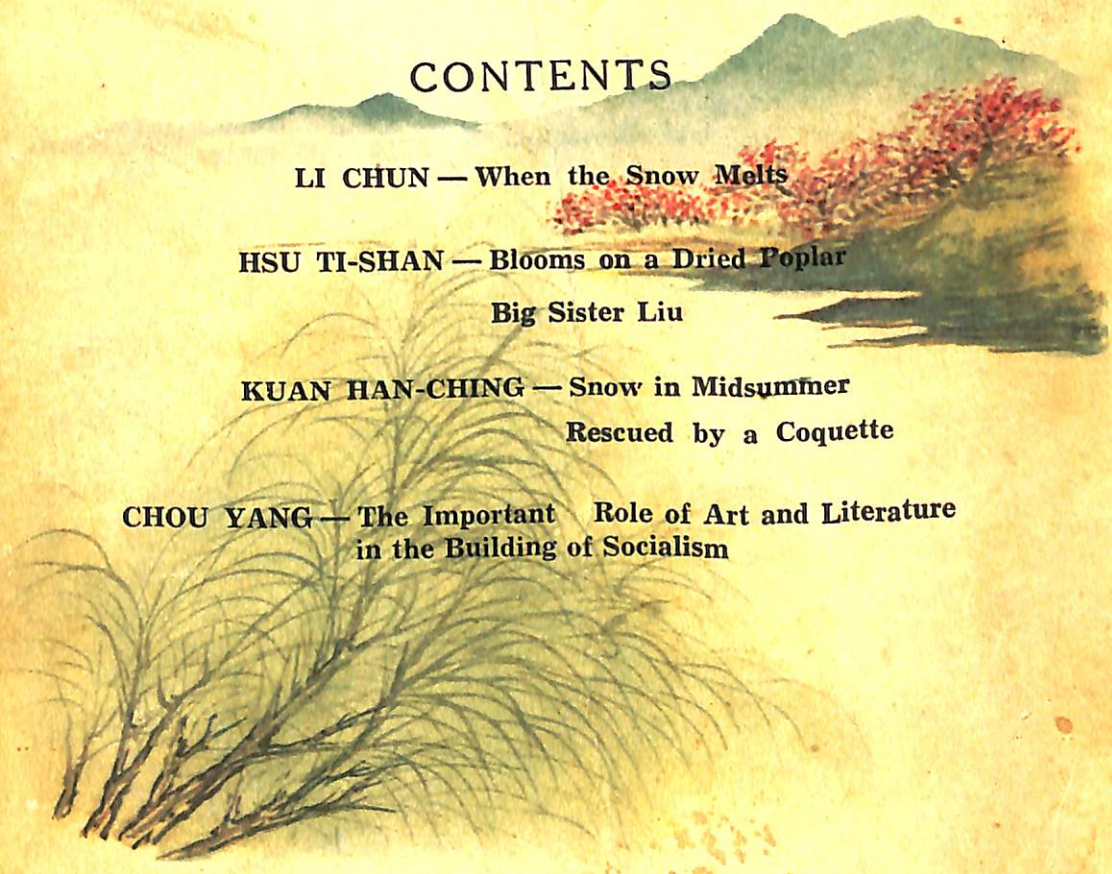
CHINESE LITERATURE



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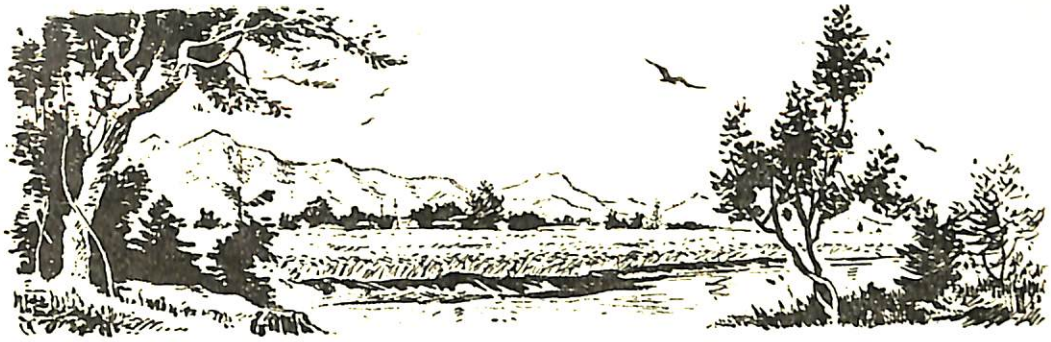

When the Snow Melts

LI CHUN

1

Chengchiawan, Chengchiawan, oh it lies in a plain
That really looks more like an ocean of grain.
The Blue Dragon River flows down at its feet,
Its head's against Sleeping Ox Mountain so steep.
The area runs into ten thousand mou,
There are hundreds and hundreds of people there too.
When the cocks crow to eastward to wake folk for tillage
You can't hear the sound to the west of the village.
Agricultural co-ops, a whole host they've got;
Old Man Cheng is the live wire who leads all the lot.

This ditty was written by one of the inhabitants of Chengchiawan. What he meant was that his village was big and the land fertile; both hilly land and water meadows were within reach. Every year a good harvest from one crop alone sufficed for clothes and food. There were eight hundred households in the village, tilling over ten thousand *mou* of level land which stretched right across the plain. Their carts formed a long line; if all their livestock had been rounded up they would have made a huge herd. So far there were five agricultural producers' co-operatives and dozens of mutual-aid teams, large and small, year-round and temporary.

Because Chengchiawan was such a large village, with so many people and so successful in its mutual-aid and co-operative movement, it was quite famous. Whenever the villagers went to other places and were asked where they came from they could always hold themselves proudly and answer, "Chengchiawan!" and you could see how envious the ques-

tioner was. As often as not, he'd stick up a thumb and say in admiration, "Oh, Old Man Cheng's village, eh?" or, "Now that's a really go-ahead village!"

Chengchiawan had made steady progress ever since the land reform. The inhabitants had never sat back and relaxed, but had gone straight on to mutual aid and co-operation when the nation-wide campaign for greater agricultural output was launched. And in 1951 an agricultural producers' co-operative, the Red Flag Co-op, was founded.

The Red Flag was the first farming co-op in the county. Its chairman, Cheng Teh-ming — always known as Old Man Cheng — was a man in his fifties. His back was a bit bent, but his face was ruddy with health and his eyes were brilliant and full of life. Only his grizzled hair betrayed his age.

What Cheng Teh-ming had gone through in organizing and leading the Red Flag Co-op could perhaps be fairly compared to eating pickles — sweet and bitter at the same time. Before liberation, Old Man Cheng and some of his mates, Liu Mai-nao for instance, had been ordinary farm-hands working for the landlords. In the land reform everyone got more than ten *mou* and an animal. But as they had been used to working on large farms nearly all their lives, they found it difficult to get used to working individually on little plots, with only one ox apiece to plough with and pull the cart into the bargain. So a dozen or so of them got together and talked things over. They thought they might as well till their land together and keep all the animals in one shed. As for the grain harvest, they decided to share that out all round. They did nothing elaborate like "computing the work done and giving work-points" but they were used to working together and willing to trust one another when it came to sharing out the harvest.

After trying this out for several months, two households thought they were not getting enough out of it, and backed out. This gave rise to sarcastic remarks, of course, from the other peasants in the village who were watching the show from the side. They particularly got at Old Man Cheng. "Wearing a sock on his head, that's what — he's so clever he's growing an extra foot there" was a typical remark.

It looked as if the group would fall to pieces. Old Man Cheng did not know what to do to stop the rot. It was at this moment that the chairman of the provincial government happened to visit the county. Escorted by the county Party secretary, he came to Chengchiawan, which was recognized as a key village, to see how things were going. He was immediately interested in the way the land was farmed in common by Cheng and his friends and the way they were keeping their livestock in the one shed, and set about finding out just how they had come to organize this. He got into conversation with Old Man Cheng.

"Well, friend, how old are you?" he started.

"Fifty-four," replied Cheng, wondering where this was leading to.

"Two years older than me," said the chairman, looking closely at him, and adding with a smile, "got a good set of teeth still." Cheng was surprised to find a provincial chairman talking in such an unofficial way, and found himself answering quite naturally, "Oh, I lost my own long ago. I only got this set after liberation."

The ice broken, Old Man Cheng blurted out all his worries and troubles, and ended up by asking what these "agricultural producers' cooperatives" were that they talked about. He was rather hesitant to ask, but he got it out. The provincial chairman smiled. "Cheng, old chap," he said, with a friendly nudge, "you've got one, here! Just keep on the way you're going. If you run into difficulties, look up the comrades on the county Party committee, or write to me direct if you'd rather."

Such encouragement from the chairman left Cheng Teh-ming so stirred that he did not sleep a wink all night, but got up and paced to and fro in his room. Things which he had not given a thought to for ages crowded into his head, and he felt as though twenty years had dropped away from him. His feelings now reminded him of the day when, a youngster grazing his sheep, he had climbed a nearby hill and been amazed to see a lovely fertile plain on the other side, stretching far into the distance. He remembered well how the bright vista had filled him with a sense of wonder and joy — the same sensation as came to him now. When, at daybreak, the cocks had crowed three times, he excitedly pounded the table with his fist and rushed out.

Since that day, nearly five years had passed, five years during which there was hardly a single day when he had not gone out to work before the glittering stars had paled before the dawn.

The people who had ventured on the new path were under a severe test: agricultural co-operation itself was on trial. Almost from birth the Red Flag Co-op met with countless troubles. The neighbours, peasants who were working independently, mocked its members and poured sarcasm on their heads. Within the co-op itself was continuous chaos, largely due to the fact that there was no one who could keep the accounts. Old Man Cheng himself could barely read a handful of characters, and tried to keep track of income and expenditure by memorizing the amounts and trusting to lines scratched on the wall to keep things straight. But the accounts became more and more complicated and Cheng got lost in a maze of figures. His face became drawn and pinched and he went right off his food.

Quite a number of people tried to persuade him to give the thing up, but every time he told himself he simply could not do it. One day the secretary of the township Party branch, Wei Hu-tou, came to talk to him. Wei was an old friend, a man in his forties, rather taciturn but with an extremely strong will. During land reform he was known throughout the district as one of the best peasants' association chairmen, famous for the fight he put up against the landlords, for exposing and

arresting local bullies, and getting the masses on the move. He and Cheng were the first two in the township to be admitted into the Communist Party. They understood one another perfectly. In the old days they had struggled against tyrants, and for the reduction of rent and interest and led in the land reform. They had fought together, rain or shine, and felt closer than brothers. When Wei Hu-tou saw that the weight of responsibility was telling on Cheng, and that despite all he did there were a few more households thinking of leaving the co-op, he strolled over to the Cheng's one day with his baby in his arms. "Elder brother," he said, "your eyes are sunk right into your head! Isn't all this too much for you?" Cheng smiled wryly. "Well, to tell you the truth," he answered, "I do feel sometimes that it's going to be the death of me."

"If you ask my opinion," said Wei Hu-tou, "I think you should tell the county administration so and give it up. I haven't heard of any other county going in for these new-fangled co-ops, and I for one can't help feeling it'd be much better to let everyone look after his own land and do it properly. That'd take the load off your back."

Old Man Cheng thought it over, but shook his head. "There's a lot to be said for an agricultural producers' co-op. You don't realize it yet. I don't know much about it myself — these past six months have been a muddle — but even so it's clear to me that it's the right way. The trouble is that it's never been done before, so we've no experience to go by." He seemed to cheer up as he went on. "It'll soon improve. Yesterday, the county Party committee promised to send someone down to straighten out the accounts and show us how to keep them properly. If I don't have all that to worry about I'll be able to arrange for the farm work better. Wait till harvest, and you'll see for yourself that co-ops are good."

Wei Hu-tou would not commit himself. He went off, the expression on his face seeming to say there was nothing more he could do.

That autumn there was a bad drought, but the Red Flag Co-op managed to pull through. The following year, 1952, both the early and late harvests were good, and the members got two share-outs of grain. The co-op was beginning to get on its feet, and all the members were jubilant. Now the words "Agricultural Producers' Co-operative" began to sound quite glamorous to the Chengchiawan villagers. It was round about this time, too, that the county authorities themselves were popularizing the idea of mutual aid and co-operation and doing a bit of organizing. And, incidentally, at the end of the same year Old Man Cheng was elected secretary of the township Party branch.

But not all the villagers were won over to the idea that the Red Flag Co-op was a good thing. Some of them were still very cool towards it, saying that Cheng's co-op was just the pet child of the county Party committee, and was always being given money loans and fertilizers and extra helpers. "Of course they can harvest more grain than anyone else

Raining Flower Mount, Nanking (57.5 cm. × 79 cm.)
Painting in the traditional style By FU PAO-SHIH

with all that extra help," they said. "It's not because of being a co-op that they do well!" When Cheng heard this sort of thing he only grinned. "Let them talk," he said. "Of course we are a pet child. If the county Party committee didn't take particular care of us, we'd never be a co-op at all."

But it was not long before the majority of working peasants became convinced of the superiority of co-operative farming. As the old saying goes, "It's what you see with your eyes that you know is true. What you hear is only hearsay," and sure enough, the Chengchiawan villagers had evidence enough in front of them to see how well the Red Flag Co-op was getting on — they could see the crops for themselves, and see the grain being distributed to the members. And so twelve large mutual-aid teams were organized.

The nation-wide discussions in 1953 on the great policy statement, the General Line to be followed, stirred Chengchiawan up, too. The village bubbled like a turbulent river which was rushing down into a mighty ocean. As a matter of fact, even before this, quite a few teams had already begun preparations to switch over to co-ops, influenced by the example of the Red Flag. This time, having learned why it was necessary to cast off bourgeois ways of thinking, they were able to see the way even more clearly. Then, one after the other, all the mutual-aid teams wanted to organize themselves into co-ops, and by the time the wheat was harvested, the framework of four new co-ops was set up. Now, with five co-ops — the Red Flag expanding, the new ones bursting to get going — the village began to look quite different. Rows of big thatched sheds were built for the animals and a continuous flow of fine sturdy mules and horses were bought. One co-op bought rubber-tired carts; another ordered the new model ploughs. Expressions and titles never heard before, like "Co-op Chairman," "Management Committee," were heard, and earnest groups were to be seen holding little meetings. And when the big bell rang in the morning, calling people out to work in the fields, there was a solid stream of people, animals and carts along the track.

Chengchiawan, with its five co-ops, became famous in the county. And with fame came hordes of visitors who wanted to see how it was done. On one of these visits something untoward took place.

2

The incident happened when the autumn crops were ripening.

Wei Hu-tou, sitting in his office in the township, received a letter from the county government, telling him that a number of model farmers from neighbouring districts were coming to visit the Red Flag Co-op. The township office was asked to tell the people concerned and see that

they were ready to receive the visitors. Wei Hu-tou read the letter through, and sat sulkily for time enough to smoke a pipe. Then he flung the letter down on the desk and told the township clerk, "Tell the co-ops to boil water for the visitors," and went out of the office, home.

What lay behind this petulant attitude? You will remember that to begin with Wei Hu-tou had not had any faith in co-ops — he had even tried to persuade Old Man Cheng to give up the idea. Then he had seen for himself how the whole village was joining in, and how the members of the Red Flag had been able to invest hundreds of yuan in their co-op, and buy beautiful horses and mules. He had felt very jealous and left out of things, and had wanted to start a co-op himself.

Of course, if a deputy township head was known to want to start a co-op, there would be some people eager to team up with him. A certain mutual-aid team, for the most part composed of middle peasants, was only too ready to get in with him. This team was led by two men who made a good living by speculation, trading and carting. These two, Liu Erh-hsing and Chiao Kuei, owned their own rubber-tired carts and half a dozen good mules. For his part, Wei Hu-tou was overjoyed at starting off with such riches, and between him and Liu Erh-hsing they started the Red Gleam Co-op.

As luck would have it, not long before the day the letter arrived, the other carter, Chiao Kuei, had behaved very badly over the selling of surplus grain to the state. Old Man Cheng had taken this up very sharply at a township meeting and said that such a man should be barred from membership of a co-op. Chiao Kuei had had to withdraw, taking with him, of course, his rubber-tired cart and two mules. Wei Hu-tou was furious about this, and said to himself that it would never have happened if Chiao Kuei had been a member of the Red Flag. "Cheng would have kept quiet about it then, you bet!" he muttered. Furthermore, the people on the Red Flag committee and their bunch of keen youngsters were always talking about "we old co-op members" as compared with newcomers. It was enough to make you sick. And look at the way Cheng was always in the public eye, going to county meetings and even to the provincial seat, and coming back with more and more medals and badges, while he, poor Wei Hu-tou, who had started off and joined the revolution at the same time got no such recognition.

All these things boiled up in his mind when he read the letter. He was damned if he was going to receive visitors who had come to see the Red Flag Co-op. Let them get the limelight again and feel grand, he'd have no part in it.

The Red Flag people were indeed feeling on top of the world, and when the vice-chairman, Liu Mai-nao, got news that visitors were coming the co-op began to seethe like a boiling pot.

They heard about it from Old Man Cheng, who was attending a meeting in the county town. He had written to Liu Mai-nao, telling him

to be ready for the visit, and to be sure to tell the visitors all the things which would interest them, and saying specifically that he would not be back for the occasion, so they must consult Wei Hu-tou about everything. Now Liu Mai-nao happened to be a person with a temperament like a wheat torch — anything would set him aflame. Directly he read the part about the model farmers coming he got so excited that he forgot everything else. He jumped up joyfully, dropping the letter, and raced to the co-op office to busy himself with preparations. He never even saw the bit about consulting Wei Hu-tou.

The first thing he did was to arrange for the people to bring out the co-op's handsome mules. There were more than thirty of them now, to be brushed and groomed until their coats shone, and tied to the posts on the threshing ground outside the co-op office. Then all the many big red satin pennants which had been presented to the co-op by schools, the county government and so on, were brought out and hung up in a row on the wall opposite the threshing ground, and tables and benches set out. The co-op's other valuable properties — the lantern-slide projector, two pressure lamps and four sprayers — were all placed around the office where no one could miss seeing them.

All this done, Liu Mai-nao looked at the result. Somehow he felt dissatisfied with the total effect. "Let's bring out our new model ploughs," he said to the stockman, "and put them in a row on one side of the threshing ground." Turning to a group of youngsters, he said to one of them, "Put markers up on our millet, sweet potato and maize fields." Finally he told the women folks to get boiled water ready for the visitors.

Old Man Cheng's daughter, Hsiu-chih, came over to the threshing ground when she heard that the women were to have boiled water ready. When she saw how festive the co-op office looked she asked the old stockman what it was all about. He rolled his eyes comically. "Seven districts!" he said. "Yes, hundreds of model farmers from seven districts are coming to visit us. Quick, hurry home and change into your holiday best."

"Change into my best?" asked Hsiu-chih, puzzled.

"The model farmers are coming," said the old man again, with a sly twinkle. "Of course you'll be asked to tell them how our women have learned to look after the cotton field. Suppose they ask who you are and find that you're the chairman's daughter — his only child at that. Wouldn't it be dreadful if they think you're shabbily dressed, and mock at us for being so poor?"

"I'm not going to dress up," said Hsiu-chih indignantly, as she gave a hand with the ploughs. "You're only teasing. No one's going to make a mock of us."

The model farmers arrived before noon, accompanied by two of the county government officials. Although it was already autumn, at noon the sun was still scorchingly hot. Liu Mai-nao and his team leaders went

to meet them and brought them back to the threshing ground. One of the county people asked where the leading comrade was from the township.

Now Liu Mai-nao of late had felt that Wei Hu-tou was treating the Red Flag people rather offhandedly, so he tried to pass the matter off. "We've got everything ready for our visitors," he said. "They can see the crops, and we'll be able to tell them everything they want to know. I'm on the township committee myself. D'you really want anyone else?"

"Perhaps it would be better."

Liu Mai-nao hesitated for a moment, then agreed. "All right," he said, turned to a group of his members and asked someone to go and fetch Hu-tou.

"I'll go," said Hsiu-chih, before anyone else could say a word. There was a general chuckle, and someone said, "Yes, better let Hsiu-chih go. She's got special influence there!"

Young Sen, with exaggerated seriousness, said to Hsiu-chih, "Mind you're careful, though. Wei Hu-tou may be eager to get hold of Youth Leaguers — his co-op happens to be very short of 'em. Take care you don't get taken away from us."

"She'll be dragged off one of these days anyhow!" someone else chimed in.

"You've nothing better to do but babble, I suppose," said Hsiu-chih, with a would-be pout. "Talk away, if it pleases you. It won't worry me, I'm going just the same. I'm not going to let you put me off." She turned round and sped off, beaming.

Hsiu-chih was the Chengs' only child. From early childhood she had been a good worker, both in the house and in the fields. When she finished primary school two years ago, she became one of the co-op's tally-men. For the last year her mother could not help seeing that Hsiu-chih apparently liked helping Wei Hu-tou's wife to sew and mend her children's shoes and clothes. At first she had thought it was because her daughter was good-natured and diligent and saw that Mrs. Wei needed help with her large brood. Then one day Hsiu-chih bought home some light blue cotton and began making a man's shirt. Some time after Mrs. Cheng suddenly recognized the stuff and her daughter's sewing on the back of Hsiao-sung, Wei Hu-tou's eldest boy. It dawned on her then that Hsiu-chih was no longer a child, but a young woman.

The boy's mother, on the other hand, had seen what was going on much earlier, when she noticed that Hsiu-chih was always coming to their house. She gave as a reason that "You've so many children, auntie," or "If there's anything you can't get done, let me do it for you," and so on, but Mrs. Wei felt there was something more to it than that. She wanted to know for certain how it was, so when Hsiu-chih made this offer, she said, "You're a good child! My Hsiao-sung is always wearing out his shoes now he's working. I'd be most grateful if you'd make him some new ones."

Hsiu-chih, blushing to the roots of her hair, said she would try to make his shoes. Mrs. Wei was now sure how matters stood with the girl, but was worried as to how Mrs. Cheng would take it, and whether she would think her Hsiao-sung good enough for Hsiu-chih. To help things on, she set to and made two new suits for her son.

When Hsiu-chih got to Hsiao-sung's house that day she called out, in her usual way, "Hello, aunty! Is uncle home?" Hsiao-sung shot out of the backyard like an arrow the moment he heard her voice, and they were just beginning to talk when Wei Hu-tou himself came out. Hsiu-chih sobered down at once and said, "Uncle, the model farmers are here. Can you come, please?"

"Liu Mai-nao can take them round. I don't think I need come," said Wei Hu-tou, rather shortly.

"Oh, but you must, uncle," said Hsiu-chih. "There's no one there from the township office. You will come, won't you? My father's away."

"Go ahead, dad!" said Hsiao-sung cheerfully. "I'll fetch the water."

