniversary of the death of Chekhov, Russian dramatist and writer of short stories; and the 2,400th anniversary of the birth of Aristophanes, the great comic dramatist of ancient Greece.

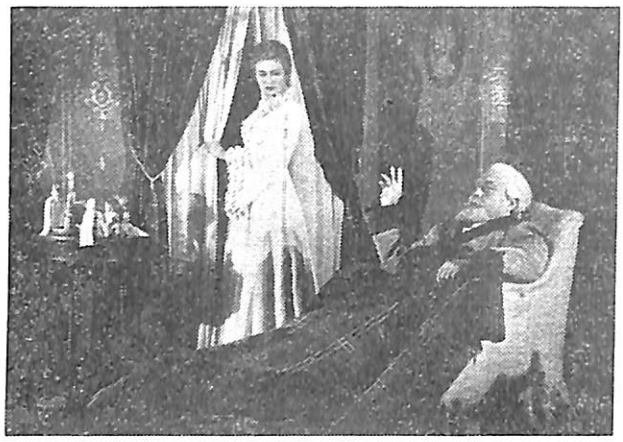
In the past six months every important newspaper and literary magazine in China has published articles on the life and work of these great men, making their names household words. In many cities public libraries organized exhibitions around them. Publishing houses issued their works and biographies in great numbers, and they enjoyed wide and instant popularity. In Peking, Shanghai and other large cities Chinese artists gave concerts of Dvorāk's music, and two plays of Chekhov, *The Proposal* and *Uncle Vanya*, have been playing to packed houses. The celebrations, in fact, came as a fitting climax to fifty years' endeavour to bring the achievements of these great men to the notice of the Chinese public.

Antonin Dvorāk died on May 1, 1904. On May Day this year, fifty years later, a great memorial meeting was held in Peking. It was sponsored jointly by the Chinese People's Committee for World Peace, the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, the Union of Chinese Musicians, and the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. In the course of the meeting, Ting Hsi-ling, Vice-President of the last-named body, said: "Dvorāk is a great Czech composer who loved his country and people. His brilliant works have not only enriched the musical heritage of the Czechoslovak people, but have become the common treasure of people throughout the world." He was followed by Ma Szu-tsung, famous violinist and Vice-Chairman of the Union of Chinese

The orchestra of the Central Song and Dance Ensemble performing Dvorāk's Fifth Symphony ("From the New World")

Musicians. After analysing Dvorāk's works and the ideas which inspired it, he remarked: "Dvorāk's love of country, his optimism, his democratic spirit, and the simplicity and vitality of his music have won the admiration of Chinese musicians. We must do our best to learn from him."

Chekhov was first introduced to the Chinese public in translation early this century. In 1907, three years after his death, a translation of his story *The Bishop* aroused wide interest. Since then translations of Chekhov's works have followed thick and fast. Lu Hsun, who laid the foundation of modern Chinese literature, and Chu Chiu-pai, another famous revolutionary writer, not only translated Chekhov but wrote many articles to give Chinese readers a better understanding of his merits. Chekhov's play, *Uncle Vanya*, was staged as early as 1930, and his comedy, *The Proposal*, always goes down well with Chinese audiences.



Scene from Chekhov's play "Uncle Vanya," presented by the Chinese Youth Art Theatre

At a meeting in Peking commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Chekhov's death, Mao Tun, Chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers, paid a moving tribute to a great man. "Today," he said, "as we pay tribute to Chekhov's memory, we must, first of all, learn from him his great ideals of democracy and real patriotism; learn to share his aversion to oppression, to enslavement, to the trivial and commonplace; his love for his country and people; his love of life and labour, and his whole-hearted devotion to the cause of the people. As writers we must learn from him the realism through which he so profoundly and tersely reflected the life of the society around him, from the strict demands he made on himself, and from his integrity as a creative artist."