"H'm," thought Wei. "If Cheng's away, and the child's come to get me, perhaps I'd better make the effort and go." Aloud, he said, "All right, I'll come," and went back into the house to get his cap.

Hsiu-chih took this opportunity to ask Hsiao-sung if he wasn't coming but Hsiao-sung said he'd got to fetch the water, but asked her if she had to go anywhere that evening. Before Hsiu-chih could answer Wei Hu-tou had reappeared, so she was only able to signal "no!" to Hsiao-sung as she followed Wei Hu-tou.

By the time they got back to the threshing ground the model farmers were already going round the fields. Wei Hu-tou had to rush after them. Once there, he walked along behind the crowd, never opening his lips.

It was about noon by then and the sun right overhead. It was very hot. Patches of golden-yellow and deep green grain shone in the fields, and the breeze brought a fragrance with it.

The visitors stopped beside a patch of millet, a wonderfully sturdy crop, with fat heads over a foot long, bending the stalks with their weight.

Liu Mai-nao remembered to be modest, and simply said, "This is from Hua-nung No. 4 seed. Sixty *mou* of it. In spring we went over it twice with our new ploughs, the double-shared ones. . . ." But as he spoke he could not help feeling such joy and pride that it showed just as clearly as if he had put it in words. When he had finished his talk, he said, "We don't know yet how much we'll get per *mou*. You're all experts — what d'you reckon?"

"About a hundred and twenty catties, I should say," said one.

"What, only a hundred and twenty? More like a hundred and fifty!" said another, while a third said, "The heads fairly burst in the hand. I wouldn't be surprised if they got a hundred and eighty."

As the visitors commented, praise implicit in their words, Liu Mai-nao's heart fluttered as wildly as a fan being waved. He was so pleased that he had difficulty in holding back a wide grin, but he managed it by keeping his lips tight shut.

Wei Hu-tou, on the other hand, trailed behind the visitors without saying a word. Whenever they stopped he turned his back on Liu Mai-nao and the group of visitors, his eyes on the sky. Every word Liu Mai-nao said aroused a fresh wave of emotion in him.

"There's some more millet over there," said Liu Mai-nao, pointing to a patch nothing like as good. "It was sown about the same time as ours, and the soil's the same. How much do you think that'll yield?" This time he allowed himself to smile.

"Seventy to eighty catties at the most."

"I suppose it belongs to someone working on his own," said someone.

Hsiu-chih quickly went up to Liu Mai-nao. "Look out, Brother Mai-nao," she whispered, "Wei Hu-tou's over there."

When Wei realized that this other lot of millet belonged to his co-op, he flushed a deep crimson, and tried to hide in the crowd. Unfortunately Young Sen, candid and tactless as he was, decided to put in a word at that moment. "Listen to me, model farmers," he said, sawing the air. "This millet doesn't belong to an individual peasant! It belongs to the Red Gleam Co-op. They don't even know that you ought to mix pesticide with the seed and yet they've got the nerve to talk about competing with us." He concluded his remark by

making a face. He had expected his words to arouse laughter, but none of the model farmers even tittered. Instead, a sudden awkward silence descended on the crowd, hushing the general conversation.

Wei Hu-tou, though unnoticed himself, heard everything only too distinctly. Anger surged up in his breast like a burning flame, until he felt that his head would burst with indignation. He gritted his teeth, and turned and tottered home.

After they had toured all the fields under the hot sun, the model farmers were absolutely parched. But when they got back to the village there was practically no drinking water. Only the Red Flag members had some ready. With so many visitors and so little water, quite a number never even got a sip. Liu Mai-nao felt as frantic as an ant on a hot pan, and dashed here and there looking for help, but found no way out of the difficulty.

The visitors had been expecting to have a short rest in the township office hall, and then look at the Red Flag's club, nursery, livestock shed, etc. in the afternoon. When they got to the township office, however, they were faced with a big bronze padlock across the door. Liu Mai-nao searched high and low for Wei Hu-tou, but without success. In the end the visitors decided they might just as well leave in good time to get home that night, as they had seen the most important thing, the crops. They cut short the visit, and left.

So despite all the time and energy Liu Mai-nao had expended the visit was far from successful. He returned glumly to the threshing ground. All the visitors had gone: the ground was littered with tea-cups and cigarette butts and the bright red pennants flapped desolately in the breeze.

3

Three days later Cheng returned.

Everyone was busy getting ready for harvesting, and the ripening crops were changing daily. Cheng had been away for nearly a week, and could not bear to go to his home first. He went straight to the fields to see how they were doing, and went slowly round looking at their promise with great satisfaction. It was a wonderful autumn day. The sky was deep blue, with only a few gauzy clouds in it. A flock of wild pigeons glittered as they turned lazily in the air.

The ripe millet was full of chattering sparrows. Cheng kept on throwing pebbles at them, but they only seemed to be jeering at him, flying up and then setting again. "H'm," he thought. "We'll all have to put up scarecrows to keep the birds out of the millet." It was at this moment that he caught sight of a mutual-aid team in a sweet potato patch.

"Hi, there!" said Cheng to one of them. "Look at the sparrows in the millet! You ought to put up something to scare them off."

"D'you expect a little team like this to keep up with your great co-op?" said the leader of the mutual-aid team. "We can't afford extras like scarecrows." He was another one who had often felt annoyed by patronizing talk from the Red Flag Co-op — that was what lay behind his offhand answer.

"Aha! You like a bit of a joke, I see," said Cheng with a grin, without paying any significance to the incident.

He went on looking over the crops, pausing when he reached a stretch of sorghum. Nearby were members of the Red Gleam Co-op ploughing. He looked interestedly at the rows they had done, waited for the plough to come back to his end, and then spoke to the brigade leader. "How much have you done today?" he asked in a friendly way.

"Just over a *mou* so far," came the answer, but the brigade leader would not look at him.

"You ought to tell your co-op to buy one of those new double-shared ploughs, you know," Cheng said. "With those two mules, a hefty young fellow like you could easily do five *mou* in a morning with one plough." But he had hardly finished speaking before the lad cut him off with "I know! The old co-ops like yours are rolling in money, but we newcomers are too poor. Don't worry, though, we'll get the wheat sown. New or not, we're not going to let the land lie fallow." So saying, he called to his mules and went off.

Cheng Teh-ming gasped at such an unexpected snub from the youngster — "Wonder what's behind this," he muttered to himself, as he hurried home.

Back in the village he saw Young Sen and the old stockman, a bunch of kids surrounding them, harnessing a newly-purchased handsome black mule to the cart.

"Young Sen, where on earth are you going to with all those children?" he asked, very puzzled.

"Nowhere in particular! Just up the village," said Young Sen, going on with the harnessing.

"Whatever for?" Cheng Teh-ming was more puzzled than ever. The old stockman, already seated on the cart, chuckled. "We're just going to give our new mule an airing, that's all," he said. "Let'em all have a good look. The day before yesterday, the Southern Co-op made a great fuss about a sorrel mare they'd bought. It's our turn to show them what we've got."

Cheng began to see what was up. "No, you don't," he said firmly. "Just you unharness the mule at once."

Young Sen gave the old man a meaning glance. "Who said we're out for an airing?" he said. "We've got to try out the new mule. You're jumping to conclusions, aren't you, with your orders?"

"Seems to me the best way to try out a new mule would be to use it for carting earth or manure," said Cheng. "I don't think much of this way — dashing up and down the street with a cartful of children!"

Young Sen had no answer to this. But the children refused to budge. "We want a ride, we want a ride!" they clamoured. They made as much din as a swarm of bees.

"Come along now, get down," said Cheng, raising his voice above the noise.

"No, we won't. We're not coming down. They promised us a ride!" The children glared at Cheng.

"Have you ever seen a motor-car?" he asked.

"Yes, we have, we have."

"In a few days there's one coming to the village. Whoever comes down quietly now, and shows he's a sensible boy gets a ride in the motor-car."

With a roar all the children clattered down from the cart and scattered in all directions, laughing. But Cheng's heart was as heavy as if there were a stone weighing it down.

He could not shake off his irritation as he went on into the co-op office. Liu Mai-nao was there, giving orders. "Remind Wei Hu-tou when you see him," he said to the storekeeper, with a steely note in his tone, "that they used up a hundred of our posts when they first set up their co-op. We need them back now, tomorrow. Tell him to return them. If he — "

"Let me ask you something, Liu," Cheng Teh-ming said quickly. "Why do you want them to return those posts just now?"

Liu was taken aback when he saw Cheng, and his tone changed. "Some of our livestock sheds are falling to pieces, and we want to repair them," he said.

But Old Man Cheng did not let it go at that. "We've got over two hundred posts lying idle on the threshing ground," he said. "What are they being kept for?"

"Er. . . ." Liu Mai-nao could find no answer to that.

"Just now, Young Sen was harnessing the new black mule — said they wanted to go for an airing! Do you happen to know anything about that, either?" asked Cheng, looking at the faces in front of him.

"Well," said the storekeeper sounding rather sheepish, "that was something Young Sen and the stockman cooked up between them. It was nothing to do with us, really. But come to think of it, I believe they had an airing yesterday, too."

Cheng shook his head. "Old Liu," he said, "this is very bad. If you people mess about like this, our co-op members won't have an inch of road to walk on when we go out."

Liu interrupted him. "You weren't here the day before yesterday," he said. "It would have made you burst with anger, too. It was enough

to make anyone explode. They purposely tried to make us lose face. There were hundreds of model farmers coming to see the place, but not a soul from the whole township got any boiled water ready for them. The office, even, was locked all day, and nobody bothered to turn up. The model farmers went away grumbling. But those people just stood aside and thought it was a great joke!" Liu Mai-nao finished indignantly, and the others chimed in one after another. They all seemed particularly worked up about it.

Old Man Cheng listened, thinking hard. "We shouldn't put all the blame on them," he said decisively. "It's as much our responsibility. You ought to think a bit before you talk like that. And what about this nonsense of giving the mule an airing, and demanding those posts back? D'you think things like that are the best way to help others take the socialist path? There's no doubt about it. We're getting swelled heads and behaving arrogantly."

Liu Mai-nao was not so easily quieted, however. "What d'you mean?" he asked. "I suppose your idea is that the county government had better not send any people out here. And that if they do come I shouldn't open my mouth. We can all pretend to be mutes, I suppose."

Cheng Teh-ming got up impatiently. "You know I don't mean that," he said. "Of course people must come and see us. After all, the county authorities have spent years fostering our co-op. It's quite right to use it as a model for people to come and see. You don't imagine, do you, that we can take all the credit for our co-op's success? Could we have done it if the district and county Party committees hadn't given us guidance all along? Let's keep our feet on the ground. Every inch gained, every step forward, is as much due to the help and guidance of the Party as it is to anything we've done."

Liu Mai-nao kept his eyes fixed on the wall in front of him and said not a word. His only movement was to snap the matchstick he was holding in two, and then break the pieces again.

Although Old Man Cheng gave Liu Mai-nao and the others such a telling-off, in his heart he was also a bit dissatisfied with Wei Hu-tou. "I dare say Liu Mai-nao did say things Wei didn't like to hear," he thought to himself. "But all the same he *is* the deputy head of the township, and he shouldn't have let the model farmers go away without even a drink of water. It wasn't right for any of us to squabble when guests were there." He made up his mind that he would go and see Wei Hu-tou after the noonday meal, have a frank talk with him, and go into the whole thing thoroughly. He did not see how he could do this without some criticism, though.

After the meal, when he got to Wei Hu-tou's house he was told by Mrs. Wei that her husband had gone to his co-op. Cheng went after him, and found that the Red Gleam officials — Cheng Shih-tou, Cheng Lao-san and Liu Erh-hsing — were seeing to the axle of their newly acquired rub-

ber-tired cart. They pretended to be busy and not see him. This did not put Cheng off. He walked straight over to them and first greeted Cheng Lao-san who he knew was fond of a joke. He exchanged a few cracks with him, and made them all grin. The other three went on trying to fix the wheel but it just wouldn't fit. Cheng set to and helped them, and after they had wiped off some of the grease and dirt they got it on. When they tried out the wheels they whirled round beautifully.

"But I really came to look for Wei Hu-tou," said Cheng, wiping the grease off his hands. "It nearly slipped my mind with all this. D'you know where he is?" "He was here a moment ago," Liu Erh-hsing said, frowning. "I don't know where he's gone." But Cheng Lao-san said, pointing, "If you go over there you'll find him. He's on the east side, in the plant nursery."

Cheng Teh-ming walked towards the nursery, and saw that Wei Hu-tou was there with several others. Before he got there, however, Wei had disappeared into the woods.

Cheng Teh-ming looked round the nursery and saw that there were several of the Red Gleam Co-op youngsters cutting down some young trees. The saplings were only as thick as your wrist so far, but they were fine, straight little trees, fresh and graceful. "Whatever are you doing with those saplings?" he said, taken aback.

"The chairman says we've got to return your posts. So we'll have to cut all those — near on a hundred of them."

"Which of us asked you to return the posts?"

"Nobody. But our chairman doesn't want to be beholden to you."

"Where is he, d'you know?"

"Don't know."

"Well, anyhow, don't go on cutting down those young trees. You'd better stop right now," said Cheng, his face dark with anger. "If your chairman asks why, tell him that Cheng Teh-ming forbade you to go on. It only wants two or three years for these saplings to become decent-sized trees. I don't care which co-op they belong to! You're not to cut them down!"

The youngsters looked at one another. None of them had ever seen Cheng Teh-ming look angry like that before. They slowly collected their tools together and went away.

4

As Wei Hu-tou was going back from the model farmers' visit, in an absolute rage, he ran into Liu Erh-hsing. Now this Liu had been a carter who preferred private trade, and had always hired others to till his land for him. As a matter of fact, both he and Chiao Kuei intended to go on doing this, and were overjoyed at the chance of belonging to a co-op under

the aegis of the deputy head of the township! Moreover, thanks to the fact that most of the Party members and Youth Leaguers in the village had already joined co-ops by the time that the Red Gleam was organized, Liu had managed to get himself elected vice-chairman.

The original eight households, which made a manageable lot from Liu's point of view, were broken up, when, due to Old Man Cheng's objection, Chiao Kuei had to be removed. Liu Erh-hsing hated Cheng in any case, but this made him hate him all the more. He was glad to meet Wei Hu-tou when he was so angry, as he saw here a chance to make matters worse. "What do we want with the Red Flag Co-op?" he said. "We should do better to break off with them altogether." He thought of a cunning lie, as he went on, "I hear from Chiao that Cheng told him he was to join the Red Flag in the winter, and that he'd give him a good price for his cart — 1,500 yuan, he mentioned!"

In such ways and in any other he could think of, Liu worked on Wei's weaknesses. He was helped by another incident which occurred round about then.

It happens that the village lies close to a river — the Blue Dragon. It is a fair-sized river, and tends to flood in summer on both banks, leaving wide stretches of fertile silt by autumn. These areas are not very near the village, and before the days of mutual aid and co-operation were not made use of. Last year the Red Flag had ploughed up some hundred *mou* and planted barley. It did extraordinarily well — they got six months' feed for their livestock off it. This year the other co-ops, having seen what could be done, decided to join in. According to the local custom, whoever first opened up unused land could claim as theirs the part they had ploughed.

One morning, therefore, when the mist was just clearing and the peaks of the distant mountains were slowly beginning to be seen, the river banks were teeming with peasants opening up the rich land, moving busily about behind their ploughs and calling to their beasts. Ridges of black earth rose behind them like waves.

Liu Mai-nao, from the Red Flag Co-op, was down there before dawn with his teams and four ploughs. He was at bursting point. First there was the business of the posts which Old Man Cheng would not let him demand back, and then there was another matter. Usually the co-ops shared up the transport of goods for the district supply and marketing co-op, but recently Wei Hu-tou had wangled the job for his co-op. "This Wei Hu-tou is really becoming too sharp for words," thought Liu Mai-nao.

Just then Cheng Shih-tou and Cheng Lao-san of the Red Gleam Co-op turned up, with three mules and several young oxen. They too had come to reclaim fallow land. Young Sen pointed at the young oxen and whispered, "Look, Brother Mai-nao, Cheng Shih-tou has brought grasshoppers to plough with." Liu Mai-nao could not help chuckling, but told the young fellow not to talk too much. "If the chairman heard us he'd tell us off

for being arrogant and complacent." Despite his reproving tone, however, he also told his team to get a move on. They shouted to their animals and went so fast that they seemed to be going over the land like a whirlwind. Before long they had opened up a dozen *mou* or more.

Cheng Shih-tou and his group were working alongside the Red Flag outfit, so he could not help seeing, right before his eyes, what large tracts of black fertile land were being turned up by the Red Flag ploughs. More property for them! He got more and more impatient, and his temper was not sweetened by the fact that his team was having a hard time keeping their young oxen under control.

"Get on, do, Uncle Lao-san!" he said sharply. "Can't you see that the Red Flag's getting all this good piece of level land?" As he spoke he lashed his mule. But Lao-san only cursed his young oxen perfunctorily. "Git up, damn you! You either crowd one another or push! Keep your mind on pulling, can't you?"

Liu Mai-nao's group were drawing nearer and nearer. Cheng Shih-tou got so agitated that he was sweating all over. He looked round at Cheng Lao-san and saw that he had not got his young oxen doing much. "The whole morning'll soon be gone," he thought, "and we shan't have opened up more than a few *mou*!" He was in this agitated state when Liu Erh-hsing and Wei Hu-tou arrived. "What shall we do?" Cheng Shih-tou called to them, in a frenzy. "They've opened up nearly all the best land."

Liu Erh-hsing made a disagreeable face at Liu Mai-nao and drew a big circle in the air with one hand. "We can open up more land, too," he said, with a snigger. Cheng Shih-tou glanced at Wei to see how he was taking this, but Wei Hu-tou's face gave no indication of any feeling either way. Cheng Shih-tou called to his mule and made a boundary line all the way round a wide area of the unploughed land.

Liu Mai-nao of course saw all this, and came over. "What are you doing, Cheng Shih-tou?" he asked. "This is a funny way to plough! You know all the land you can plough is yours, but this isn't ploughed! What are you doing? Occupying?"

"Has this tract of waste land got the Red Flag Co-op's name on it?" asked Cheng Shih-tou, sarcastically.

"I'm not saying that, but no more has it got a Red Gleam Co-op tag on it, either," said Liu Mai-nao, beginning to lose his temper.

"This is my way of ploughing."

"Then I'll have to say your way of ploughing won't do."

This was too much for Cheng Shih-tou, in the state he was in. He dropped his whip and said, "Liu Mai-nao, this is my way of ploughing, and a fool like you can't do anything about it."

"You could mind your manners a little."

"It happens to be the way I mean to talk."

Liu Mai-nao got so angry that sparks danced before his eyes. However, he remembered that he was a Communist and could not indulge in personal fights. He swallowed hard, and then turned to his own teams. "Let's get on with our ploughing," he said. "As long as the land's not been ploughed no one can stop us from reclaiming it."

"Let'em try!" said Young Sen, bursting. "We'll give them a hiding."

Cheng Shih-tou sprang across and seized hold of their mule's bridle. "You're not ploughing here! We've occupied this land."

Wei Hu-tou took a hand in it when he saw that the two sides were nearly coming to blows. "What are you doing?" he demanded of Liu Mai-nao. "D'you want a fight?"

"Well, what d'you mean by occupying the land before you've ploughed it?" said Liu Mai-nao.

"This fallow land belongs to the public," said Wei Hu-tou, his face ominously dark. "Even individual peasants have the right to reclaim waste land for themselves. I dare say your livestock needs fodder but so do others'! Perhaps it's not the usual custom to occupy a stretch of land like this, but circumstances alter cases. Our livestock aren't as many as yours, and we're not so powerful, but we've marked out this land and you're not ploughing it up!"

"D'you really mean what you're saying?" Liu Mai-nao became even angrier.

"I mean it, all right," said Wei Hu-tou, and he turned to his members. "Go ahead," he said. "You plough here. I'll be responsible for whatever happens."

The Red Flag teams glowered. "We'll get our chairman here," someone shouted. "Yes, get the chairman!" they agreed.

"Right!" said Young Sen, and dashed off.

He had only just gone when they saw Cheng Teh-ming in the distance, coming like the wind on a big black mule.

A shout of "He's coming — there he is" burst out, while Liu Mai-nao thought to himself, "Aha! now we'll see how long you'll remain unreasonable, Wei Hu-tou!"

But to everybody's exasperation, when Cheng Teh-ming got near, he only said, "We've opened up quite a bit of land, haven't we? Let's call it a day."

There was a general gasp. Nobody moved. "There's another side to the river," Old Man Cheng went on. "No need to crowd anybody out here, nor pick quarrels."

Liu Mai-nao had been waiting for Cheng Teh-ming to come, so that he could get his own back, but when he heard what he had to say he swung his whip sulkily and walked off without a word, wiping his face with his towel.

Feeling a bit awkward, Wei Hu-tou walked up to Cheng Teh-ming. He greeted him, and then came straight to the point. "Cheng Shih-tou

has just had words with Liu Mai-nao over the question of reclaiming fallow land. Of course, our young co-op hasn't got to keep as much stock as you have, but I think we have the right to a hundred *mou* to your two hundred. I'm not denying, either, that some of our crops are poor, and that it may be due to our lack of skill. But the five fingers on the hand are never the same length — where's the co-op that hasn't got a few unsuccessful *mou*? We've occupied this tract of waste land. If you want to say we're wrong to do so, say so. I'll be responsible."

Cheng Teh-ming listened patiently, his head slightly bent. "Well, well, well," he thought to himself. "Old Hu-tou's certainly got a lot of grievances on his chest."

When Wei Hu-tou had finished speaking, he said slowly, "There's nothing to get worried about. Let's all calm down and not be carried away. I know some of our youngsters have been saying things that aren't pleasant to the ear. It's all my fault for not teaching them any better. As far as this fallow land question goes, you'd better finish ploughing it. If you are short of draught animals, we can give you some help."

Wei Hu-tou was taken completely aback, and no words came at first. Then he stammered, "Oh, you don't have to say that! If you want to open it up, go ahead and consider it yours."

Cheng Teh-ming was quite determined. "No, Hu-tou, I'm speaking honestly. We can easily spare a few beasts so as to give you a hand. Last year, you remember, I did my best to persuade you all to reclaim this land, but the people had doubts about the value of it, and no one else came to plough at all. This year, they've started coming, you see. It's a good thing. The more the better."

Wei Hu-tou flushed scarlet, and stood rooted to the ground. Liu Erh-hsing saw his chance of putting in a word. "Our co-op's small, but we've got enough beasts to reclaim waste land," he said, forcing a smile.

"If our people get in the way, we'll go," said Cheng Teh-ming, and turned to his team. "Come on," he said. "Let's take our animals back. It's getting late and we'll all go home."

The Red Flag teams began to get ready to return, though there was some muttering and grumbling among them. Some of them thought Old Man Cheng was right, but some were indignant and angry, Young Sen particularly so. He pulled at his ox's halter, and said, "Damn you! What d'you think you're doing? D'you want to stick around here too and not go home?" Cheng Teh-ming gave him a sharp look and made Young Sen look sheepish. The group returned to the village in glum silence.

5

The news of the dispute on the river bank swept through Cheng-chiawan Village like an autumn gale. Before nightfall every household had heard about it.

Arguments and discussions went on all evening, on the threshing ground, in the livestock sheds and in the lamp-lit offices. The feelings aroused varied from indignation and lamentation to satisfaction.

Cheng Teh-ming, at home after the evening meal, sat silently at the table, his arms stretched before him and his hands clasped together. He too was thinking of the day's events.

Mrs. Cheng, his wife, was a kindly, wise old soul. Married at nineteen, she had gone through many stormy patches with him, and had come to understand him as well as she did herself. She knew that although Cheng Teh-ming was originally an unlettered peasant, long years of bitter struggle had given him a wide outlook and had not hurt his naturally open, happy character. Even in the bad days before liberation he was never one to come home and take it out on his wife. He had infinite endurance, and with it irresistible strength.

Mrs. Cheng had noticed that whenever her husband was seriously worried he would sit staring at the photograph of Chairman Mao on the wall. She knew this meant he was working out some difficult problem. Today, she saw, was one of these times, and she took special pains to keep quiet as she tidied up, went out to shut the chickens up for the night, and shooed their tortoise-shell kitten out.

She was not in the room when she heard Old Man Cheng calling their daughter. She came back, telling him that Hsiu-chih was at her evening class. "Did anyone come to see me this afternoon?" asked Cheng.

"Liu Mai-nao did."

"What did he want?"

"What?" Mrs. Cheng hesitated a moment before she continued. "You know what he's like! He's hardly put his foot indoors when he burst out, 'Aunty, I'm not going to go on being the co-op vice-chairman any more.' Really, there were tears in his eyes! It was a pity that our silly lass was in then, because the two of them started an argument. She told him he shouldn't have said the Red Gleam's crops were poor and he aggravated her by telling her it was too early for her to say that, because she still belonged to the Red Flag!"

"Um! That's no way to talk," said Cheng Teh-ming with a frown.

"Oh, that's not all," said Mrs. Cheng. "Before he left he said, 'If we all begin considering connections by marriage and being afraid of causing offence because of it, it'll be impossible to run a co-op.' "

"Ai!" said Cheng, getting up and putting on his jacket. "What on earth made him say that! Does he really think my actions are prompted by considerations of my daughter's future?" He picked up his flashlight and stalked out down the village.

The moonlight poured down like quicksilver in the late autumn night, frosting the thatched roofs of the village huts. Outside the air was as cold as iced water. Cheng Teh-ming drew his coat tighter and thought, "Have I been wrong to act the way I did? Have I been doing it for

selfish reasons?" As he walked on his mind was busy with these questions. From a livestock shed not far off he heard cheerful voices.

"Liu Mai-nao's stopped being a nuisance at last. This time Hu-tou's put him in his place."

"Well, Hu-tou's not entirely in the right, either. He shouldn't have talked the way he did."

"You only say that because you haven't had a taste of those stuck-up bastards in the Red Flag. The other day I went to borrow a rubber-tired cart from them and had to deal with their Young Sen. 'What!' he says, 'are any of your mules big enough for this cart?' pretending to open his eyes in surprise! 'I hope you don't have to bring it back without using it because you haven't got an animal strong enough to pull it.' I was red in the face! The storekeeper was there too. He urged me to take the cart. If he hadn't been there I'd have surely. . . ."

"You'd have surely not dared!"

A roar of laughter went up. Cheng Teh-ming had heard every word clearly. He thought of what had been said, and went over his own work in the co-op and more than ever realized his responsibilities and felt ashamed. Although the conversation he had overheard pricked him, nevertheless he was glad to have learned how people were thinking.

A little further on he drew near to a group of youngsters. They were chattering gaily. "Honest," said one of them, "I really thought they were coming to blows. My heart was thumping like mad."

"Softy! If you're like that how will you ever go to the front and fight?"

"At least the enemy's in front of you there. Here we've got Liu Mai-nao on one side and the deputy head of the township on the other. What can you do with that?"

"I'm not at all sure that Liu Mai-nao doesn't deserve a good dressing down. When that last lot of visitors was here the other day he was beastly about the crops of all the new co-ops like ours. He talked as if their co-op was the only one that could possibly grow good crops."

"Well, you can't get away from it, their crops *are* good. Does your maize come anywhere near theirs?"

"Don't forget they used that new artificial pollination method, and they ploughed deep and raked fine. . . ."

Cheng Teh-ming sighed and shook his head. He wondered what made his members have such an overbearing attitude to the people outside their co-op. His musings were interrupted by the people coming out of their evening class. A group of girls were coming towards him and the youngsters in front called out to them. "Ta-yung, let's have a look at today's lesson."

"Liu Yu-fang, tell the girls we're mowing tomorrow! The brigade leader's told me to take charge."

"Look, look, Chiu-ngo's done her hair in plaits!"

"Makes her look like a bob-tailed quail!"

Cheng Teh-ming had to turn off the road at this point, on his way to Wei Hu-tou's. In front of him were shadowy figures talking in lowered voices. The one who was speaking as Cheng drew near seemed to be feeling very satisfied with life. "Today even Old Man Cheng nearly lost patience, and there'd have been a fight for certain if he hadn't come."

"To hell with them. Let the bulls fight and lose their horns; they'll come in handy to make inkstands with. It's a pity you couldn't have made them give that fool Cheng Teh-ming a good thrashing. As long as he's in this village we don't stand a chance. Damn him! He's always going on about taking the socialist road. . . ."

"That's Chiao Kuei." Cheng Teh-ming recognized the voice at once. Anger flared up in his heart and he swore under his breath. "Blast you, we're going to take that road, whatever you think." He ground his teeth and followed behind them, feeling disgusted. The other man, he saw, was Liu Erh-hsing, and they seemed to be going to Wei Hu-tou's too. Cheng Teh-ming watched them go into the courtyard. "This business will have to be dealt with at once," he thought, and hurried back to look for Liu Mai-nao.

Liu Mai-nao's wife was still in bed after the birth of a son. His mother greeted him and then immediately told him, "Mai-nao hasn't been sleeping at home for the last fortnight. He's been spending the night in one of the sheds. Today he's in a proper state — says he wants to leave the land and be an industrial worker. Can't you talk to him? I'm past sixty. . . ." She would have gone on talking, but Cheng Teh-ming cut her short with a smile. "Don't you worry, old sister," he said. "It's just that Mai-nao's got a temper like a wheat torch. It'll be all right. How's the baby? Past its first month?"

"No, not yet. Come and see him." The old woman, excited, rushed into the house. "Sure," said Cheng, beaming, "I'd like to see the baby."

Mai-nao's wife was dressed and was nursing the baby on the bed. She brought it over to the door and said smilingly, "He's a tough little rascal. Kicks like anything and won't stay quiet under the quilt. He's a bit dark-skinned, don't you think?"

"A dark skin doesn't matter with a boy," said the grannie, quickly. Cheng Teh-ming took the baby from its mother and looked at its inky black eyebrows. "He's like his daddy," he said, laughing. "He looks a fine little chap. He'll grow up to be a tractor driver, I bet."

"He weighed eight catties! He's a pretty strong lad," said Old Mrs. Liu.

"Is Mai-nao pleased with him?" Cheng Teh-ming asked.

The wife blushed and pointed to the table. "Look!" she said. "See those two bonnets? He bought them for baby. Silly man! Baby's not a month old yet, but he's got to buy two bonnets at once."

"That's all right. Baby'll soon grow into them," said Cheng Teh-

ming, turning to go. Young Mrs. Liu called out to him, "Uncle Teh-ming, I've already scolded him but you talk to him again. Can you take him this quilt, if you're going to the shed?"

Cheng Teh-ming took the quilt and walked across to the shed in the bright moonlight. There was no light inside and the door was slightly ajar. The moon was shining through an unpapered window and made a silver patch on Liu Mai-nao as he lay curled up on a pile of hay.

Cheng Teh-ming flashed his torch on the young man and saw that he was asleep, with his legs curled up and his head tucked down between his shoulders. Beside him was a little wooden stool with an oil lamp on it, and an open book, *How to Be a Good Communist.* A breeze through the door ruffled the leaves of the book. Cheng Teh-ming felt suddenly deeply moved. His heart warmed to the lad and tears pricked his eyes.

He stood there for a minute or two, not wanting to wake him. He covered him gently with the quilt, and was turning round to go when Liu Mai-nao suddenly sat up and called out, "Who's there?"

"It's me, Mai-nao," said Cheng Teh-ming, groping for the matches. Liu Mai-nao kept his mouth tight shut. There was a silence which lasted so long you could have finished half a bowl of rice. Mai-nao was trying to decide how he could pour out the pent-up bitterness in his heart.

After a while Cheng Teh-ming suddenly chuckled. "Mai-nao," he said, "that's a fine boy of yours."

There was no response from Mai-nao. Cheng Teh-ming ignored his silence and went on enviously, "Yes, a lovely baby, as strong as a young calf. He's getting good milk too. Look at him, only a few weeks old and his little fists are as fat as rubber balls. My Hsiu-chih was never like that at that age. . . ."

Mai-nao suddenly interrupted him: "Uncle Teh-ming," he said, "I was thinking that after baby's passed his first month, if Old Chin from the newspaper office happens to come again, I'd like him to take a picture of the baby with his camera. What d'you think?"

Cheng Teh-ming glanced at him and saw that he was wreathed in smiles, as if he had forgotten what had passed between them. "Why not?" said Cheng. "Old Chin is a good fellow. He'll certainly do it if you ask him. Get your wife to make the baby a pretty frock to have its picture taken in."

"When I went to the co-op in town the other day I bought some cotton cloth." Talking about the baby, Mai-nao forgot his anger.

Cheng Teh-ming sighed. "Mai-nao," he said, "when I see you with a child I can't help thinking, what about me? Ai!"

"Why, you've your Hsiu-chih and she's safely grown up already."

"Ai, but daughters, after all, aren't dependable. Now if she gets married and leaves the family, who are we to rely on? Mai-nao, when I think of it, I feel chilled to the heart. I shan't see fifty again, and here

I am, running round day and night. Who am I doing it for?" He shook his head sadly. Mai-nao gave him a look of surprise.

"Uncle Teh-ming," said Mai-nao with feeling, turning round to give the older man some serious advice. "We're both Communists. Of course you joined the Party before I did, but perhaps you haven't read this book, *How to Be a Good Communist.* It says here clearly that all Party members must be without thought for themselves, that they must work only for the public good. We are working for the whole working class. We can't indulge in personal considerations. You may have no son, but don't you know our co-op will take care of you in your old age? Don't look at things so narrow-mindedly."

"What do you think 'being unselfish and only caring for the public good' means?" It was Cheng Teh-ming's turn to ask serious questions.

"What we're doing now — leading the people towards socialism, and working with our whole heart and soul. Don't you agree?"

"But why do we have to work with our whole heart and soul?"

"So that all of us peasants can live well, so that we can all march towards socialism."

"I think you're right," said Cheng Teh-ming. "But Mai-nao, since we're supposed to lead everyone to socialism, is it right to cling to our own co-op and leave all the others to go their own ways? Should we mock at the other co-ops, and try to score over them?"

Liu Mai-nao went scarlet, but Cheng Teh-ming went straight on. "I think you've been looking at it in a narrow way. D'you remember when our co-op was the only one in the village, and how the individual peasants clapped their hands, and laughed when we quarrelled among ourselves? And how they rejoiced when our mule died? When the bridge or the dike needed repairing, we couldn't even get them to come and give a hand. Is it like that now? Have you noticed the way the surplus grain was sold this year, in both seasons? Have you noticed how they turned out to repair the dike the last time? We only had to mention it and the jobs were finished in a few days. Our co-op's the oldest, but instead of helping the others we quarrel with them and set them against us. Is that being unselfish and only thinking of the public good?"

Cheng Teh-ming stopped for a minute, to choose his words carefully. "Mai-nao, why don't you mix with people a bit more, and hear what's being said? Are you sure we're not only thinking of competing? Do we try to give others as much help as we can? It doesn't matter how good our crops are. They'll be no credit to us if we're the only ones to have good crops, will they? It's only when everyone succeeds that we can really feel any credit is due!" Raising his voice a little, he continued, "Your aunt Cheng told me you'd said I was afraid to offend Wei Hu-tou because I was thinking of him as a prospective father-in-law for my daughter. Mai-nao, you're wrong in that, quite wrong. I'm already called the 'Old Man Without an Heir' behind my back. I'm long past fifty. Yes, I *am*

an old man without an heir. But that doesn't make me lose interest in my work. No, never! I've got a daughter, but even if I hadn't I'd still work as hard. I'll work as long as I've got the strength. Look back on the years. Surely you don't think I've sweated like this only for my daughter's sake? . . ." He stopped and broke into a frank laugh. Liu Mai-nao looked at him shamefacedly, his eyes a little moist.

The two sat in silence for a while. Even now Liu Mai-nao could not get over his bitterness over the matter of the fallow land. "You know," he stammered, "on the river bank this morning, it only ended the way it did because you came. If you hadn't come I'd have insisted on opening up that tract of land with our ploughs. And I'd like to see what they could have done to stop me!"

"Well, what do you think we should have done?" Cheng Teh-ming asked, trying to make Mai-nao see it for himself.

"They weren't being open to reason," said Mai-nao. "I reckon we should have got tough with them."

"Tough, eh?" said Cheng Teh-ming, very seriously. "Did you know someone was standing by, as it was, bursting with pleasure at what you'd done already?"

"No — who d'you mean?"

"Chiao Kuei! And Liu Erh-hsing too." Cheng Teh-ming raised his voice. "They are saying, the more we quarrel the better. 'Like two bulls fighting,' they say, 'we can make carpenter's inkstands out of their horns.' So, you see, what you wanted to do was exactly what they wanted too. That's why I say they'd certainly have applauded if you'd been tough."

Cheng Teh-ming had made out an unanswerable case, and Liu Mai-nao winced. He clenched his jaw until his teeth gritted, trying to express in some way his deep remorse and indignation.

6

When old people quarrel, the younger ones suffer for it.

Ever since she was a baby Hsiu-chih had been the apple of her mother's eye, and had grown up in her mother's palms. In hot weather Mother Cheng worried that Hsiu-chih would be overcome by the heat, in cold that she would catch a chill. She had only this one daughter, and she was even afraid of a puff of wind.

Mrs. Cheng was a thoughtful woman who worried about many things. Now, when the family was getting enough to eat and wear, she was worrying about her daughter's marriage.

When the new Marriage Law was announced in their township, Mother Cheng had been a member of the local branch committee of the Women's Federation and had therefore taken the lead in getting the new law known. In her heart of hearts, although she really thought the

Marriage Law was wonderful, there was one thing that made her heart miss a beat whenever she thought of it. "What if my Hsiu-chih should set her heart on the wrong sort of man. . . ." She dared not let her thoughts go any further.

Up to the previous year she could see that Hsiu-chih was still a naive young girl who liked teasing and having fun. Of course she kept a close eye on her daughter's friends, but none of them seemed to mean anything special to her. But since New Year this was no longer true. Hsiu-chih was always running over to the Wei's. Then Mrs. Cheng found that Hsiu-chih had embroidered a pillow-case for Hsiao-sung and made him a shirt. Could this mean what she thought? She was not quite sure. Finally, one evening, Hsiu-chih had gone to a meeting, and her mother had waited up for her till midnight. When at last she opened the door for her daughter she saw that someone had brought Hsiu-chih home, and recognized his voice. It *was* Hsiao-sung, then.

Ever since then her heart had been going up and down queerly, up seven times and down eight: she felt uneasy all the time. She did not know whether to be pleased or worried, but she did know she was all upset.

She made a point of talking to the Red Gleam Co-op members, and tried stealthily to discover the amount of work-points Hsiao-sung earned. When she discovered that he was getting more than 200 a month, her heart warmed. At least the lad was good at his work!

She tried to find out more about him. Some said he had been quarrelsome ever since he was little, and that he was the kind who could put anything off his mind and not care about the consequences. When she heard this her heart was gripped by an icy hand. "What shall I do if my daughter marries a hothead — someone like a raw red brick?" she wondered.

She was fetching water from the well once when Hsiao-sung chanced to go by, and she decided to test him. "Oh dear, this is so heavy!" she said, loud enough for him to hear. Hsiao-sung came over at once. "Auntie, let me do that for you," he said, rolling up his sleeves, and taking the bucket out of her hands. She had a good look at him then. A good-looking, well set up young fellow, if a trifle dark-skinned, she thought. Handled the job sensibly, too. Her daughter knew how to pick a man for herself, it seemed.

One point of uneasiness still remained. Would Hsiao-sung be reliable as a son-in-law? Would he be willing to live in their house and take care of her and the old man in their old age? Hsiao-sung's father, she knew, was a stubborn man. Once he'd got an idea into his head there was no budging him. If he was against the marriage, there was no hope. She went over and over the problem with her husband, but he had so much on his hands that he spared little attention for such do-

mestic matters. "It's up to the children themselves to decide," he would say. "Don't worry about it so. We shan't starve in our old age."

Since it was no use talking to the old man, and she could not very well talk about it to her daughter, she tried to let the matter rest. But her heart would not let her be at ease. Every time she had a few minutes with Hsiu-chih she could not help saying, "Hsiu-chih, your dad and I have only you. We've suffered a lifetime of misery for your sake." Then she would go on to talk about this or that family whose daughter's husband lived with them and was a good son to them. This was her way of showing Hsiu-chih her duty.

Hsiu-chih was a very sensible girl. She could read her mother's thoughts quite clearly and knew just what was worrying her. But she could not say so openly, and only said, "Mum, why are you always going on like this?" But she told herself, "Oh, mother, you don't have to worry!"

But now this access of ill feeling between the two co-ops stirred up a tempest in the love affair too.

The first one to upset Hsiu-chih was Liu Mai-nao. When he came to their house Hsiu-chih had told him he should not have said, in front of every one, that the Red Gleam's crops were poor. But Liu Mai-nao told her she was biassed, and that she only said that because she was in love with Hsiao-sung. Young Sen did not help either. Every time he saw her he would say "Traitress!" She took him up on it, and asked him how he dared call her that, but he was still stupid, and said if the cap fitted she could wear it.

Hsiu-chih began to get really upset about it, and wept. She was not only upset about herself, but even more so because of the things they said about her father. She knew what her father was like, and that he acted as he did in forbidding his members to be sarcastic about other co-ops purely because he wanted them all to work well together and make a success of their farming. No thought at personal advantage would have entered his head. Yet people would go on saying that when she supported him it was only for Hsiao-sung's sake! Just to show them, she decided she would not go near Hsiao-sung. When she ran into him by chance, even when there were only the two of them, she turned away, would not look at him, and walked off.

Hsiao-sung was bewildered, and Hsiu-chih suffered with him.

As soon as she returned from night school she flopped down on her bed. She was sure that Hsiao-sung must be angry with her. Just then one of Hsiao-sung's little brothers turned up. He looked quietly round for Hsiu-chih, and when he found her, said, wide-eyed and very solemn, "My big brother told me to give you this. No one else is to see it." He gave her a little screwed-up note, and ran off. Hsiu-chih smoothed it out. "I'm waiting for you under the big poplar," it said. She had meant to be strong-minded and not see him but somehow or other she could not stay

still. As her mind pictured Hsiao-sung eagerly awaiting her, she jumped up and, without even pausing to blow out the lamp, ran to her tryst.

Hsiao-sung called out to her at once, smiling, "Aren't you speaking to me nowadays?" When Hsiu-chih saw him and saw he was not angry, words failed her for a moment. Then she managed to say, with a sob, "Oh Hsiao-sung, they're all saying such horrid things!" and turned away to dry her eyes. She pulled herself together, though, and after a while was able to tell Hsiao-sung what Mai-nao and Young Sen were saying.

"Oh, bother them! What does it matter!" said Hsiao-sung, putting a bold face on it.

"You'd feel awful if you were me!" said Hsiu-chih, looking straight at him.

"Go on! I don't think so," said Hsiao-sung, still in a normal voice. "Why, only today I had an argument with my dad. When he came back after the row on the river bank it so happened that we'd got in a new batch of machinery for making bean vermicelli, and no one knew how to use it, and when I said we could ask someone from your co-op to show us, dad went right up in the air."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, plenty—mostly nasty. He rowed at me and said I was just trying to make him lose face, and forbade me flatly to go near your co-op. I just said, 'All right, if you know how to use it, go ahead,' and he shut up. In the end I went and called in your chap."

"Did he come?"

" 'Fraid not! he said he was scared of my old man," Hsiao-sung chuckled.

Hsiu-chih was pensive for a moment. "I'm a bit afraid of him myself," she said.

"What's there to be afraid of?" said Hsiao-sung. "We'll explain it to him if he's in the wrong. The way our two co-ops are going on at present, we'll have to do something about it. It just won't do to go on like this."

"You're quite right," said Hsiu-chih, remembering how her mother was worrying the last few days. "My mum's in ever such a state. But then she's afraid that things'll go wrong between us."

"Between us?" asked Hsiao-sung, with a grin. "What's all this got to do with our feelings?"

Hsiu-chih blushed, and looked away. "You don't know my mum," she said. "She minds a lot about things that concern you and me. One thing she worries about dreadfully is that your father'll get angry and not let you come to live with us when we're married. You know mum and dad have only got me. If this goes wrong it'll break their hearts." She couldn't keep back a tear when she thought of this.

"That's all right. I'll go and reassure your mum tomorrow," said Hsiao-sung, as cheerful as ever.

"The way you talk!" said Hsiu-chih, knowing that it was not so simple. "Whatever can you say to her?"

"Oh, I'll find some way of saying it so she'll understand."

"I don't think you ought to talk about it — even if you do know some way of doing it," said Hsiu-chih. They looked at one another, and then began to laugh.

It was nearly midnight, and all the village was sound asleep. Hsiao-sung saw her home by paths which ran round the village, not the main path. They had so much to say that one way and another they took a very long time. Cheng Teh-ming was coming back himself from Liu Mai-nao's and saw the two figures ahead of him. There was little enough moonlight by then but he recognized them. He thought they would be shy if they saw him, so he kept in the shadow, and got past without their seeing him.