Henry Fielding, the great British realist writer, is also well-known to the Chinese people. His *Joseph Andrews* and *Life of Mr. Johathan Wild the Great* and *A Journey from this World to the Next* have won great popularity among Chinese readers. At a meeting commemorating the 200th anniversary of his death, Lao Sheh, the famous Chinese novelist, pointed out that at the very start of his literary career Fielding realized that art must be built on a foundation of realism, that true art must have an educational value, and that it must penetrate deeply into life itself and serve the people.

Professor J. D. Bernal, famous British physicist, Vice-President of the World Peace Council and International Stalin Peace Prize winner, also spoke at this meeting. "We honour Fielding as a man," he said, "we should honour him for his writing, some of the clearest and most vigorous that has ever appeared in the English language; we should honour him particularly because, at the very beginning of the creation of that form of writing, the modern novel which was to be raised to such heights later by other writers like Balzac, Dickens, Gogol and Tolstoy, he established an essential humanity and outlook, and made it a vehicle for the liberation and progress of mankind."

Chinese literary circles also honoured the memory of Aristophanes, that towering representative of ancient Greek culture. The 2,400th anniversary of his birth was celebrated all over China. From his plays the Chinese people clearly perceive that he was an indomitable

fighter for peace. He sang the simple life of the industrious people of the villages, and ridiculed the corruption of city ways. He sang the praises of honest working men, and castigated incompetent and vicious demagogues. The comedies which he bequeathed to posterity over two thousand years ago remain a great inspiration to all who fight for peace the world over today.

Hung Shen, the famous Chinese theatrical director, and Tien Han, Chairman of the Union of Chinese Stage Artists, at a memorial meeting pointed out that Aristophanes was one of the first champions of peace in world literature. As a leader of progressive thought Aristophanes gave a great impetus to progress in Athenian society. Today his plays have a new significance. For while the Chinese people have a great respect and love for the democratic culture of ancient Greece, while they wish to carry on the militant tradition of Aristophanes in creative writing, they also want to learn from, and pay tribute to, his compatriots, the Greek people of today who are waging such a heroic struggle against the enemies of peace and democracy to bring to birth a newer, greater Greece.

Professor J. D. Bernal speaks on Henry Fielding at Peking

NEW PUBLICATIONS!

by CHOU LI-PO

The Hurricane (awarded a Stalin Prize, 1951) is the dramatic story of what happens in a village in Northeast China during and after the land reform. There are three or four hundred families in Yuanmao Village, yet most of the land is in the hands of three landlords, one of whom—Han Number Six—is particularly dreaded for his cruelty.

In 1946, after Yuanmao has been liberated, a work team arrives to help the peasants carry out land reform. We see how slow the villagers are to put their trust in the government workers and to unite against the landlords, yet how, once aroused, they sweep down on their enemies with all the force of a hurricane! Even after they receive land, however, their troubles are not over; for the power in the peasants' association passes into the hands of crooks who are in league with the landlords, and a further struggle is required to achieve real democracy in the village.

This is a richly human book, written by a man who understands the peasants and shares their humour. The chapters describing the landlords' attempts to corrupt the peasants and win over a weak-kneed villager are riotously funny. More significant are those describing the character and experiences of ordinary folk like the old carter Sun or the little swineherd Wu. Here is Pai, too, a loafer when we first meet him, whose pretty wife is always nagging at her shiftless husband. We see how their relationship is strained by the tremendous upheaval that land reform causes in their lives, but how they win through to mutual respect and happiness. We meet the poor peasants Chao and Kuo with their unassuming courage and selflessness. And through these and many other unforgettable characters we are able to understand something of the life won by hundreds of millions of peasants in China today.

Illustrated with woodcuts

by LI CHI

This is a long ballad about the love of two poor peasants during the Second Revolutionary Civil War in Northern Shensi. In the simple but lively form of Northern Shensi folk songs, this poem describes the crimes of the reactionary landlords and militarists, and the victory of the revolutionary workers and peasants.

Illustrated with colour plates

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