Hsiao-sung and Hsiu-chih finally reached the house. By then the moon was slanting towards the west. Hsiu-chih stood at the door, not wanting to knock. She tried to peep through a crack to see if her mum was in bed, but to her surprise the door sprang open as soon as her head touched it. It had obviously been left unlatched on purpose. A tender warmth flooded her heart. Blushing, she turned to Hsiao-sung with a little laugh, and said, "Look what my mum has done!" Hsiao-sung laughed too.

But as a matter of fact, it wasn't her mum at all who had left the door ajar for her.

7

Darkness covered the countryside. The wind had died down and the dogs were quiet. The whole village was deep in silent slumber.

Cheng Teh-ming, however, was not asleep. He tossed and turned, going over in his mind all that had happened that day. He was still awake when his daughter came in. She dropped off quickly, but not so her father. He decided that the first thing to do was to write a letter to the county Party committee and put the situation before them.

He got up quietly, lit the lamp and found his spectacles. The pen felt awkward in his hand as he began to write laboriously under the dim light.

The river gurgled gently in the silent night, and the moon's rays shone only fitfully through the drifting clouds and the light mist of dawn which was rising from the damp soil.

"What, daybreak already?" asked his wife, waking up.

"No. . . . Go to sleep, it's still early," Cheng Teh-ming replied, going on with his letter.

"Can't you do your writing in the daytime?"

"We're reaping today."

Slowly, a pearly light came through the paper panes and the lamplight faded into a pale pink glow. Cheng Teh-ming looked up and realized that a new day had dawned.

His wife got up. The windlass over the well began to rumble. From down in the village came the call to gather for reaping. Cheng Teh-ming sluiced his face energetically and made ready to go to the fields.

When he went to Hsiu-chih's bed he found her still fast asleep. He knew that she had come in very late and was reluctant to wake her. Surely, he felt, the child ought to sleep a bit longer. Then he thought of the reaping, and decided she must get up. "Hsiu-chih! Hsiu-chih! Wake up, child. We're reaping today. It's time you got up."

"It's so early," grumbled her mother. "It won't hurt us if she does lose a few work-points."

But Hsiu-chih was already awake, and said, with a smile, "I'm a team leader, mum. I've got to get there early. I'd have been worried stiff if you'd let me sleep on." She got up and went out to look for her sickle, and found it out on the stone, newly sharpened. "Oh, dad!" she said. "Did you sharpen my sickle?"

"Hsiu-chih," said her mother, rather severely, "your father sharpened it for you at dinner time yesterday. Goodness me, if everyone went gadding about day and night like some people, nothing would ever get done."

Hsiu-chih didn't know what to say to this so she ran off to work.

Cheng Teh-ming had just finished giving out jobs to the production brigades when a letter came from the county Party committee, asking him to go there at once.

"But I've just written them a letter!" Cheng Teh-ming told the comrade from the county.

"You might as well go and take it along in person. Comrade Lu Lien is very anxious to see you. It's not far, anyway. It won't take long with a bicycle or a horse."

Cheng Teh-ming thought for a moment, and decided that he had better go. "All right," he said. "I'll come right away, busy though we are."

He reached the county Party committee by mid morning, and went straight to the secretary's room.

When he went in he found Lu Lien, the secretary, busy with his papers. He passed him over a packet of cigarettes and they both lit up. Cheng sat quietly waiting. Lu Lien smiled, and they exchanged a long glance which made them both feel as if quite a lot had been said already. Cheng Teh-ming felt as though the Party secretary had said, "Well, old chap, you haven't managed this so well. How does it happen that a capable and experienced Party member like you can allow such things to happen in your village?" while Lu Lien understood Cheng Teh-ming to have said, "Yes, things have gone wrong. I know you won't think it's all my fault, I do feel very ashamed of myself. You only have to tell me what to do now. I'll carry out any directions the Party gives me implicitly."

After a pause, Lu Lien said with a smile, "You start. First tell me about the situation in your village."

Cheng Teh-ming began the whole story, while Lu Lien listened closely, now and again nodding to show he had got the point, and now and again smiling a little.

"I don't think that our Liu Mai-nao understands yet how dangerous his attitude is." Cheng Teh-ming was reaching the end of his report. "As far as we're concerned, I can clearly see, looking back, that we've been feeling too pleased with ourselves. That was bound to get up the noses of our fellow villagers. I've been trying to work out why it is that my co-op members have always felt rather hostile to what we feel are 'outsiders.' We've never had really good relations with them— maybe because we feel, rightly or wrongly, that they have been peasants working in the old way, on their own. That *was* true at one time, and my people haven't adjusted themselves to the changed situation, I'm afraid."

"You're right in some ways on that," said Lu Lien, "but that's not the basic reason for the trouble. And just to put all the blame on your people won't cure it. There are other factors complicating this case." Lu Lien paused for a moment, and then asked, "How many households are there in Wei Hu-tou's co-op?"

"Seven from the old mutual-aid team . . . the original lot . . . and now seventeen others . . . that's twenty-four altogether."

"How many of them were classified as middle peasants?"

"About fourteen, I should say. The original mutual-aid team had five — Liu Erh-hsing's old crowd."

"Which is Liu Erh-hsing? Do I know him?"

"The one with the moustache."

"The carter who was doing the haul from the west gate?"

"Yes. He came back to the co-op after the wheat harvest was in."

Lu Lien nodded. "You know," he said very seriously, "your Party branch ought to think about that aspect. It deserves close attention. Building socialism isn't easy. If we don't consciously take the lead in the countryside, the enemy will, for sure. You've got to get your Party comrades and the Youth Leaguers and the other active members to understand this and see that the strongholds are in our hands. That means seeing that they're not in the hands of the enemy! If you let *them* get in under our banner you'll be in for trouble. It's what happened in quite a few places, and you've got to learn to look out for it and be ready for it. You must be careful about this, and not relax and think everything is all right." He paused again.

"There's no need to get too worried, however," he went on. "The county Party committee will give full consideration to your village affairs, and we'll let you know what we think, and what we think you ought to do. I mustn't keep you any longer . . . you'll be wanting to get back, I expect. But I tell you what. . . . It'd be a good thing if you pulled all your co-op members up on this superiority business. It's fine to be an old-established co-op, but that's no reason to be conceited and put people's backs up. If you've got an old, good co-op, that's all the more reason to be unassuming and modest, really, as far as relations with others go, and help others in a proper spirit. But your actual officials can have a sharp talking to! This Liu Mai-nao of your co-op — he's quite a keen fellow, isn't he?"

"He's a good chap, but a bit too inclined to go off too easily," said Cheng Teh-ming with a grin. "But all our chaps have got one good point, at any rate. The moment they hear that there's any question of sabotage by landlords or rich peasants they close their ranks and forget all their squabbles among themselves. They know where to point their spears, all right!" He broke into a laugh, and Lu Lien joined him.

"That's good to hear," he said. "That's the main thing to grasp. We must work as a corporate body, with no divisions among ourselves, in everything we do."

"You're right," said Cheng Teh-ming. "There's no doubt about it, we've been looking at things from a narrow, sectional point of view." He paused, and then said, "You know, Wei Hu-tou's attitude's been even worse."

Lu Lien was silent for a moment, cogitating. "I'm afraid that Wei Hu-tou is still thinking along the old lines, what you might call bourgeois lines," he said, with a sigh. "He's dropped behind. You'll have to do what you can to help him correct himself." He paused again, and then said, "You go on home now. See that your Party members get a better

political understanding of what's going on, encourage them when necessary and criticize those who need criticism. There's no doubt that Wei Hu-tou's co-op needs tidying up, but the main thing at present is to recognize the real enemy and keep a sharp eye open. There's no call to get depressed and overrate the difficulties. We know you're a tried and trusted Party member, and that you can handle this problem. You know the background very well. After all, you've been struggling all your life in this small-peasant set-up — an ocean of it. You'll realize that all the battles are not over even if you have got some co-ops set up in your village. And, one more thing, don't take any notice of any silly talk about you giving undue consideration to your daughter's future in-laws!"

"Pooh! I shan't mind what they say, now."

"You really don't have to. It's just small-minded nonsense. The Party understands you well enough for you not to bother with it."

"I really haven't worried about it," Cheng Teh-ming assured him, looking away in embarrassment, to hide the fact that his eyes had moistened at the thought of the loving care which the Party gave him, and of the importance of the job he had — a hard job, but how rewarding! Suddenly he felt that a mighty force was buoying him up, the promise of happiness and prosperity for everybody, of the glory of socialism, and his conviction that however much was demanded of him, however old and tired he felt, he would give all he had, even if he perished in the attempt.

The sun was already sinking in the west when Cheng went home. The midday heat was lifting, and a cool gentle breeze was blowing over the fields. As Cheng cantered home he mused over all that he had heard, and felt his heart stirring in him again.

"Yes, the battle is not over," he thought, opening his shirt to the cool air and spurring his horse. The fresh air cooled his hot cheeks and his shirt ballooned behind him as he hurried home.

8

On the outskirts of the village a horse-drawn cart rolled along in a leisurely way. In it were the old stockman and Young Sen. The old man, his eyes half-shut, was gossiping about the latest developments.

"Young Sen, my boy," he croaked. "Didn't the chairman give it you good and proper the other evening!"

"I wasn't the only one to catch it, was I?"

"Don't try to get away from it with me! Do you agree he was right, or are you still being pig-headed?"

"Well — I agree with some of the things that were said, but I'm not so sure about others. When he told us we should help the new co-ops and the mutual-aid teams and the individual peasants, I couldn't agree more.

Nor about the way we behaved — that was wrong, to act so arrogantly and be so pleased with ourselves. What I don't agree with is sending our lantern-slide projector to the township office. After all, the provincial government gave it to us. Why should those fellows play about with it whenever they like? It's too good for them."

"So that projector is still on your mind, eh?"

"Of course! It'd be on yours if you'd repaired it twice, like me."

"Can't they all enjoy it whenever there's a show?"

"That's not the point. Sure, they can come and enjoy the show, but that doesn't mean they've got to know how to operate it themselves. Anyway I don't like the idea." He stopped for a minute, and then said, "I don't think our vice-chairman was all that satisfied, either."

"How do you know what he felt like?"

"Ha! Didn't you see I was sitting next to him at the meeting the day before yesterday? When the chairman said all that bit about us being too fond of talking with our noses in the air, that we should put ourselves in the other person's place and think before we speak, and that there was no getting away from it, it was due to our thinking in a bourgeois way, I couldn't miss seeing with my own eyes the vice-chairman shrug his shoulders and get up and go. And I hear that during the management committee meeting the chairman suggested we should send our new rubber-tired carts to help the other co-ops and mutual-aid teams bring back their millet, and the vice-chairman wouldn't agree. He had another argument with the chairman about that."

"I thought the second brigade's cart did go out to help bring in their millet."

"Yes, but the vice-chairman had to be made to do it."

"How do you know?"

"Never mind how I know, it's a fact. And there's another thing. The other evening Little Chuan took the cart to the Red Gleam to help them bring in their millet. It was obvious to everyone that they were short of carts: all their three carts have been sent to transport salt for the supply and marketing co-op, but Wei Hu-tou told Little Chuan they didn't need our cart. He must have said it on purpose to make us lose face." Young Sen jerked the reins as he spoke and the cart lurched forward at a quicker pace.

"Mm. That Wei Hu-tou has certainly got a one-track mind. He'd rather knock his head against the wall than change direction. All the same, the Red Gleam Co-op will make a pretty penny with the carting they've been doing."

"No doubt about that!" said Young Sen. "What do you expect when one co-op monopolizes the whole business?" His tune changed, and a complacent grin came over his face. "Never fear! If they think they can compete with our co-op, they'll have to wait another two years." He

The Hunters (50.5 cm. × 41.5 cm.) ANONYMOUS (Sung Dynasty)

suddenly checked himself. "Oho! What am I saying? I'm being arrogant again. I take it back, I take it back."

The cart reached the millet field. A group of women were reaping, their bodies bent, their sickles flashing rhythmically. The pastel shades of their blouses shone brightly against the golden millet.

"Hsiu-chih! I say, Hsiu-chih! Has your group reaped a cartload yet?" Young Sen was shouting from his perch on the cart at the edge of the field.

The girls went on with the reaping, and never even raised their heads. Young Sen shouted again, but they still paid no heed.

"Are you deaf, or what? Aren't you going to give a fellow an answer?" Young Sen got down and walked over to Hsiu-chih.

"Can't you see for yourself?" she asked. "You've got eyes, haven't you?"

Young Sen made a face at her, and bending down so as to see her face, said, "Aha, cutting, aren't you? You'd make a fine razor blade! What's up? Trying to pay me back, eh?" Hsiu-chih only said, "Pay you back? Why should I want to pay you back?" She laughed as she looked at him. "Hsiu-chih," he said in a lower tone, "your dad criticized me proper at the meeting last night."

"You certainly deserved it," said one of the other lassies.

"I'm not saying I didn't deserve it, am I?" Young Sen cocked his head on one side. "What's this?" he went on. "Are you girls in a plot together? Why do you all talk like this spitfire — swallowed a dose of gunpowder?"

The girls giggled. "Hey, you there, machine-gun," shouted the old stockman — he was tired of waiting. "Start loading, can't you?" Machine-gun was his nickname for Young Sen.

"All right!" said Young Sen, still enjoying his act and fooling around even more wildly. The girls looked at one another. "You there, machine-gun, start loading!" they cried in unison.

"I'll have something to say to you girls when I've loaded the cart," said Young Sen, and ran off to do his part of the job.

They got the load on, and then Young Sen took it into his head to try his skill at cracking the whip. He sent the whip whistling through the air again and again, though his mules were having a hard time getting the cart to start on the loose soil. "This is a pistol, this is a Mauser!" he muttered happily to himself as he worked the whip.

Finally they got the cart loaded and left the millet fields, and were just crossing a stretch of dry land which belonged to the Red Gleam Co-op when they saw two men standing near by, Cheng Shih-tou and Liu Erh-hsing. Liu Erh-hsing kept his back turned, but Cheng Shih-tou ran over, shouting to them to stop.

"We'd better stop," said the old stockman, but Young Sen kept on cracking his whip. "I'm not going to bother with them," he said.

Cheng Shih-tou came right up to the cart and caught hold of the harness. "You can just turn back," he said. "There's no right-of-way in our fields for carts from your co-op."

"When we were getting the wheat in, you never said anything about no passage for us," said Young Sen, looking straight at him.

"That was in the wheat season. Things are different now."

Young Sen was bursting with rage and a fierce retort was trembling on his lips, but he remembered that only the day before Cheng Teh-ming had criticized him. "Oh, well," he said, "don't let's go into that now. I know why you're behaving like this, but our chairman told us yesterday that we're not to quarrel with you, so I'm not going to. Just let us pass, will you?"

"What a white face you've got!" Cheng Shih-tou went on, taunting. Now Young Sen was rather dark-skinned, and the dig made him so angry that he felt like jumping down on his tormentor and hitting him, but he managed to hold himself back. Flinging his whip down, he said simply, "My face isn't white, but that's neither here nor there. I'm not trying to marry into your family." So saying, he jumped off the cart in a rage and went off to the Red Flag Co-op, intending to get reinforcements.

When he was gone, the old man picked up the whip and drove the cart back on to their own fields.

At the management committee meeting two days ago Cheng Teh-ming had gone over the shortcomings of the co-op and everyone felt that the problem was serious. Much of the firing at the meeting was centred on Liu Mai-nao, but he had not taken it very well. He did not feel inclined to accept all the criticism.

It was an overcast afternoon. Cheng Teh-ming took a turn round the fields, and saw that some of the new co-ops and mutual-aid teams were having to use untrained young oxen to pull their loaded carts, and were only managing to carry about a dozen shocks of millet each trip — and even then going very slowly. Cheng Teh-ming went back and asked Liu Mai-nao what he thought about sending three of the co-op's rubber-tired carts over, to get the harvest in for the others. "Do what you think fit," said Liu Mai-nao, reluctantly. "The management committee agreed to it, didn't they?"

The carts were sent out, much to the surprise of the other co-ops. They wondered what had made the Red Flag Co-op members suddenly lower their eyes from the sky, and why some of the formerly uppish workers were now speaking in modest and friendly terms. The carts went from one field to the other, working like a whirlwind. Before dusk all the shocks had been brought to the threshing ground.

Ordinarily, non-members rarely went into the Red Flag Co-op office. But after the carts went out to help with the millet, the situation changed. The other co-ops' members and some of the mutual-aid teams felt that

since the Red Flag people had been so friendly and helpful it was up to them to show equal courtesy. Maybe we can't afford such good draught animals, they thought, but at any rate we've got plenty of manpower, and quite a few came along in the hope that they could give a hand at some job or other.

In the evening the Red Flag was having a general membership meeting, with Cheng Teh-ming speaking again about helping other co-ops. Liu Mai-nao was out in the office by himself when the leader of one of the mutual-aid teams came in. Now this leader had not been on speaking terms with Liu Mai-nao ever since they had had a quarrel over a set of vermicelli-making equipment. Now there were only the two of them in the room, and you could feel the tenseness as soon as the "outsider" entered.

"Brother Mai-nao," said he, "you're not still angry with me, are you?" Both of them burst out laughing.

"No, seriously, I've come to ask you something," he went on. "When I was in town yesterday I noticed that the flour mill was advertising bran for sale. I had a look at it. It looks like a bargain to me, at the price they're asking. Now, I hear that you haven't got enough feed for the amount of livestock you carry. We're sending in our cart to town tomorrow. Would you like us to bring back some bran for you?"

It was perfectly true that the Red Flag *was* short of foodstuff, and this offer made Liu Mai-nao feel as if he had discovered a treasure. It was strange to see these two, who were not on speaking terms before now. Once started they could not stop. They were talking away when the chairman of the East Side Co-op came in to borrow a set of harness.

"Doesn't the room look grand?" he said politely. "So many great men's portraits!" He asked if he could borrow some harness, and then said, "I hear you people have reclaimed over 200 *mou* of waste land by the river."

"That's right, but we think we'll have to give some away. We intended to put it under barley, but we shall need all our barley as feed, so no matter how much we've ploughed we shan't be able to use it if we haven't got the seed to spare."

"No barley to spare for seed, eh? But we've got plenty! If it's barley seed you want we've still got a thousand catties or so. We'd be glad to let you have it. D'you want to swap it for maize?"

"Do we!" burst out Liu Mai-nao, so overwhelmed he was at a loss for words.

"Righto! We'll bring the barley over tomorrow, then," said the East Side chairman, picking up the harness and going off with the other fellow. Liu Mai-nao, left to himself in the room, pondered over what had happened. He felt a warm glow of happiness all over. He was both moved and ashamed.

Next day the seed barley was brought over in good time. Liu Mai-nao was half expecting Cheng Teh-ming to go on moralizing, but he only bantered the East Side Co-op chairman about the marriage coming off soon in his family. "I hear you'll be a father-in-law soon," said he. "You and your missus'll have to give up sleeping half-naked in the yard!"

They were weighing out the barley when suddenly Young Sen rushed in, panting heavily. "They've stopped our cart!" he shouted. "They've blocked the way of our cart!"

"Who's they?" asked Cheng Teh-ming sharply.

"Cheng Shih-tou! That Liu Erh-hsing's there too. They told us there's no passage for us through their fields." Then he quickly added, "But I never said a single word, honest!"

"Phew! Liu Erh-hsing is really going too far," said the visitor. A general silence followed. Liu Mai-nao's face went red with fury, and then white. "All right," he said abruptly. "We'll turn back, we'll have to make a detour and come down that slope on the north side." He caught Cheng Teh-ming's eye, meaningly.

"*You* want us to turn back?" Young Sen's eyes nearly jumped out of his head with astonishment.

"Yes, that's what I said. Turn back," said Liu Mai-nao.

Young Sen could not believe his ears. He repeated Liu Mai-nao's words again. "You say we're to turn back, and make a detour down the slope on the north side?"

"Yes, yes. Can't you hear what's said to you?" said Liu Mai-nao, irritated by the repetition. But Young Sen was unperturbed. "I thought of something as I ran back," he said, wagging his hand wisely. "The Red Gleam's got five lots of land they can only reach by going through our fields. Just let them see what happens when they want to do that! We can stop them, can't we?"

Liu Mai-nao made no reply, but Cheng Teh-ming spoke now. "No, my son," he said with a grin. "We shan't refuse them passage. Of course they're quite in the wrong to stop us, but sooner or later they'll see they can't do it. You wait!"

"I'll wait, all right — see if I don't," said Young Sen grimly, and raced back to where he had left the cart.

9

When Liu Erh-hsing went back from the fields he made up a story for Wei Hu-tou's ears.

According to him Young Sen of the Red Flag had been cursing the Red Gleam Co-op and getting at him and Cheng Shih-tou while he whipped his mule, and that was why Cheng Shih-tou had stopped Young Sen's cart. But Wei Hu-tou heard him in silence, and sat thinking for

quite a while. For the last few days he had noticed that Cheng Teh-ming had gone out of his way to be friendly, and had even offered to give him a hand with his co-op's work. He had begun to doubt whether he was right to suspect Cheng Teh-ming of trying to harm him. Furthermore, there had been constant muddle and confusion over his co-op's autumn harvesting. The members of Liu Erh-hsing's original mutual-aid team would not co-operate with the other members: if one group worked the other slacked. And it was about time they got ready to sow the winter wheat too, but they had not got the animals to do it. After a pause, therefore, all he said was, "Let's not compete with them in such things from now on."

Liu Erh-hsing saw that Wei Hu-tou was generally disturbed. "You're not worrying about the harvest, are you?" he said. "In a few days our carts'll be back and we'll get it all in in no time." He edged nearer, and lowered his voice. "I want to have a word with you about Chiao Kuei," he said. "I know from him that if you agree and will back it up, he'll come back, and bring in his two mules. Mind you, he likes being out — it's much freer — but he doesn't like to leave us so short, he says. He's a bit worried that our co-op mightn't come out on top."

Wei Hu-tou nodded at this. "I know Chiao Kuei still thinks of us, although he's no longer with us."

"Chiao Kuei's above minding little things," said Liu Erh-hsing, seizing his chance. "I've known him willingly suffer a bit of loss for himself. He's a true friend, and since he was in this with us he's looking at it from the point of view of friendship."

The conversation was interrupted by a group of women who had come back from the field with empty baskets, and were clamouring at the door. "Chairman, where were we meant to go to pick the cotton?" they wanted to know. "There's only two *mou* of cotton on the south side where we were told to go, and you sent over a dozen of us. There's not enough room to stand, let alone pick cotton!"

"Well, why on earth couldn't you use your heads and find out where to go," said Hu-tou. "We've got over 60 *mou* of cotton. Why must you all crowd into a two-*mou* patch? You all had your eyes on it because it's near, I suppose. There's not a bit of socialist spirit in you . . . all you mind about is earning work-points."

The women resented this remark and felt it was unjustified. "We went there because Liu Erh-hsing told us to. We didn't choose that plot ourselves," said one. "How d'you expect us to know which are our cotton fields?" said another. "Yesterday we went to a field on the north side, and we'd been picking for quite a while before we found out that it belonged to the Red Star. I reckon it's the chairman's job to make it clear where we're to go."

"Look here, Liu Erh-hsing," said Wei Hu-tou, highly irritated, "what do you do all day? Why should all these little details be left to me to

decide? I don't know how it comes about that you send people cotton-picking without telling them exactly where to go!"

"I did tell them exactly," Liu Erh-hsing answered quickly, forcing a smile, "but they never get it clear." He turned to the women and said, "It's the land on the east side, see? That bit which touches that twenty-*mou* lot of mine. It should have been done long ago."

"That bit? We did it yesterday!" cried the women, now thoroughly puzzled. Liu Erh-hsing looked at the sky in despair. "What d'you mean?" he shouted. "Why, the day before yesterday — I mean last night, I had a look at it and it was still all white. Oh, come on, I'll have to take you there myself, I suppose." He glanced a little nervously at Wei Hu-tou and went off with the women.

When they had gone Wei Hu-tou thought over what had been said about Chiao Kuei coming back into their co-op. He felt rather tempted to let him, but he knew Cheng Teh-ming would not agree. Only the evening before, at the Party branch committee meeting Old Man Cheng and several others had criticized him for his bourgeois way of thinking. Wei Hu-tou's suspicions came back. He decided that Cheng Teh-ming was purposely trying to make trouble for him; he was sure it was because Cheng had a big co-op and was jealous of Wei Hu-tou enlarging his.

In the evening it began to drizzle. Wei Hu-tou sat in the office by himself, brooding. He had plenty to brood about, what with Chiao Kuei

and his rubber-tired cart and mules, and the autumn harvest only half in. . . . Suddenly the door opened and Cheng Teh-ming came in.

Hu-tou only gave him a cold greeting, and sat glumly silent. "How much of your wheat land is still unploughed?" asked Cheng Teh-ming.

"Over thirty *mou*."

"Got enough manure ready?"

"What d'you mean, enough? Didn't know there was a set standard! Call it what you like, it's got to do!"

Cheng Teh-ming gave an understanding grin and sat quietly for a minute. "What d'you think about yesterday's meeting?" he asked after a minute.

"I've nothing to say," was Hu-tou's reply.

Cheng Teh-ming was getting a little impatient. "Look here, Hu-tou," he said, getting up. "You can't go on like this. If you want to disagree with us, out with it. Don't keep it to yourself and let it rot in your belly. Say what's on your mind. We've got to think of the work, haven't we? It doesn't help to keep on quarrelling with one another. It's not as if you were a raw Party member of only one or two years' standing."

Wei Hu-tou wouldn't meet his eye. "There's nothing to say," he said, and ungraciously quoted a proverb. " 'Where there are too many carts they get in one another's way. Too many boats only bump into each other.' "

Cheng Teh-ming became really angry at this, but managed to keep it out of his voice. "You know, Hu-tou," he said. "If you really mean what you say you're making a great mistake. No wonder you neither understand nor agree with what we all said at the meeting. How can you say or think such a thing? There can be any number of carts, but there's no need for them to obstruct one another, nor will the boats bump if they're all going the same way. The only thing that does block the way to socialism is a bourgeois way of thinking — though I suppose you could say that going the socialist way gets in the way of those going the bourgeois way! But we want to obstruct *them* — more than that! We want to block their way completely." Cheng Teh-ming became more and more animated as he talked. His voice showed how strongly he felt. "Hu-tou," he went on, "I've been wanting to talk things over with you for some time, but I rather feel you've been avoiding me. I thought you were just lagging behind, but it never occurred to me that you could have got *so* backward. You, an old Communist! It's six years ago that we two joined the Party. Don't you remember the movement against the landlords. For three months on end you never got a good night's rest. When some held back for selfish considerations or to save someone's face, you never did. I remember one night when we were talking. . . . 'I never feel tired nowadays,' you said. 'I've given all my life and every-

thing I've got to the Party.' Oh, Hu-tou, how you've dropped behind! All the years we've been together we've never had hard words between us or quarrelled. We've been like brothers, you and I. Maybe talking like this will make you hate me. Maybe you'll think I'm just a nuisance. But I can't mince matters, or pretend with you. I've got a duty to the Party, and a duty to you. Yes, to you, my class brother, the brother who joined the Party with me and whom I've fought shoulder to shoulder with all these years. You're caught in the net of bourgeois thinking. I must get you out of it, even if you bite at my fingers and beat at my hand." Cheng Teh-ming stopped, breathing heavily. Wei Hu-tou sat rigid, with his teeth clenched, and his face was beaded with sweat.

"I'll put it quite bluntly," Cheng Teh-ming went on, weighing his words. "You're all tied up. You still don't understand why the Party wants us to organize co-ops. Maybe you pay lip-service to the theory, but you've no conviction about it at heart. That heart of yours doesn't know what direction we should go in. All you can think about is that our co-op's got dozens of mules and six rubber-tired carts. You work desperately hard to get your co-op going in as big a way — so much so that you don't do your duty by the land and you don't mind what sort of people you get in your co-op. Going on like that will wreck any co-op. All you'll do is to make us poor peasants work as hired labour for the rich ones."

Wei Hu-tou flared up at this. "You dare tell me that the poor peasants will become hired labour for rich peasants again? Anyone who tells me that, I'd . . . I'd kill him with my bare hands!" he cried, pounding the table with his fist.

"Pah!" said Cheng Teh-ming in disgust. "It's not only someone talking about it. It's you, Wei Hu-tou, who's well on the way to doing it. You're not only sending them back to the rich peasants' houses, you're making a shelter for the rich peasants to hide in. They call themselves co-op members, but that doesn't stop them going on with their exploitation. Think for a moment and then tell me why Chiao Kuei wants to sneak back into your co-op! It makes me sick! But he needn't think he's getting away with it. I'll be a match for him, and for all of them. They may plan to go on exploiting us, but we're not letting them. And you'd better think it over, too." Cheng Teh-ming had finished all he could say. He went out, slamming the door behind him.

Wei Hu-tou could not say a word. His head was sunk and he felt as though something was wrenching his heart. He jumped up, stamped his feet, and then staggered across to his bed and leant against the wall; he felt as though all his strength had been drained from him.

10

Young Sen's words were perfectly true. There were five lots of Red Gleam land which could normally only be reached by going through the Red Flag's land.

"Now what shall we do?" one of the old members asked Wei Hu-tou bitterly. "Liu Erh-hsing blocked the Red Flag's cart the other day, and today we'll need to go through their land to cart manure to our eastern field. What are we going to do?"

"We'll have to go round," said Wei Hu-tou, reddening.

"Go round? — All right, but what'll that mean? It's a good four or five *li* more. We'll have to make a circle right round the Chang's old graveyard, and take that road along the northern ridge. Oh, hell, why are our people always doing things which only harm ourselves!"

"Stop your grumbling and get a move on," said Wei Hu-tou, at a complete loss. "There's nothing for it but to make the detour."

The man went off, grumbling. They could usually make five trips to that particular piece of land in a morning, but with this detour they'd be lucky if they could do three, however much they hurried, what with the distance and the slope. As the Red Gleam cart drove along the driver cursed the oxen freely, but he was too fond of his beasts to whip them. One of them had been his before he joined the co-op.

Coming back after the first trip he was quite fed up. Every stray cat, chicken or dog appeared disgusting in his eyes. By chance three or four girls from the Red Flag Co-op, Hsiu-chih among them, were going back on the same road from cotton-picking, each with a big load. When they saw an empty cart they wanted a lift.

"What have you been carting, grandad?" asked one, close behind him.

"Manure, that's what!" he answered crossly, when he saw they were from the Red Flag.

"How many trips have you made?" asked another.

"This is my first!" He guessed they were trying to get a lift, and made the oxen go faster.

The girls began whispering among themselves as they followed along behind. Then one said, loud enough for him to overhear, "Your leader ox is a new one, isn't he? I haven't noticed such a big ox in your co-op before."

The old driver could not pretend not to be interested in this — it was his ox she was talking about. "It's that calf I had. Grown big, hasn't he!" said he. "He can pull a plough or harrow alone." He smiled jovially. "Come along, lassies," he said. "Put your cotton on the cart and get on."

The ox cart rolled slowly along and the old man chatted with the girls. "Where's the manure for?" asked Hsiu-chih. "Our wheat land

over east," he said, without thinking. "Why ever do you come this way round?" she asked, puzzled.

"Because I want to. I felt like trying out our oxen's strength, that's what. Or maybe I've come specially to give you girls a lift!" he said, half in jest and half bitterly. But Hsiu-chih realized at once what lay behind his words. She knew all about Cheng Shih-tou stopping Young Sen and his cart. She thought for a moment, and then said, "Oh, I've just remembered something Liu Mai-nao said. He said if any of your carts want to go through our fields today, please keep to the sides — we're just starting sowing our winter wheat."

The old man's eyes opened wide when he heard this. Suddenly he chuckled. "You're quite right, child," he said. "It *is* the time to sow winter wheat. Next time I go through your field I'll guarantee to keep to the side."

"Right you are," said Hsiu-chih. She could not keep back a smile either.

When she got home she found her mother alone, sitting glumly in the yard. "What's the matter, mum?" she asked. When she saw her, Mother Cheng burst into tears. Hsiu-chih had no idea what was the matter. "Mum," she asked anxiously, "whatever is it?"

"Oh, Hsiu-chih, my love," her mother gulped, "he — he's a real raw red brick!"

"Who is, mum?" asked Hsiu-chih again.

"Your Hsiao-sung! I went over to his house just now and found him having such a row with his father. Hsiu-chih dear, your dad and I have only you. . . ." And off she went on her usual lecture, trying to tell Hsiu-chih where her duty lay.

What had happened was that after the midday meal Hsiao-sung had suggested borrowing a double-shared plough from the Red Flag Co-op. The Red Flag had two, and had finished their second ploughing. Hsiao-sung knew that one of the mutual-aid teams had borrowed one and were doing a dozen *mou* or so a day with it. If the Red Gleam borrowed one they could finish their ploughing much quicker. But when Wei Hu-tou heard his suggestion he just glowered. "Don't you dare go there. You'll only get snubbed. They'll never lend it to us."

"Of course they will," said his son. "I know. I've already asked Young Sen."

"Those double-shared ploughs aren't much good, anyway. We might just as well go on using our own." Wei Hu-tou was eager to get rid of Hsiao-sung, but Hsiao-sung would not budge.

"What d'you mean, aren't much good?" he asked. "I've seen them do a dozen *mou* a day. They're three times faster than ours. The thing is, you only think of your old carting. Don't you mind about the wheat? I tell you I'll go and borrow the plough myself, if you won't." Such

behaviour from his son made Wei Hu-tou raging cross. "Don't you dare!" he shouted. "I'll skin you alive."

"Skin me alive, will you? It's for our co-op's benefit, isn't it?" Hsiao-sung was a strong-minded lad and would not give in to his father. One thing led to another, and before long father and son were shouting and swearing at one another wildly.

It was just at this point that Mother Cheng passed on her way to fetch Cheng Teh-ming home for the midday meal.

Mrs. Wei was there, too, trying to stop the quarrel, when she suddenly heard Mrs. Cheng's voice saying, "Sister, has our Hsiu-chih's dad been here?"

Now Hsiao-sung's mother was not stupid. She was very fond of Hsiu-chih, and was anxious for her to marry her son. She was very much afraid that Mrs. Cheng might be against it, so she always went out of her way to say how good her Hsiao-sung was when they met, how he treated his parents with real filial piety, and how capable he was. She was terribly flustered, therefore, when Mrs. Cheng happened to come by just when father and son were having such a noisy quarrel! "No, sister, Brother Teh-ming hasn't been here," she said, and turned towards the house to call to her son. "Hsiao-sung, here's Aunt Cheng come to look for your Uncle Teh-ming. Have you seen him?" She hoped that the boy would realize that Mrs. Cheng was there, but he did not, seemingly, as the angry voices went on louder than ever.

"I forbid you to go to the Red Flag in future," said Wei Hu-tou, pounding the table.

"My legs will take me there, and I'm going. It's not for you to stop me," said Hsiao-sung.

"Afraid you won't be able to get married, eh, you little whippersnapper!"

"You're to set on making money, you don't care about the farm."

Hsiu-chih's mother stood listening, her heart hammering wildly, wondering whatever could be the matter and what had made them so angry.

"You don't know the whole story, sister," said the other woman, blushing. "It's not my boy's fault at all. It's all my old man!" She rushed into the house and said in an urgent whisper, "Oh, you men! Stop quarrelling, do! There's Hsiu-chih's mother out there. She'll hear everything!"

Mother Cheng heard this whisper too. She felt she was causing them too much embarrassment, so she beat a hasty retreat before Mrs. Wei came back.

When she got home she got more and more upset as she thought about it. Why must her only daughter go and fall in love with the son of Wei Hu-tou? The father was as stubborn as could be, and the son was so quick-tempered. What if some day Hsiao-sung were to treat her

and her husband like that? She would not be able to bear it. She unburdened her worries to Hsiu-chih when she returned.

Hsiu-chih tried to console her and managed to make her stop crying. But then she herself began to fret.

She was worried about Hsiao-sung, wondering why he was quarrelling so with his father, and whether he had got a hiding. She longed to go to his house and see him, but on second thoughts she realized that it would not be right to go there soon after a family squabble. If only she could send a message! But she had neither brother nor sister, and no one to send. She sat in the yard, worrying and feeling sorry for herself.

Then suddenly she heard Hsiao-sung talking, over on the threshing ground. Her heart leapt and she flew out of the yard like a kite with a broken string.

Hsiao-sung was talking to Liu Mai-nao and some others. He had brought two mules along, and was borrowing a double-shared plough.

Hsiu-chih began by watching from a distance, but then she overcame her shyness and went nearer. Liu Mai-nao was squatting on his haunches and pointing to the double-shared plough and telling Hsiao-sung that it was quite easy once he knew how. All he had to do was to set the gauge and not let the ploughshares go too deep.

Standing close by, Hsiu-chih stared intently at Hsiao-sung, as if she wanted to read the story in his face. To her surprise Hsiao-sung looked as cheerful and light-hearted as ever. She could see no trace of the anger that had recently filled him.

There were too many people around for her to ask him directly about the quarrel, so she led up to it by asking him where he was going to plough. Hsiao-sung looked up, saw Hsiu-chih and understood what she wanted to say. "We're going to that patch beside the dike by the southern dip," he said.

Before ever he got to the southern dip, Hsiu-chih, a basket over her arm, was there waiting for him by the roadside.

"Whatever made you quarrel so with your dad?" She burst out as soon as he was within hearing.

"He said I wasn't to borrow this plough, that's all," said Hsiao-sung with a grin. "I couldn't help having a row about it."

"Look at you, laughing about it! You don't know what trouble you've caused. My mum's been crying her eyes out all morning."

"Oh dear," said Hsiao-sung, "your mum's too easily upset. When she came by we were just having it out — it was at its worst. We'd finished almost as soon as she left."

"That's not the point," Hsiu-chih remonstrated. "You shouldn't quarrel like that. You should talk it over reasonably. You'll only make everyone laugh at you when they hear. Just like you, always so rash and hot-headed. Don't you remember us criticizing you for it in the League? And now see what you've done. You've not only disturbed all

your family, but mine into the bargain. You should hear what my mum said about you just now. . . ."

"Well, what did she say?"

"She said you were a raw red brick," Hsiu-chih said, but she began to laugh. "But really, you *must* be more careful in future, especially when my mum's around."

"It's not so easy, Hsiu-chih," said Hsiao-sung, shaking his head. "We've got a terrible problem in our co-op. It's worrying me a lot. My dad listens to that wretch Liu Erh-hsing and only thinks of going out carting. They're neglecting the proper farm work. They even mean to allow Chiao Kuei to come back into our co-op."

At this moment Young Sen came in sight at the other end of the dike, walking along beside a cart. Hsiao-sung called to his mules and began to move away and Hsiu-chih went to the other side of the field. As Young Sen was coming down the slope he called out to Hsiu-chih, "Why aren't you in the fields?"

"My mum wants some *tsitsi* greens for supper, and I'm digging some for her," said Hsiu-chih, poking about in the grass at her feet.

"Oh yes? Think I'm blind?" said Young Sen; and didn't he laugh as he went past!

11

Directly after autumn harvest all but one of the co-ops had their share-out, and a feeling of exhilaration and enthusiasm for increasing farm production spread among the peasants.

The members of the new co-ops had felt rather uneasy before the share-out, for fear that the grain they got would not amount to much. But after the distribution, when they set to and worked out how much each family got, most of them found they had done better than when they had worked on their own, even though for the new ones it was only the first season, and the real over-all increase in production was not very much. They knew, also, that now they all owned new farm implements and fertilizer through their co-ops, that they would get a good start for the winter wheat sowing and could look forward with confidence to the next wheat harvest. Some of the peasants who had been thinking of withdrawing changed their minds; others who had not given all their energies to the work now threw themselves into it with enthusiasm. The agricultural co-operative movement caught the hearts of everyone like a great magnet.

It really came home to them that when the co-op reaped good and bigger harvests they would get bigger portions themselves. During the wheat sowing the peasants cheerfully competed with one another in getting up early for work. In the old days, if an awkward corner or a strip of land was missed out in ploughing, it was left, but now everyone turned

back, and made sure that every single inch of land was ploughed. The big clods of earth were knocked into small pieces, and the small pieces pounded until they made a fine tilth. Every scrap of manure was used, even odd droppings on the roads.

But in the Red Gleam Co-op the harvest was not very successful. The co-op committee had been too preoccupied with outside occupations like carting, and had not paid proper attention to organizing the farm work well. Liu Erh-hsing saw in this an opportunity for another evil scheme.

When he had originally joined the Red Gleam, taking with him his original eight households, he had in mind that the poor peasants could till his land, leaving Chiao Kuei and him free to go on with their carting. That plan was not entirely successful because Cheng Teh-ming had driven out Chiao Kuei and, despite several attempts to get him back, he had not been allowed in because Wei Hu-tou had not dared to agree to it. So now, when it came to the distribution of income, Liu Erh-hsing saw his way to raising another problem.

"Some of our people want to withdraw from the co-op," he said to Wei Hu-tou one evening.

"Who wants to back out?" Wei Hu-tou asked fiercely.

"There's Lao Wan and Ping-shen, and six or seven households from the west side. They all feel like quitting. I've tried to talk them over but they won't listen to me. They say that practically all the things in the co-op were theirs before, and they won't be any better off for it — they won't get any bigger share of grain. They think they might as well go out and manage on their own." Liu Erh-hsing stole a glance at Wei Hu-tou. "This time," he thought, "I'm going to see that you shoulder the responsibility, and then we'll see how you get out of it!"

"All right. If they really don't want to work with us, let them leave!" was what came into Wei Hu-tou's mind, but he did not say it aloud. It had been on the tip of his tongue several times before, but he had never had the courage to say it. He could not escape the feeling that Liu Erh-hsing had an iron grip on the co-op. If this group, which he knew was under Liu's control, really backed out, it would come close to wrecking it. He sat glumly, thinking, with his eyes fixed on Liu Erh-hsing. A wave of revulsion came over him. That mouth, half hidden by a moustache, was unbearably ugly and vicious! In his morbid state it seemed to be enormous, big enough to swallow him in one gulp.

"You people had better work it out and make up your own minds," he said gruffly. He turned away and left.

Next day Lao Wan, Ping-shen and some of the others, making plenty of noise about it, wanted to take their draught animals, their feeding troughs and their implements home. Wei Hu-tou was tormented, both by worrying about it and by the fear that people outside the co-op would hear about it. Liu Erh-hsing approached him again, and stealthily drew

him aside. "Look, Hu-tou," said he, "you'll need to have all your wits about you. I've just found out what it is they really want. They say if we change the present methods of distribution — the 60 per cent for labour and 40 per cent for land shares — to the other way round, 40 per cent for labour and 60 per cent for land, they'll stay on. If they don't, it'll mean the end of our co-op. If they back out, and take their land and carts and animals away, it's all up with us."

Wei Hu-tou shuddered as he listened. "If we do it that way," he asked, torn with anxiety, "what about the poor peasants? Will they be willing?"

Liu Erh-hsing gave a crafty sneer. "I've already arranged that with the book-keeper! We'll nominally keep to the sixty-forty principle, but in fact we'll reverse it without telling anyone. We can put in a bit extra for those with a lot of labour power — and take the money for it out of the transport section."

Wei Hu-tou had begun to realize what he was driving at, and his first instinct was to get up and throw Liu Erh-hsing out. But somehow he lacked the courage, and when it came to the point did not even protest. It flashed through his mind that Cheng Teh-ming had prophesied this. . . . He remembered how he had struggled to emancipate his poor peasant brothers a few years back. But he was caught now, overwhelmed. It was like an incident when he was a child bathing in the river, and some one had pushed him under the water. Like then, all he could do was pinch his nose tight and wait, helpless.

12

"Who told you about it?" asked Cheng Teh-ming, looking at Hsiao-sung's flushed face in the lamp-light.

"Nobody had to tell me. I saw it with my own eyes. I was helping the book-keeper with the provisional distribution list, and noticed that he wasn't calculating the amount for each in the proper sixty-forty way; he was doing it the other way round: the sixty for land and the forty for labour! When I asked him why, he told me to mind my own business. I went home and asked dad, but he was lying in bed and only heaved a sigh and turned away towards the wall. I'm sure that scoundrel Liu Erh-hsing is up to his tricks again. We'll have to do something about it, quick. We're distributing the grain tomorrow and he's in charge."

"H'm," said Old Man Cheng, nodding. "He's made the first move, has he? All right! Let him do his tricks in front of everyone. We'll let the masses see for themselves." He looked at Hsiao-sung and smiled reassuringly. "Keep cool, son. Don't get flustered. Have you got the membership list? Do you know exactly how much land they each own and what their work-points should be?"

"I've got the lists."

"Good. Bring them over to the township office later on tonight," said Cheng Teh-ming. "Work out what the correct shares for everybody are, taking sixty for labour, forty for land. And will you ask Cheng Shih-tou and Cheng Lao-san to come over straight away, too? Mind you don't let anyone else know." He took down a padded jacket from the wall and put it over the boy's shoulders. "You're not going to get much sleep tonight!" he said. "Get along now."

The lad ran off, and Cheng Teh-ming went up to the co-op, got hold of Liu Mai-nao, Liu Shu-ching and the other members of the Party branch committee, and started to talk over the problem which had become so urgent.

"Today we've all read the county Party committee's directive," said Cheng Teh-ming. His tone showed how serious he felt the matter was. "But now it seems obvious we can't wait until after harvest to tackle the Red Gleam Co-op. They've pushed the problem to our very door. To think that one of us said, only this morning, that it wasn't very serious! You can see now that it is very serious. It's almost as though we'd built up a platform for them to act on, and when we tried to make them change, they wanted to pull it down. But at least we know just how we stand now. There's Liu Erh-hsing, a rich peasant, working hand-in-glove with Chiao Kuei. Don't fool yourselves that he's just got an oily tongue and can't really do much harm. It's not just a few dirty tricks he's got up his sleeve! He's a very clever rascal. He's managed to change the co-op regulations, and reverse the sixty for labour and forty for land calculation. And our own Wei Hu-tou, who did such a fine Party job during land reform, has actually agreed to let him do it! He's given the reins over to him." Old Man Cheng sighed.

"What we've got to do is to carry out the county Party committee's directions. Open fire on the rich peasants! I'm going to remind you of what I've said before. We must remember that our township must be looked at as a whole, like a perfect piece of jade. The countryside is ours. It doesn't matter whether it's a small mutual-aid team or a peasant household working on their own, their problems are ours, and we've got to solve them. We mustn't leave one loophole for the enemy. And don't let's have any more individualistic nonsense — 'You'll look after Wakang Fort, and we'll see to our Paotou Mountain.' All the forts are our forts!"

Cheng Teh-ming then reported on the latest news from Hsiao-sung. "It strikes me," said Liu Shu-ching, "that Liu Erh-hsing's original eight households are not as well-knit as he thinks. They're near neighbours of mine, and I can't help knowing that Ping-shen, Hsi-tsai and a few others in the eight households are all fed up with Liu Erh-hsing themselves. The only real ties that hold them are old uncleared accounts. They're

not doing at all well for themselves by following Liu Erh-hsing and Chiao Kuei."

"Good. I'm glad to hear that," said Cheng Teh-ming. "If you've got that sort of contact, you go and find out from all the middle-peasant households in the original eight whether they're really wanting to back out, or if they're just bluffing." He turned back to the others and went on, "You know, I reckon we'll have to reshuffle ourselves a bit, here in our township. If we mean to put the Red Gleam on a sound basis, some of our people'll have to go there. It's not right to let those bad eggs get a foothold unchallenged."

They discussed the question a little longer, and then went on to arrange the next day's work. Everyone but Cheng Teh-ming went off, and a few minutes later Shih-tou and Cheng Lao-san of the Red Gleam arrived.

Shih-tou was a hot-headed lad. He was not overburdened with brains, but hardly anyone could keep up with him when it came to field work. He was one of the Red Gleam's brigade leaders. To tell the truth, he thought Cheng Teh-ming was going to have him on the carpet because he had stopped the Red Flag's cart the other day.

"Did you want to see me?" he asked, putting on a bold front. Cheng Teh-ming told him to sit down, and began to chat about the day's work. He wound up by asking both what they thought of co-operative farming compared with farming on their own.

They both began to answer at once. "Uncle Lao-san and I are poor peasants," said Shih-tou. "If we work on our own, we're always having to leave one thing unfinished to do another. There's no question that we do much better in the co-op."

"That's right," said Cheng Lao-san. "I can't give figures to show the difference, but I can compare it with the old days — there's absolutely no question which is better."

"Well," said Cheng Teh-ming, "suppose Liu Erh-hsing and his group were to withdraw from your co-op, would you and the dozen or so households left be able to manage all right?"

"If they want to go, let'em! It'd be a good riddance, I say." Shih-tou burst out. "Why, look at this year! The autumn crops on all our hundreds of *mou* were sown and reaped by us poor peasants, every *mou* of 'em. I did hear the other day that they were thinking of backing out. So much the better if they do."

"We can't force people to join," said Old Cheng Lao-san with a chuckle. "And the same holds good about backing out. We can't make them stay in the co-op if they want to go. It's like marriage, the two parties must see eye to eye. They think we're too poor for them and we think they're too lazy for our liking. Or put it this way: Liu Erh-hsing thinks we can't manage without him because of his precious two mules. But to my mind it's like making up your mind you're going to catch a

rabbit for New Year's Day. New Year comes and the old year goes, whether you catch one or not. Wasn't it Chairman Mao who told us to set up co-operatives? This co-op belongs to us. I don't care how difficult it gets — we'll go on working in it."

"Good," said Cheng Teh-ming, flinging his arms round their shoulders. "But you'll have to show your grit. Don't get scared off. Liu may have two mules, but we'll have tractors and trucks. Given the will we'll change mud to gold."

The two left. Cheng Teh-ming felt excitement rising in him. "Oh, we've got good, staunch people in our ranks!" he kept telling himself, and a wide smile lit up his face.

13

The threshing ground was thronged with people as the Red Gleam Co-op members met to distribute the harvest. Liu Erh-hsing wore an even bossier air than usual, standing beside the stack of grain with a supercilious smile and puffing at a cigarette. He was in control of the

scales. Wei Hu-tou stood timidly on one side, not daring to look the members in the eye.

"Read the list," Liu Erh-hsing ordered, glancing at the book-keeper. "Who's first?"

"Cheng Shih-tou," the old book-keeper sang out — he sounded as though he were once again the clerk in a grain shop.

Shih-tou came up. He had more work-points to his credit than any one else and had brought five empty sacks with him. "What's my share?" he asked Liu Erh-hsing.

"Come on, give us your sacks first," said Liu Erh-hsing.

"I want to know how much?"

"Two hundred and seven catties," read the book-keeper. A sudden commotion started up among the listeners.

"What the hell! How can I only get two hundred and seven catties?" shouted Cheng Shih-tou, his eyes blazing.

"It's all in the books. Everything's quite clear," said Liu Erh-hsing, still sneering. At this moment Hsiao-sung jumped up from where he was sitting at the book-keeper's table. "It's not clear," he said. "According to my reckoning he should be getting three hundred and seventeen catties. Isn't there some mistake?"

Liu Erh-hsing went white. "There's no mistake," he said, his smile fading rather. "You don't understand, that's all. Your dad knows it's right."

"How much are you getting?" Hsiao-sung demanded.

"Never mind about me. My share'll be coming later," said Liu Erh-hsing.

"Don't you believe it! I'm going to look and see," said Cheng Shih-tou, coming up to the table, raging. He could read a bit, and grabbed the list from the book-keeper to look for Liu Erh-hsing's name. There were six hundred and twenty-five catties down for him, thanks to the amount of land he held. When Cheng Shih-tou saw this he flung his sacks down. "I'm not standing for this!" he said. "What kind of trick d'you think you're playing? How can it be that you get so much more than me? How d'you reckon that out? Never saw *you* working in the fields!"

Liu Erh-hsing was speechless. The members began to stir when they heard that something was wrong with the reckoning. It was just at this moment that Cheng Teh-ming and half a dozen others arrived. Liu Erh-hsing tried to slip away when he saw them. But someone, Liu Mai-nao it was, blocked his way.

"Listen, everyone, I've got something to say." Cheng Teh-ming had jumped up on the table. He had to shout again before everyone quieted down. "Let's have a bit less noise for a few minutes and see what Hsiao-sung's got to say about the distribution of income."

Hsiao-sung told the whole story and finished up by saying, "By his way, it was sixty per cent for land and forty for labour, see? Now I've drawn up another list according to the proper regulations, sixty for labour and forty for land." He went on to read the figures from his list.

There was a roar of indignation.

"Turn and face us, Liu Erh-hsing," shouted someone. "Bah! He's still trying to get us to work for him as hired labour."

"We don't want such a bastard in our co-op. Throw him out!"

"Where's Wei Hu-tou? What sort of a leader has he been?"

Cheng Teh-ming waved his arms to ask for quiet. "Let's be calm," he said gently. "Give me a chance to say something. It must be clear to all of us what's happened. We can see just how Liu Erh-hsing's been destroying our co-op movement. We all know that sixty for labour and forty for land is the right proportion for the land here in our township. But Liu reversed it — trying to make it forty for labour! What was he aiming at? I'll tell you. He's got scores of *mou*. His way of reckoning means that we sweat for him. We can all remember the old days, when landlord Wei the Fourth tried a twenty-eighty scheme. Plain exploitation! But we didn't let him get away with it. Are we going to let Liu Erh-hsing? Never! Liu Erh-hsing's not one of us."

"Before he joined the co-op he always hired labour!" someone shouted.

"What about his money-lending? He was the same about that — lent you ten yuan and told you to work for him to settle the interest!" There was a rising murmur among the crowd.

"You've got it," Cheng Teh-ming said. "He's a rich peasant — our adversary. We've got ample proof — eight examples at least of how he was exploiting people. But this rascal managed to get in when the co-op was first set up. He even got your chairman Hu-tou to invite him to be vice-chairman. As if such a one can be any good for us!" Cheng Teh-ming threw a quick glance at Wei Hu-tou, who by now was holding his head in his hands.

"I'll tell you another thing he's been up to," said Cheng Shih-tou. "All these quarrels we've been having with the Red Flag were his doing."

"Expel him!"

"Throw him out."

"Bastard!"

"Tell him to take his damned animals and get out."

"Don't worry, folks," said Cheng Teh-ming. "He's not getting away with it. But let's get the distribution settled. D'you all agree with 60-40? Sixty for labour, forty for land, that is! Anyone not agree?"

"No, that's the right way, as far as I'm concerned!" cried Shih-tou. "But what about the original eight households from the west side?"

"Why should we object?" exploded Old Lao Wan, properly losing his temper. "When we set up the co-op we agreed to this principle every

man jack of us. Liu Erh-hsing's the only one who plays these dirty tricks. Don't look for objections from us!"

"And while we're talking things over," called some one else, "don't let's hear any more about the original eight households! I can't stand the name." A roar of laughter went up.

"All right," said Cheng Teh-ming. "We're all agreed on the distribution. If there are any objections to anything else you're all free to raise them. We were talking about it last night, and I want to say again that if anybody wants to back out of the co-op, all right, but the Red Gleam Co-op will carry on."

Cheng Teh-ming called Liu Erh-hsing over. "See how it is now, Liu Erh-hsing?" he asked. "You wanted to wreck the co-op, didn't you? You'll never do it. Your times are gone. I'll tell you something. We've got the countryside. You try any of your tricks and we'll deal with you."

Liu Erh-hsing hung his head. "I know what this means," he said, spitting out the words. "You've got a personal grudge against me. All this is just settling a private score."

Cheng Teh-ming only chuckled. "I quite agree there is a grudge between us," he said. "You want to exploit us and hold us back. I shall always be against you for that."

They decided to go on with the distribution in the afternoon, and everyone dispersed noisily, laughing and talking. Wei Hu-tou, who had just stood by and listened to Cheng Teh-ming, thought over what had been said. Slowly the knot in his heart began to loosen. He looked round, first at Cheng Teh-ming and then at the others. Cheng Teh-ming looked like an old pilot calmly guiding his ship against the wind and waves of a mighty sea, the epitome of determination and strength, and the others — going off cheerfully, their problems on the way to being solved. Wei Hu-tou could not keep back a tear and rubbed his hand over his eyes, moved to the core.

14

The muddy river began to clear, and the peaks of the Sleeping Ox Mountain to stand out in bold relief. With all the harvest carried the fields with their fertile black soil seemed bigger and looked as though they reached the horizon.

Like a new bride rising late, the sun was showing a blushing face to the group of peasants who had got up at the crack of dawn to sow the winter wheat.

Cheng Teh-ming, his padded coat round his shoulders, was taking a turn through his co-op fields. The second raking had been done, and as he walked along he was taking a good look at the soil. In one field he bent down to see how well it was holding the moisture. He broke through the thin crust on the surface, and found that underneath it was moist and soft, like brown sugar. He smiled with satisfaction.

"Brother Teh-ming," called out a mutual-aid team leader, raking nearby, "what d'you think of our tilth?"

"Fine! Just right!" said Cheng Teh-ming, going over to him. "But I don't think much of this bit, though! You haven't broken it down enough yet."

"Have to go over it again, then," said the team leader cheerfully. "Brother Teh-ming, d'you think I could get into your co-op? Should I be able to earn ten work-points a day, d'you think, the way I'm working?"

"Oh yes, easily," said Cheng Teh-ming. "But mind you, no mischief-making."

"I'm not a mischief-maker. Can I be admitted, then?"

"Why not? We'll be looking for new members before next year's wheat harvest. But you'll have to show that you can do a good job before then."

"I'll mark what you say," said the man, emphasizing his words with his finger. "Don't you think you can get away with it, and refuse to let me come in!" And he went back to his raking.

Cheng Teh-ming went on to look for Liu Mai-nao and found him furrowing. "Hey, Mai-nao," he said. "I'll go on with this. You go over to the Red Gleam. I was there last night and things were still pretty messed up. The main trouble is that they're not arranging the jobs properly, and they haven't got a good system for reckoning the work-points. You go over there for a spell, and stay overnight if necessary. Come back after the wheat's in."

Liu Mai-nao thought it over. "I don't know why you should send me," he said. "Wouldn't it be better for you to go?"

"No, you go," said Cheng Teh-ming, smiling. "It's not a question of argument. I'm giving you a political task. Only remember, no quarrelling!"

Mai-nao smiled too. "Never fear," he said, his face getting red. "You won't catch me quarrelling!" And off he went to the Red Gleam.

They had had a reorganization. Jobs had been changed around, and a new committee elected, with Wei Hu-tou still as chairman. It was only small now — about twenty households — but the members were no longer at sixes and sevens but working together with a will. The middle peasants among them were settling down, and they were one and all enthusiastic about increasing the yields. Now that the sowing season had come everyone had worked from early morning till late dusk, but despite this the work was badly organized, particularly as regards the reckoning of work-points — that was due to their lack of experience. Sometimes too many points were given for a particular job. That satisfied the members on it, but made the others grumble. Sometimes too little was allotted and the people on the job stopped working half-way through. Although Wei Hu-tou did his best, and was out in the fields with them to try and allot them fairly, there were too many loose ends for him to tie up,

and he had failed to hit on the right method. The soil was drying up fast, but they had not finished raking. He had therefore asked Cheng Teh-ming to help, and Cheng had said he would send Liu Mai-nao over.

Liu Mai-nao, although he was only a youngster in his twenties, had developed a remarkable ability for leadership after two years in the co-op. His memory was excellent, and he knew every inch of all the eight hundred lots of the Red Flag's land. He could tell you at once exactly how many baskets of manure a person could carry a day, or the amount of hay a man could cut — every detail was at his finger-tips.

He got over to the co-op, and was just saying modestly that Cheng Teh-ming had sent him but he was afraid he could not be of much help, when he was interrupted by Wei Hu-tou, who grasped his hand. "Mai-nao," he said, "don't try to say that. Our eyes are red with watching for you!" Both men tried to pass off the tears that sprang to their eyes by laughing.

Liu Mai-nao settled down to get a grasp of the situation — the labour power available, the number of draught animals, the extent of the co-op land, and so on. They went over it together, and then Mai-nao said:

"No need to worry. We'll begin the seed-bed tomorrow. We needn't wait for the raking to be finished — it'd be too late. We'll get on with it while they're still doing the raking. The main thing is to get the wheat fields ready. I think we'd better start and give out the work for the biggest pieces first. The women must get a move on, selecting the seed. Send someone over to our co-op for it, and then the women can start straight in. Oh yes! Let's soak the seed in an insecticide mixture — I'll show you how." Liu Mai-nao went over all the jobs one by one in this way, and was able to settle all the problems which had been driving Wei Hu-tou nearly mad of late.

"Hsiao-sung," Wei Hu-tou called, "I arranged with your uncle Teh-ming to borrow three hundred catties of seed wheat this morning. Take a barrow and fetch it, will you?" Hsiao-sung nodded, and was just going off when Mai-nao called after him, "The seed's at Cheng Teh-ming's in the room facing the street. The storekeeper's got the key."

Hsiao-sung went over and found the Red Flag storekeeper busy distributing oil to the members. The storekeeper told him to get the key from Mrs. Cheng, and when he went to the house Hsiu-chih answered his call.

The two of them opened the door of the storeroom and began talking as they measured out the seed.

"Hsiu-chih, you know, it's going to be all right about you and me. I heard dad say to my mum, the day before yesterday, 'Brother Teh-ming really deserves respect in every way, not least for bringing up his daughter so well. Whenever you see her, there she is, working away, never idle a single moment.' Imagine it — even my dad praising you!" Hsiu-chih blushed and said, "Go along with you. You're making it up!"

"No, I'm not," said Hsiao-sung. "I'm not teasing you, honestly. Ever since our co-op was reorganized my dad thinks everything your co-op does is wonderful. He says your dad pulled him out of the mire. And have you heard, there's a chance that next year we'll have a tractor station in the village! I'm sure that within two years we'll have a collective farm. Oh, Hsiu-chih, isn't it all wonderful! We'll be together in one farm, and be able to do all our work and study together. It'll be grand!"

Hsiu-chih smiled. "Looking rather far ahead, aren't you?" she said.

"Of course I'm looking ahead!" Hsiao-sung paused, and then said, "I say, Hsiu-chih. If my dad's in favour and your dad is willing, can't we fix a day for getting married?" Hsiu-chih blushed again. She darted a look at him, and said with a shy smile, "I don't know." She said nothing for a minute, and then went on. "If you come over to our house oftener, and we see more of each other we shan't feel so lost with longing. And then, my mum's still worried. She's always talking about Liu Yu-shan's son-in-law and saying he's such a nice boy, always full of smiles, and never raising his voice or saying a harsh word. You know him, don't you? *He* takes the trouble to be nice to his mother-in-law, and all old ladies like that sort of thing. You ought to be nice to my mum. Learn to be charming!"

Hsiao-sung was worried. "I don't know how to do that sort of thing," he said.

By the time they had measured all the seed into the sacks they were both dusty, and when Hsiao-sung called out to Mrs. Cheng that they had finished, she came out with a basin of water. "Just look at the dust on your faces," she said. "Come along and wash, you two."

Hsiao-sung and Hsiu-chih were washing the dust off when she came back again, this time with a bowl of scrambled eggs and pancakes. "Hsiao-sung, have a bite of something," she said. "Oh, I couldn't eat a thing," said Hsiao-sung quickly. But Hsiu-chih gave him a look, and whispered, "If you're told to eat, you eat." Hsiao-sung could do nothing but tuck in. As he ate he told himself, "Really I ought to say something to please the old lady." But somehow, he finished the food before any suitable words came to him.

15

That winter there was more snow and sleet than usual. Sleeping Ox Mountain was covered by a thick layer of snow early on.

The snowflakes streamed down from the sky as thick and big as if someone were emptying out a sack of raw cotton. The roads were blocked and the overladen branches broke off the trees. The wheat shoots lay curled up in the soil as if they were afraid of the cold; the icy hand of winter lay everywhere.

After the wheat sowing the villagers of Chengchiawan set up a "Committee for Mutual-aid and Co-operation." It was made up of the co-op chairmen and leaders of the larger mutual-aid teams, and was under the guidance of the township Party branch. They had a committee meeting every fortnight, at which they made a study of management and crop potentialities, shared their knowledge and gave one another practical help where necessary. It was decided to link up the mutual-aid teams with the co-ops, and that the co-ops were to be responsible for helping them solve problems connected with production and management. And lastly, whenever necessary and practicable, the co-ops were to help individual peasants in difficulties.

This Committee for Mutual-aid and Co-operation played an important part in the work during winter. Many tricky problems were ironed out. When it was bitterly cold, for instance, quite a number of the draught animals began to fall ill, but the joint experience now available through the committee enabled them all to use the tricks of the trade, known only to a few before — like giving animals warm water, instead of cold, and heaping them up with fresh bedding every day. The result was that they pulled the whole lot through the winter.

The willows began to get a wash of yellow-green on their branches. Spring was coming. The lunar year ushered in a long spell of cloudless sunny days. The ground began to warm up, and the Sleeping Ox Mountain began to shed its heavy coat, and show its clear blue peaks again.

The snows were melting. The great stretches of white dwindled into little patches. Soon these, too, disappeared, soaked up by the black earth.

The ice on the Blue Dragon River was also beginning to melt. Floes cracked and crashed in the warming water; along both banks the thick blocks of ice began to crumble. Gradually all the ice thawed and disappeared in the churning river, which, gathering speed, flowed tempestuously eastward.

One night Cheng Teh-ming was at home, writing to the county Party committee. On looking back over the winter's work he realized how very successful it had been, how helpful it had been to have the township Party branch giving guidance and to be able to make comprehensive plans. So he was writing to the county to tell them about it and propose that the method should be adopted elsewhere. As he sat there, the door opened and Wei Hu-tou came in, stamping the muddy snow off his shoes.

"Back already, Hu-tou?" said Cheng Teh-ming, taking off his spectacles.

"Yes. I've got a letter for you from the county Party committee," said Wei Hu-tou, who seemed in good spirits. "Department Head Wang asked me to give it you. Here you are!" Cheng Teh-ming opened it. It read: "The provincial authorities have decided to set up a tractor station in the county and that it should be set up in your township. Work

on the station will begin in the middle of February. The tractors will be there in time for the spring ploughing."

"Aha!" exclaimed Cheng Teh-ming, his hands shaking with excitement and his heart warming. "I never thought that our land would be ploughed by tractor so soon!" While they were reading the letter and excitedly discussing the great news, Hsiao-sung and Hsiu-chih were just outside and heard it. When they heard that tractors were coming, their hands tightened on one another and they fairly jumped for joy.

Then they listened again. Wei Hu-tou was speaking. "Brother Teh-ming," he said, "now that we've got tractors coming, the co-ops will be busier than ever. Can you let my co-op have a couple more Youth Leaguers — preferably with some schooling?"

"I can't guarantee you a couple," said Teh-ming with a grin, "but I can promise you one."

"Who have you got in mind?" asked Hu-tou quickly.

"Well, there's one Youth Leaguer who gives me a lot of help, but I'll have to make up my mind to let you have her. I might even send her right into your household, not only your co-op! You know who I mean, don't you? My Hsiu-chih. Don't tell me you haven't noticed what they've set their hearts on!" He laughed as he spoke, but he had to dab at his eyes.

Outside the window two shadows suddenly merged, as the young people clasped each other in a close embrace.

Translated by Tang Sheng
Illustrations by Kuo Chen

TWO STORIES

HSU TI-SHAN (1893-1941)

BLOOMS ON A DRIED POPLAR

Seconds, minutes, years,
  Are mechanical calculations of Time.
Grey hair, wrinkles,
  Are Time's marks upon us.
But who has ever seen a grey-haired heart,
  A heart with wrinkles?

The heart never ceases to flower.
  Though lodged in an aged and ailing body,
It never loses its shining glory.
  Who says ancient poplar blossoms cannot last?

"The body is but earth," they say,
  Yes, earth to nurture the blossoms of our hearts.
As humble soil can bring forth lovely flowers,
  So can old bodies bear long-living heart-fruit.

Everyone in the little fishing village was used to life on the sea. Even the women sometimes went fishing with their menfolk and lived for days in the floating, tossing craft. But some of the women, though they were quite willing to share their husbands' dangerous lives, had no chance to do so, for their men were far from home. After a long, long absence, a man might return with the swallows, only to depart again a few months later. The lucky swallows always flew in pairs, but the man who left his native village to travel in distant places, whether setting out or coming back, except for his baggage was very much alone.

Deep in the shade of a banian tree in a narrow lane lived a family named Chin. Only an old woman and her daughter-in-law were at home. The son was many miles away, and there had been no news of him for several years. Time, flowing on tirelessly, had steeped the hearts of the old woman and her daughter-in-law in anxiety and melancholy. Like a cliff beside a stream, they were washed bare of their bloom and bedecked with dirty flotsam brought down from the stream's upper reaches. Many were the vain hopes and useless inquiries these two mournful women had expended on their man.

Because the village was sparsely populated and everyone's life there was pretty much the same, the blind fortune-teller seldom called. Whenever the old lady heard the sound of his gong, she hurried out to wait for him and ask him to predict the luck of her distant son. She was even more concerned about this than her daughter-in-law, for a reason that she alone knew. The blind man always foretold the same thing — he saw nothing but peace and good fortune for the son. What he did not know was when the son would attain them.

One day, the soft sound of the gong again announced the visit of Master Blind Man. As usual, the old lady was waiting for him at her door. "Do you want me to tell the fortune of the traveller today?" he asked her.

"Every day that he's away from home, I'm afraid I must trouble you. But I'm beginning to doubt your predictions. All these years you've been saying that we'll be able to be together again. But we haven't even had the sign of a letter from him. I think you'd better turn your gong over to me and take up another trade," she said jestingly. "You're a very unreliable fortune-teller!"

Master Blind Man joined in her laugh. "You're teasing me. But that's the way your son's fortune is — for the good, you'll have to wait; for the bad. . . ."

"What about the bad?"

"You can learn the bad part immediately. For the good, there's nothing to do but wait. Even if you took my little gong and smashed it, you couldn't make his good fortune come a minute sooner. But if you want to see him, you don't have to wait till then. All you have to do is go to him. You've been to his place several times, haven't you?"

"Of course I can see him if I go there. Do I need you to tell me that!"

"I'm only reminding you because you're so impatient. I think the best thing would be for you to go. I won't tell his fortune today. If you can't find him when you get there, it still won't be too late for you to take my little gong away when you come back. I'll admit that I'm not psychic and not fit to be a fortune-teller."

Although Master Blind Man's reply was something of an evasion, it reminded the old lady of her desire to seek her son.

"Very well," she said. "Unless there's news from him in another month or so, I definitely will go. But just you wait. Beware that I don't smash your little gong if I can't find him."

"It won't come to that, it won't come to that," Master Blind Man murmured. Holding his bamboo staff, he followed the path along the edge of the pool. The sound of his gong gradually drifted beyond the shade of the large banian.

* * *

One month, two months, flew quickly by, and still no news from the son. Setting out with her daughter-in-law, the old lady took to the road. Their trials and hardships *en route* I don't have to tell you — they had more than their share. The old lady had made this trip two or three times before, and she knew the way well. At last she again recognized the familiar gate and walls, only this time they appeared more resplendent than before. "You see, your son has become rich!" they seemed to say.

She had long suspected that her son had prospered and forgotten her. Now, coming in sight of this pleasant view, she said reproachfully to her daughter-in-law:

"You're always defending him. Today you can see for yourself."

The gate was closed but not barred. Pushing it open, the old lady stepped into the compound.

"Maybe someone else lives here," suggested the daughter-in-law. "Maybe this isn't the right place."

The old lady took the younger woman abruptly by the hand and pulled her along. "How could it be wrong?" she demanded. "I've been here lots of times." The daughter-in-law had nothing more to say, and she followed the old lady in.

Before them lay a small garden. Pretty flowers postured and gestured to them seductively. On each side of the path from the main gate to the house was a row of evenly trimmed shrubs called "Fickle Singsong Girls." Daughter-in-law had never seen this kind of live, growing railing before, and she brushed her hand back and forth over the top of it as she walked.

"The young wretch knows how to enjoy himself alright," the old lady muttered. "This courtyard used to be a field of rubble and now look at it. He's lavished plenty of money on himself, without a thought to his old mother who spent her every penny to pay for his education. Of course he couldn't save anything while he was in school those ten or twelve years. But now that he's able to put something aside, he can only think of spending it on himself!"

By then the women had reached the house. They could see a painting of some flowers hanging on the wall inside, and they recognized it as a picture the son had taken from home. Reassured that they had come to the right place, they sat down in the anteroom. The old lady kept peering toward the interior of the house, but there was no sign of her son.

"Is anyone at home?" she called out finally, in some annoyance. "I've been waiting here a long time. Why hasn't there been even half a shadow of a person come out to greet me?"

This wave of sound brought forth a young servant. "Who do you wish to see?" he inquired.

"Who do I wish to see!" the old lady retorted angrily. "Are you pretending you don't recognize me? Hurry and ask your master to come out."

The old lady obviously was no one to be trifled with when she was aroused. "Madam is some close relative of his excellency, then?" the servant asked respectfully.

" 'Excellency' indeed! The nerve of him — putting on airs before his own mother!"

This came as a surprise to the young servant, for his master's mother was living right upstairs, and now here was another one.

"But madam surely can't be my Master Hsiao's —"

"Master Hsiao? My son is Master Chin."

"Perhaps madam has come to the wrong gate. My master's name is Hsiao, not Chin." The exchange grew livelier, with both sides becoming more and more confused, until the noise brought out another servant. He recognized the old lady.

"Why, how are you, madam?" he cried. He was the son's cook.

"So you're still here, Sung," the old lady said to him. "This hateful little flunkey insists his master's name is not Chin. Don't tell me my son has changed his name?"

"Doesn't madam know?" asked the cook. "The young master hasn't been living here since the beginning of last year. He sold all these things to the new owner. I'm not working for him any more either. The owner of this place is named Hsiao."

It seemed that Cheng-jen, the son, had been engaged in business and doing fairly well. But times had changed, and soon he was reduced to living from hand to mouth. Sometimes two or three days went by with no smoke rising from his kitchen stove. Although he obviously couldn't go on like that, he was ashamed to tell his family. Finally, he sold the house and furniture for whatever he could get.

The old lady asked for his present address. "I haven't seen the young master for more than a year. I really don't know where he is now," said the cook. "I remember him saying he wanted to leave this town."

The cook saw them to the gate and gave them directions to the main street. They walked aimlessly for a while. "Now where are we going?" said the daughter-in-law in a tearful voice. The over-sensitive old lady thought she was ridiculing her. "We'll just follow our noses!" she snapped. Daughter-in-law dared say no more. She continued to support the old lady down the street in silence.

Having failed to find their relative and being unfamiliar with the town, the two country women, each carrying a small bundle, could only wander from street to street. When the old lady had walked almost to the point of exhaustion, she turned to her daughter-in-law and said:

"We had better find a place to put up for the night. But whether there is an inn around here. . . . I have no idea."

"Then what shall we do?"

They had stopped on a street corner to talk things over. At that moment, a motor-cycle drove slowly by. Because it had sounded its

horn, they glanced in its direction while stepping to the side of the road. Everything would have been alright if the old lady hadn't noticed the rider, but when she saw him, she gazed at him in stupefaction, and the daughter-in-law did the same. Before they had a chance to cry out, the vehicle was already far down the street.

"Riding that motor-cycle — wasn't that your husband, Cheng-jen? How could you be so slow-witted? Why didn't you call to him to stop?"

"Oh, it was such a shock! Besides, how could I just call out like that on a public street?"

"So you wouldn't call! Well, now we'll see where you sleep tonight."

The passing motor-cycle had produced a different reaction in each of the women. The mother thought the son had become rich and no longer cared about her; that he had told the cook to fool her with stories of his poverty. The wife thought the husband had found himself a pretty new wife in town and couldn't be bothered with a simple country woman any more. She bemoaned this unlucky destiny which Fate had bestowed upon her.

But a busy street corner was no place for idle speculation. In any event, the women had to find somewhere to stay. The sun was already low in the west. If they delayed much longer, they'd have to spend the night in the open. While they were trying to sort out their thoughts, a policeman, twirling a big black club, came ambling down the street, whistling a vulgar ditty. Observing these odd-looking women, he walked over to question them. When they told him they were looking for lodging, he pointed to a building a distance off and said, "That place over there is an inn." Too tired to walk any farther, they went in the direction indicated.

The women assumed that the streets of a big town were as simple as those in their little village, that everyone took the same route every day. And so the next morning, before she had even washed her face or combed her hair, the old lady hurried to the corner where she had seen the motor-cycle the previous day. She had some difficulty in finding the place, for she didn't know the town. She stood on the corner for hours, and though many motor-cycles passed, none of them was ridden by her son. Finally, the policeman again came up and questioned her. She replied excitedly, with many vigorous gestures, but the policeman couldn't make head or tail of what she was saying. He had to ask her to move on and not block the busy intersection. Muttering under her breath, the old lady slowly returned to the inn.

The daughter-in-law had been sitting in the doorway for a long time, eagerly awaiting good news from the old lady. She remained at the gate all day, her eyes never leaving the street. When she saw the old lady coming back alone, her eyes glazed. Such disappointments are not unusual. We meet them often in our daily life.

The old lady came in the door and sat down, breathing hard. For several minutes she did not speak, but only shook her head. "Come what may, I must find him," she said after a long silence. "How hateful that a man should forget his family when he prospers. I'll get hold of him and make him give an account of himself if it's the last thing I do."

Although the daughter-in-law was feeling badly, she suppressed her own emotions and made an effort to comfort the old lady. "We're sure to find him sooner or later," she said. "But I don't think we can do it by standing on the street corner every day. Wouldn't it be better to hire someone to make a search for him?"

"You hire someone, if you're so rich!" retorted the old lady angrily. After a pause she said, "I know that street now; tomorrow I'm going to wait there again. It was dusk when I saw him the other day. If I go in the afternoon the next time, I'll be able to find him."

"You ought to let me go," the daughter-in-law urged. "I'm stronger and can stand a longer time."

The old lady shook her head. "No. People's hearts here are very wicked. The less a young woman goes out alone the better."

"You scolded me that day for not calling the motor-cycle to stop," the daughter-in-law said in a low voice. She was very disappointed. "Now you won't even let me go out."

The old lady's face hardened. "Talking back to me again, and at a time like this."

The daughter-in-law was afraid to say any more.

They talked of various possible methods to seek the missing son. But the old lady was very stubborn. She insisted on waiting on the same street corner every day.

And so each day she stood on the corner, but the motor-cycle she had seen before never came her way. A month quickly passed. They were running out of money and would soon have to leave the inn. The old lady decided to return home first and then make further plans. The daughter-in-law didn't want to leave immediately, but knowing the old lady's stubborn disposition, she could only swallow the protest that was on the tip of her tongue.

* * *

When they went on board, they were given a small cabin near the side of the ship. Not long after they set sail, a strong wind began dashing spray against their cabin window. The ship rolled and tossed until they were dizzy. The second night at sea, they were wrenched from their dreams by a loud sudden crash that was followed by terrifying cries. The daughter-in-law leaped from her bunk and ripped open the cabin door. She could see passengers dashing madly about the deck like mice in a cage. Hastily returning to the cabin, she cried to the old lady:

"We must get outside, quickly!"

The two women rushed out of the cabin, tightly holding hands. Frightened passengers crowded and pushed one another on the wet, slippery deck. Because of the gale and the angry waves, many of them lost their footing and rolled into the sea. The two women stumbled, and the old lady let go of her daughter-in-law's hand to steady herself. In the next instant the younger woman was swept away in the milling crowd. A young man helped the old lady up and she threw her arms around a mast. Not daring to release her grip, she cried aloud for her daughter-in-law. But not even thunder or the roaring of a lion could have been heard above that raging storm.

At dawn the stricken vessel was still afloat. It had run aground on a reef, and its entire stern was under water. Because of their panic-stricken jostling, people crowded on the forward deck were falling off and sinking into the sea much faster than the ship itself. The old lady wandered about, distractedly seeking her daughter-in-law. There's no telling how many were lost the night before; the daughter-in-law was not the only one. Although the old lady wept bitterly, no one tried to comfort her. Each was bewailing his own personal tragedy, and heart-broken weeping was common enough.

For several days the ship remained on the reef. The storm gradually abated, and a hope sprang up in the survivors that another ship might pass and save them. Sometimes hopes are fulfilled. When the passengers saw a column of black smoke coming nearer from the horizon, the old lady forgot her loss and joined her voice to their pleading shouts.

It was after she and the others were taken aboard the rescue ship that she again thought of her daughter-in-law. Simple people always hark back to an event after the time of stress has passed. She knew that the ship was bearing her back to the port she had just left, a place she didn't want to go to, and this upset her still more. She had left there a few days before because she had no alternative, and now she was being returned to the same place. The old lady couldn't restrain her tears.

She was the only unhappy person on board, and several of the passengers came to comfort her. An old gentleman named Mr. Chu was particularly kind. On hearing the old lady's story, he felt very sorry for her and invited her to stay at his home after they landed; there she would be able to rest and make inquiries about her son.

Old folks are the only real selfless philanthropists. Young people perform good deeds mostly to please themselves, or to earn fame and respect in society. Mr. Chu was quite sincere in bringing the old lady home and introducing her to his wife, to whom he explained the situation. The wife, also a very generous person, hurried to prepare a room for their guest, and saw to it that the old lady had everything she needed in the way of food and other necessities.

Mr. Chu did his utmost to help find the son, but with no success. Though the old lady found it rather embarrassing to stay so long in an-

other person's home, she had no way of returning to her own village. She was really too old to look after herself. Before, her daughter-in-law had taken care of her, but now the daughter-in-law was gone. The mists in the evening of life were indeed frightening, painful. In her youth she had been aggressive, positive, unwilling to rely on anyone. But now she was old. Besides, her aged host and hostess were happy to have her and did everything to make her forget her troubles.

People all have many hidden thoughts, especially old folks. Although the old lady didn't like the big town, her heart was always there. For her the most important thing in life was to go to the town and see her son's face again. Why this was so urgent not only her daughter-in-law didn't know — even her son didn't know. For this was the old lady's most closely guarded secret. Wanderers cannot be satisfied with their life away from home, and the old lady's secret coiled around her heart like a poisonous snake. She had the heart of a young woman. She wasn't at all like an old lady reaching the end of her days. The serpentine secret bit deeply into her mind.

Mr. Chu, whose love extended to all passers-by, of course bought her medicine. But there is no medicine which can ease a sickness of the mind. He could only beg her to tell what was troubling her, so that he might find some way to help. But there are some things that are not easy for a woman to say, and she wasn't sure that speaking would do any good. In the end she said nothing.

The days slipped by. Mr. Chu was a worrier over others' worries, and he grew more upset with each passing day. His wife, an intelligent woman, reminded him:

"Didn't you say she's from the village of Tsanghai? My sister's husband is also from Tsanghai, and his name is Chin too. Maybe they're related. Why not ask him about her son?"

"According to your brother-in-law, Tsanghai is full of people named Chin, and many of them travel to all parts of the land. They may not be close relatives. If they're distant relatives what good will it do? I've asked Mrs. Chin if she knows Sze-ching, and she says there was never anybody by that name in her village. Sze-ching left there over forty years ago and has never gone back. He might not recall her anyhow."

"There's nothing strange about her not remembering his name. Country boys always go by some nickname or other, but they adopt a proper name if they leave their native village. How could you expect her to remember him? It's much easier for a man to recall a girl's name, which doesn't change. Since Tsanghai is a small place, he's sure to know her. She's over sixty now. That means she was about twenty-five or six when Sze-ching came here. Right? I still think you'd better ask him."

After talking the matter over, it was decided that Mr. Chu would call on his brother-in-law, Sze-ching. Although the two were related by

marriage, they seldom met. Sze-ching's wife, younger sister of Mr. Chu's wife, had died many years before. She left only one child, a son named Li-sheng. Because there were no women in Sze-ching's house, except for the traditional exchange of gifts at New Year's time, there was little visiting between the two families. Sze-ching was a very affable fellow with a fine sense of humour. After his wife died, he turned all of his affairs over to his young son and retired to a country retreat outside the town. He called the place "Fairy Villa of the Little Waves." He had been living there for the past fifteen years. Men of his sort, who build up their families with their own hands, as a rule always want to keep climbing higher. He was one of the few who knew how to relax and enjoy life.

The "Fairy Villa of the Little Waves" was hidden in a dense grove of bamboos which was surrounded by a meandering stream. It was virtually a small island, and you had to cross a little bridge to reach it. Mr. Chu, entering the bamboo grove after walking across the bridge, came upon three or four tame deer. Evidently hoping to be fed, they trotted toward him. The grove was full of the insects of late autumn. Their droning blended with the sound of the drumming hoofs of the deer. Mr. Chu was an infrequent visitor and, to him, seeing the lovely grove was like seeing its master. He wandered about the leafy glade for some time.

Sze-ching's country house was no glittering tower of gold and jade, but a simple thatched-roof cottage with only a few rooms. Instead of rare treasures it was stocked with a small number of well-thumbed books and some old painting scrolls. As the old gentleman approached the house, the cheerful Sze-ching came smilingly out to greet him.

"It's been a long time, brother-in-law!" cried the host. "There must be something special to make you come all the way from town and honour me with a visit."

"Naturally, 'One doesn't disturb an important personage without real cause,' " said Mr. Chu with a smile. "There's something I have to ask you about. But you haven't been back there for so many years, perhaps you don't know."

"Is it something to do with my native village?"

"Yes. I haven't told you yet: This summer when I was coming back from Hongkong, my ship rescued several dozen people from the sea."

"I heard about that. My son Li-sheng told me. I instructed him to call on you and inquire after your health."

Mr. Chu was surprised. "Oh? But he never came to see me."

"He still hasn't called? The longer that boy studies the less propriety he seems to understand!"

"No, don't blame him. He's very busy. What I want to talk to you about is this: On the boat I brought back a woman with me —"

The humorous Sze-ching laughed gaily. "Who would have believed that an old gentleman like you would have a heart so young?"

Mr. Chu smiled. "You haven't let me finish. The woman is over sixty. She came here recently to look for her son. Unfortunately she couldn't find him and started to return home with her daughter-in-law. During the voyage the ship was wrecked by a storm and the daughter-in-law was lost. Because she was all alone, I brought her home to live with us temporarily. She says she's from Tsanghai. My wife and I have been very worried about her these past few months. If she goes home, there's no one to look after her. But staying here and not being able to find her son has made her ill with anxiety. When I ask her about her family affairs, she answers in a very confused manner. So I've come to ask for your assistance."

"I was never an official of Tsanghai. I may not necessarily know her. Still, someone about sixty — I ought to know quite a few of that age. What's her name?"

"Her name is Yun-ku."

Sze-ching's interest mounted. "Is she the Yun-ku who married Jih-teng? I knew a Sister Jih-teng once. Her own name was Yun-ku. But if her son came here I certainly would have known it."

"She hasn't said whether she was known as Sister Jih-teng. But her son's name is Cheng-jen. She told me so herself."

"Say, that's right. Sister Jih-teng did have a son of that name. I'd better go and see her. Then we can be sure."

Sze-ching was even more eager than Mr. Chu. In less than ten minutes he was ready and hastening the old gentleman back to the town.

As they were entering the door, Mr. Chu said to him, "You wait in the study. Let me tell her first."

Mr. Chu hurried to the guest's room where he found his wife seated on the edge of the bed, keeping the ailing Yun-ku company.

"Brother-in-law is here," he said to his wife. "It's a remarkable coincidence. He says he knows her." To Yun-ku he said, "You say you don't remember anyone called Sze-ching, but he remembers you alright. He's already come. I'll bring him in to see you in a minute."

The old lady still maintained that she didn't know him. When he came in the door and asked her, "Aren't you Sister Jih-teng?" she was startled. She stared at this old man with the grey hair and grey eyebrows for a long time.

"You're not Brother Jih-hui?" she asked finally.

"Of course I am!" Sze-ching's grey brows danced delightedly.

Yun-ku seemed to be suddenly restored to health. She sat up and gazed long at the old man standing before her. "Ah, you've aged so," she said, shaking her head.

"Me? Old?" Sze-ching replied with a laugh. "I still expect to live another thirty years. But I never thought I'd see you again in this world!"

Tears ran down Yun-ku's old cheeks. "Nor I," she said. "After you left, you never wrote. If I had known you were here, Cheng-jen wouldn't be lost today."

Mr. Chu and his wife looked at each other in bewilderment. They hadn't the faintest idea what this was all about. Sze-ching sat down.

"You two must be quite surprised. Let me explain. She and I are relatives. We're both well along in years now; there's no harm in telling something that happened in our youth. All my life I never loved and respected any woman more than Yun-ku. Her husband and I were clan brothers. He was my elder, but she's five years younger than I. Less than a year after her marriage, her husband died. Shortly afterwards, she gave birth to a son. I knew her before she was married. We were always together. I went to see her often after her marriage too." Sze-ching paused a moment, then went on:

"We lived at opposite ends of a small lane. Whenever I went out I had to pass her door. After she lost her husband, she became rather high-strung, often getting very angry over trifles, and I stayed away from her. But the world is full of coincidences. When her son Cheng-jen grew to be five or six, he began to look the very image of me."

"Then when she thought she saw him here," Mr. Chu interrupted, "it must have been your boy Li-sheng who went by on the motor-cycle."

"Oh, you've seen Li-sheng?" Sze-ching asked Yun-ku. "He doesn't know you. Even if he had seen you, he wouldn't have known who you are." Turning to Mr. Chu, he continued, "I've told you that the people in my village were very ignorant, and they loved to gossip. I was the only son of a declining family. There were many in the clan who were always looking for a chance to take advantage of me. A couple of rascals used Cheng-jen's resemblance to me as a means for blackmail. They threatened to 'expose' me before the magistrate for getting gay with a widow, for ruining her faithfulness to her husband's memory. For the sake of us both, I took a bit of money with me and ran away to this place. Actually I had never been a merchant. It was just luck that I was able to set up in business here. Anyhow I never went back. I was afraid of being blackmailed again."

Sze-ching looked at Yun-ku. "Since you've come, there's no point in your going back. I'll prepare a place for you to live, then I'll think of some way to find Cheng-jen."

He didn't talk much longer, for he wanted to let Yun-ku get some rest. Following Mr. Chu out of the room, he told the old gentleman he would move her to his country retreat. Since the two were relatives in the same clan, Mr. Chu of course couldn't insist on her remaining. Yun-ku was very happy, but she was still sick in bed and couldn't travel immediately, so she continued living with the Chus for the time being.

For the bed-ridden old lady, this sudden meeting with the lover of whom she often thought but never could speak, the man she had so longed

for in her youth, was the best possible medicine. The frown was erased from her brow. No one knew how happy she was. Only the animation of her face gave some hint of her feelings.

Lying in bed, she mentally turned back through her history to its most interesting page.

* * *

She remembered the period after her husband died. She was only twenty. Although she had a child, it was difficult for her to remain faithful to her husband's memory, especially since there was another man who was always in her thoughts. She saw him every day. A widow's existence was becoming increasingly harder to bear.

Operas were performed every year in the courtyard of the temple in the neighbouring village, and everyone took this opportunity to relax a bit. When the show started, men and women from miles around gathered before the temple's outdoor platform. They watched the performances from noon until dawn the following day. One night, Yun-ku also sat among the audience. But she tired of the play before midnight and returned home, depressed and irritable.

She found the baby sleeping peacefully. The room was hot and, as was her custom, she took a little stool and sat outside the door to get some fresh air. The lane was deserted. Her only company was the reflection of the moon in the nearby pond. Voices and the clash of cymbals occasionally drifting over from the neighbouring village where the opera was being staged seemed to add to her misery. Facing the small pond, she wept silently.

The echo of footsteps in the lane made her turn her head. A man was approaching, smoking a pipe. She recognized Jih-hui, and at once her heart was eased. Jih-hui was then a refined, bookish student. He lived near the end of the village and he had to pass down this lane every day. As he came nearer, he saw Yun-ku sitting alone, moonlight glistening on the two streams of tears that ran down her cheeks. Weeping widows are difficult to console. He sucked noisily on his pipe and stopped beside her.

"Not asleep yet? Now what's troubling you?"

She made no answer, but grasped his hand in hers. The inexperienced Jih-hui was beside himself with embarrassment. After a long silence he said:

"Does holding my hand help you not to cry?"

"Tonight, I'm not going to let you go."

Jih-hui was very frightened. His pulse quickened; his pipe dropped to the ground. He spoke very seriously:

"Perhaps the opera tonight has made you unhappy. It's not that I don't feel the same as you. But I'm the only scholar in the village. If I do anything even three-tenths out of the way, I'm criticized for the other

seven-tenths as well. When you married my clan brother that made us relatives, and men and women relatives are not supposed to be intimate with each other. What's more, the clan has high hopes that you'll remain a chaste widow the rest of your life. So even though my heart is burning with desire for you, I can't let myself assuage the anguish with the bit of cool water you're offering me tonight. You know that if my parents had been alive to speak for me, you would have been my bride long ago and we wouldn't be suffering now. But don't fret; I'm sure to find a way to comfort you. I'm not afraid of ruining your reputation, or being accused of incest.* We grew up together. Our love is more important than all those other things. I'm only worried about your son. He's still a baby, and if a storm should break over our heads, wouldn't that be harming him? Why don't we wait another few years? After I've come up in the world a bit, then —"

The baby began to cry, and Yun-ku had to let go of Jih-hui's hand to hurry into the house. When she came out again, Jih-hui was gone. As she stared down the lane into the darkness, someone's arms suddenly embraced her from behind. Twisting her head, she saw Stinking Dog, a village rascal.

"What are you trying to do, Stinking Dog?"

"I hear everything you two said. You wanted him to spend the night. Why not me?"

Yun-ku was frantic. She wanted to cry out.

"If you scream I'll drag Jih-hui back here and confront him," Stinking Dog warned. "I'll accuse him before the clan council. I'll tell the prefect not to guarantee him when he wants to sit for his official examination. He'll never get to be a *hsiu tsai*." As he spoke, he ran his hands boldly over Yun-ku's bosom.

Unable to call for help, she tried soft talk as a last resort. "You can't get what you want unless I agree. You can hold me from now until tomorrow, but unless I'm willing, what good will it do? But if you let me go a minute, I'll move the baby into the next room —"

Stinking Dog eagerly released her before she had even finished her sentence. "And then you'll be willing," he said fawningly.

Yun-ku glanced at him coyly, then ran into the house and grabbed the door. Seeing that she was getting away, Stinking Dog thrust a foot over the threshold. Yun-ku closed the door hard, and put her whole weight against it, pinning Stinking Dog's foot in a painful vise. Howling with agony, he begged for forgiveness.

"So you thought you could get something cheap, Stinking Dog, you scabby toad. The scabby toad wants to eat the flesh of the high flying swan, does he? Stinking fool, how can he leave the mud if he has no

*In feudal China a love affair with a relative by marriage was considered equally incestuous as an affair with a blood relative.

wings? Come on in — if you can! Shameless, stinking monster. You stink worse than any real dead stinking dog."

Outside, pleas for mercy; inside, curses and unrelenting anger. Only when the young woman's strength was nearly at its end did she finally let him go.

That night taught her a lesson. Thereafter she never sat alone on the doorstep to enjoy the evening breezes. Stinking Dog, unable to eat the flesh of the "high flying swan," waited for a chance for revenge.

A few years passed. Cheng-jen was now nearly five. He looked remarkably like Jih-hui. The village gossips — Stinking Dog among them no doubt — insisted that the child's parentage was doubtful. Jih-hui was very face-conscious. A thousand evil tongues put the blame on him, besmirching his good name. It was more than he could bear.

One night there was a heavy thunderstorm. Frightened, Yun-ku had closed her door and windows tight, and lay down on the bed beside her child. In the early hours of the morning, she heard a light tapping on the little window facing the lane. Yun-ku was too afraid to ask who was there, but then someone called her name and she recognized that refined and agitated voice. She opened the window.

"It's you. I couldn't imagine who it was! Wait a minute. I'll light a lamp and open the door."

"No, it's too late at night. I won't come in. We don't need a lamp either. I'll just stand here and tell you something. I'm leaving tomorrow, first thing in the morning." There was a flash of lightning, and Yun-ku could see that his face and clothing were soaking wet. Before she had a chance to see whether those were tears or raindrops on his cheeks, Jih-hui continued, "For your sake, I can't stay in this village any longer. Anyhow, here I can have no hope for my future."

As the woman looked at him, he drew a title-deed from his sleeve and handed it to her through the window. "This is all I can give you now. The deed says that I've sold my land to Cheng-jen. I've already spoken to the county Land Registrar about it. It's all right. When Cheng-jen grows up you can sell it for his tuition."

After giving her the deed he started to withdraw his hand. But it wasn't the deed she wanted; it was the hand she hastily grasped. The deed fell to the floor, but the woman seemed to be unaware of it. She kept caressing Jih-hui's hand, not saying a word.

"Have you forgotten that I'm standing out here in the rain in the middle of the night? Let me go back. If someone should see us, it wouldn't be good."

The woman wouldn't release him. After a long time, she said, "I was going to ask you something, but I've forgotten. . . . Oh, that's right, you haven't told me where you're going."

"I can't really. I have to make some inquiries in Amoy first, then I'll be able to decide. I used to think of going to Nagasaki or Shanghai, but lately I've been wondering about Singapore. So I'm not sure, yet."

"When I let go your hand it will be like letting go the string of a kite," the woman said in a stricken voice. "I won't know where to look for you again."

She released his hand, and the man stood numbly. He seemed to want to say something more. The woman gazed at him in silence. Rain pelted the man standing outside; lightning startled the widow within. Yet neither of them noticed. In the darkness, the woman heard him say:

"When Cheng-jen is older, you must send him to school. Bring him up well, and some day he'll bring honours to you."

Without waiting for her reply, he opened his battered umbrella and walked away.

* * *

More than forty years they had separated, with never a letter from him. The woman felt as if she had refound a lost treasure. No message or news, no son or daughter-in-law, could have moved her as this reunion did. Her happiness soon cured her illness.

When Yun-ku was able to leave her bed, Jih-hui, or Sze-ching, as he was now called, came for her in a car and brought her to his country retreat. In the bamboo grove of droning insects and pattering deer hoofs the old couple at last began the life they had always longed for. Yun-ku upbraided Sze-ching for never having sent her any word.

"I didn't want to cut myself off from you," he replied. "But if I told you where I was then, it might not have been to our benefit. I thought to myself — you had Cheng-jen; there was sure to be a lot of gossip after I left. If I went back to see you, I knew you wouldn't let me go so easily again the next time. If I insisted on staying with you, I'd be brought up on charges. Leaving you again — that would be unthinkable.

"After I took a wife, I forgot you. I didn't really forget you, but since thinking of you made me miserable, I learned to pretend that you didn't exist. And because I was married, I all the more didn't dare go back to see you."

As Sze-ching was talking, he saw his son Li-sheng stop his motorcycle on the edge of the grove. "The 'Cheng-jen' you saw that day is here," he said to Yun-ku.

Li-sheng entered. Sze-ching told him to greet Yun-ku as "mother." To the old lady he said, "Doesn't he look like your Cheng-jen?"

"Yes, very much. No wonder I mistook him. But looking at him closely, I can see that he's much younger."

"Naturally. Cheng-jen is more than ten years older. Li-sheng is only thirty-four."

At the mention of her son, Yun-ku again felt distressed and her eyes wandered vacantly. Sze-ching consoled her:

"Anyhow, my son is yours. Sooner or later Cheng-jen will be found. We'll give the job to Li-sheng. Let's spend our old age in carefree pleasure."

Hearing this, Mr. Chu, who was present, laughed heartily. "'Who would have believed that an old gentleman like you would have a heart so young?' Who's the old man now?"

Sze-ching smiled. "I'm her brother-in-law. It's quite right that I should look after my widowed sister-in-law. Would you have me send her to a home for the aged?"

The indulgent talk of these elderly people embarrassed Li-sheng. He excused himself, saying that he wanted to order a celebration banquet sent out from town. Mounting his motor-cycle, he rode off.

The chime clock on the wall struck the hour, and its musical clang reminded Yun-ku of the gong of the blind fortune-teller back in Tsanghai. "Now you've found everything," she seemed to hear him say. "You ought to pay double for my prediction about the traveller. And I don't suppose you dare say anything about breaking my little gong any more!"

Of course the banquet that night was a very special one.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

BIG SISTER LIU

Summer was unusually hot in Peking that year. Although the street lamps were already lit, the man who sold cool crab-apple cider on the corner of the lane was still announcing his wares with a rhythmic clanging of two small brass bowls, like the accompaniment women ballad reciters use to punctuate their stories. A woman with a large basket of scrap paper on her back passed before the cider vendor. A large battered straw hat obscured her face, but when she hailed him, you caught a flash of even white teeth. Her burden weighed her down heavily. She walked placing one foot solemnly in front of the other, like a camel, until she entered her own gate.

Beyond was a small compound lined with one-storey buildings built in a hollow square. The woman lived in two dilapidated rooms on one side of the compound. Most of the yard was strewn with rubble, but before her door was an arbor of cucumbers and a few stalks of tall corn. Tuberoses grew beneath her window. A few rotting timbers beneath the arbor evidently served as seats. As she neared her door, a man came out and helped her lower the heavy basket.

"You're late today, wife."

The woman looked at him in surprise. "What do you mean? Have you gone out of your mind, wanting a wife? Don't call me that, I tell you." Entering the room, she took off her battered straw hat and hung it behind the door. Then she scooped water from a large earthen vat several times in succession with half a segment of bamboo, drinking so rapidly she couldn't catch her breath. After standing a moment, gasping, she walked out to the arbor, pulled the big basket to one side and sat down on a rotting timber.

The man's name was Liu Hsiang-kao. He was approximately the same age as she — about thirty. The woman's surname was also Liu. But, except for Hsiang-kao, no one knew that her given name was Chun-tao, or Spring Peach. The neighbours all referred to her as Big Sister Liu the scrap paper collector. That was because of her occupation — poking through rubbish heaps on street corners and lanes' ends to earn a living, buying old written matter for which she gave boxes of matches in exchange. From morning till night, beneath the blazing sun or in the icy gale, she tramped the streets, eating her full share of dust. But she had

always loved cleanliness. Winter or summer, each day when she returned home she washed her face and bathed her body. Hsiang-kao never failed to have a bucket of water waiting for her.

Hsiang-kao had graduated from a rural elementary school. Four years ago, soldiers were marauding through his native region, and his whole family was forced to flee and scatter. On the road he met Chun-tao, another refugee. They travelled together several hundred miles, then separated.

She went with a group of people to Peking and found a job as nursemaid in a family of foreigners whose mistress was looking for an inexperienced country girl. Because she was clean and pretty, her mistress became very fond of her. But country people don't make good servants; they can't get used to being scolded. In less than two months, Chun-tao quit. Her finances at a low ebb, she decided to try collecting scrap paper. In this trade she was able to earn enough to live on.

Hsiang-kao's story, after he parted from Chun-tao, was quite simple. He went to Chochou to look up a relative, but the man was gone. Family friends, hearing that he had come as a penniless refugee, were not very cordial. He drifted to Peking where someone introduced him to Old Wu, who sold crab-apple cider on the street corner. Old Wu loaned him his present quarters in the run-down courtyard, on the understanding that if anybody wanted to rent them, he would move out. Hsiang-kao had no job, so he helped the old man sell cider and kept his accounts for him. He paid no rent and Old Wu gave him nothing for his work, but supplied him with two meals a day. Chun-tao wasn't doing too badly at her paper collecting, but the people with whom she was staying wouldn't allow her to store her merchandise. She went looking for a place along the north city wall and the first time she rapped on a gate, Hsiang-kao came out. Saving herself a lot of formalities, she rented the rooms from Old Wu and kept Hsiang-kao on as her helper.

That was three years before. Since Hsiang-kao could read a bit, he was able to sort through the paper that Chun-tao collected and pick out the relatively valuable pieces, such as inscribed paintings or letters or scrolls written by some famous figure. With the two co-operating, business improved. Occasionally, Hsiang-kao tried to teach Chun-tao to read and write, but without much success. He couldn't read very well himself and had even greater difficulty in explaining the words to others.

Their life together, while perhaps not as idyllic as that of the mandarin duck and drake, famed symbols of connubial bliss, was in any event as cheerful as the union of a pair of common sparrows.

But to get back to the present. As Chun-tao came into the room, Hsiang-kao followed behind her with a bucket of water.

"Wash up, wife," he said happily. "I'm starving. Let's have something good tonight — onion griddle cake, alright? If you agree, I'll go out and buy the fixings."

"Wife, wife! Why can't you stop calling me that?" Chun-tao demanded impatiently.

"If you'll only answer to it — just once — tomorrow I'll buy you a good straw hat in the second-hand market. Haven't you been saying you need one?" Hsiang-kao pleaded.

"I don't like to hear it."

Seeing that she was a little annoyed, he changed the subject. "Well, what do you want to eat?"

"Whatever you like. You buy it and I'll make it for you."

After a while Hsiang-kao returned with some onions and a bowl of sesame seed sauce, and placed them on the table. Chun-tao had finished washing. She came in holding a large red card.

"This must be some big official's wedding certificate. Don't sell it in the Small Market this time. Better have someone take it to the Peking Hotel. We'll get more for it there."

"That's ours. Otherwise what right would I have to call you wife?" replied Hsiang-kao playfully. "I've been teaching you to read for nearly two years and you still can't recognize your own name!"

"Who can read so many words? And cut out this wife business. I don't like to hear it. Seriously now, who wrote this thing?"

"I did. This morning a policeman came around to check up on the tenants. He says the martial law has been stricter the last two days. Every family has to report exactly who's staying with them and their relationship. Old Wu said that if I said we were husband and wife it would save a lot of trouble. The policeman, too, said it wouldn't look good if he wrote down that a man and a woman, unmarried, were living together. So I took that blank wedding certificate we couldn't sell last time and filled in that we were married in 1919."

"What? 1919? I didn't even know you in 1919. You'll get us into an awful mess. We never worshipped Heaven and Earth together, we never drank from each other's wine cups. How can anyone say we're husband and wife?"

Although opposed to the idea, Chun-tao spoke calmly. She had changed to blue cloth trousers and she wore a white tunic. Even without make-up, her face had a fresh natural beauty. Had she been willing to marry, the local matchmaker could easily have passed her off as a young widow of twenty-three or four. Chun-tao could have commanded at least a hundred and eighty dollars under prevailing market conditions.

Laughing, she folded the card down the middle. "Don't fool around. A fine wedding certificate. Let's make our griddle cakes and eat." She lifted the stove lid and thrust the card into the flames. Then she walked to the table and began to knead some dough.

"You can burn it if you like," said Hsiang-kao with a grin. "The policeman has already registered us as husband and wife. If they make an official check, I'll say we lost it when we were refugees on the road.

From now on, I'm going to call you wife. Old Wu recognizes our marriage; so does the policeman. I'm going to call you wife whether you like it or not. Wife, wife. Tomorrow I'll buy you a new hat. I'm afraid I can't afford a ring."

"Keep that up and you'll make me mad."

"Looks like you're still thinking of that Li Mao." Hsiang-kao was not quite so high-spirited as he had been a moment before. He said it under his breath, but Chun-tao heard him.

"Think of him? Husband and wife for one night, then separated for nearly five years, with no news all that time. What's the good of thinking?"

She had told Hsiang-kao what had happened on her marriage day. When the flowery sedan-chair brought her to the groom's home, before the guests even had a chance to take their seats at the wedding feast, a man came rushing in to announce that an army of many soldiers had arrived in the two neighbouring villages. They were grabbing men to dig trenches and everybody was running away. The new couple hastily bundled their belongings together and fled toward the west with the rest of the villagers. Their second night on the road, they suddenly heard people ahead shouting, "The bandits are coming. Hide, quickly, hide!" There was a wild scramble to get out of sight. No one had time to think of anyone but himself. When the sun rose the next morning, a dozen people had disappeared, Chun-tao's husband Li Mao among them.

"I think he must have been taken by the bandits," she now said. "Maybe they killed him long ago. Forget it. Let's not talk about him."

She finished making a griddle cake and put it on the table. Hsiang-kao scooped a bowl of cucumber soup from the crockery pot. The two sat down and ate in silence.

When the meal was over, they sat beneath the arbor and chatted. A cool breeze brought tiny fireflies descending on the arbor like a myriad of falling stars, while countless real stars flashed and twinkled among the leaves of the cucumber vine. The night-blooming tuberoses slowly opened their petals and filled the garden with their perfume.

"How lovely they smell," said Hsiang-kao. He plucked one of the flowers and put it in Chun-tao's hair.

"Don't spoil my tuberoses. Wearing flowers in the hair at night — I'm no prostitute." She took the flower out, inhaled its delicate scent then placed it on the timber seat beside her.

"Why were you so late today?"

"Huh! Today I did a good piece of business. As I was coming home this afternoon, passing the Houmen Arch I saw some street cleaners pushing a big cartful of scrap paper. I asked them where they got it. They said it came from the Shenwu Gate of the old Imperial Palace.* I saw

*The paper was sold by museum employees to pay their salary, which was months in arrears.

that it was full of official-looking red and yellow documents. I asked them whether they'd sell it to me. They were very polite. If you want it, they said, we'll give you a special price, and you can take it away." Chun-tao pointed at the big basket resting beneath the window of the house. "I only spent a dollar for all that! Maybe it's money thrown away, I don't know. We can go through it tomorrow and see."

"You can't go wrong on things from the Palace. It's only stuff from the schools and the foreign business firms that I'm afraid of. Their paper is heavy and it smells bad. You never know what you're getting."

"All the shopkeepers have been using foreign paper for wrapping paper the last few years. I can't imagine where it all comes from. None of the collectors like to handle it. We have to pay more for it because it's heavy, but when we sell it we get very little."

"More and more people are studying foreign languages. Everybody wants to be able to read the foreign newspaper so that they can learn how to do business with the foreigners."

"Let them. We'll stick to picking foreign paper."

"Looks like everything will have to have a foreign label from now on. We've got 'foreign' clothes and 'foreign' hats and 'foreign' cloth. The next thing you know we'll be using 'foreign' camels!"

Chun-tao laughed. "You shouldn't talk about others. If you had money you'd probably want to study foreign books too, and get yourself a foreignized wife."

"The Lord of the Heavens knows, I'll never get rich, and even if I did, I wouldn't want a foreignized wife. If I had a little money I'd go to the countryside and buy some good farm land, and we two could till it together."

Ever since Chun-tao had been forced to flee from her home and lost her husband, the word "countryside" had unpleasant associations for her. "Is that what you want?" she demanded. "Before you'd even have bought your land, both you and your money would be gobbled up. The countryside's a hell. I wouldn't go back even if I were starving here."

"I'd like to see our Chinhsien County again."

"The countryside's the same wherever you go. If it's not marauding soldiers then it's bandits on a raid. If it's not the bandits, it's the Japanese. Who dares go back? We're much better off right here, picking scrap paper. What we need is another person to help us. If we had someone to take your place at home going through the pickings, you could set up a stall during the day and sell direct to the customers. Besides cutting out the middleman, we'd be less likely to pass over any good items."

"Another three years at this trade and I'll be alright. If we pass over any good items, it's nobody's fault but my own. I've learned plenty the last few months. Used postage stamps — which ones are worth money, which ones aren't — I pretty near know them all. I'm beginning to get the hang of spotting the writing of famous men. A couple of days ago

I found something by Kang Yu-wei.* Guess how much I sold it for today." Hsiang-kao happily held up a thumb and an index finger. "Eighty cents!"

"You see! If we could pick eighty cents out of our heap of scrap paper every day, that wouldn't be so bad. Why go back to the countryside? Wouldn't that just be looking for trouble?" Chun-tao's cheerful tones were like the throaty warble of an oriole in late spring. "I guarantee you'll find plenty of good stuff in the paper I brought home today. I hear there'll be even more coming out of the Palace tomorrow. That street cleaner told me to wait for him at the Houmen Arch first thing in the morning. He says all the things in the Palace are being crated and sent south, but nobody wants the old paper. I saw a lot outside the Tunghua Gate of the Palace too. They're practically giving it away — whole sacks of it. You go down there tomorrow and ask about it."

Before they knew it, it was almost midnight. Chun-tao stood up and stretched. "I'm tired. Let's get some rest."

Hsiang-kao followed her into the house. There was a brick oven-bed against the window wide enough to sleep three. In the tiny light of an oil lamp, the two pictures on the wall were dimly visible. One was "Eight Fairies Playing Mah-jong," the other was a cigarette advertisement with a beautiful girl. It seemed to Hsiang-kao that if Chun-tao took off her battered straw hat and put on a decent gown — not necessarily from a smart dress shop, even a second-hand one from the Heavenly Bridge Market would do — and sat on a grassy knoll, she wouldn't look much different from the fashionable young lady in the cigarette ad. That was why he liked to tease Chun-tao and say that the advertisement was her photograph.

Chun-tao undressed, draped herself in a thin coverlet and lay face downwards on the bed. According to their nightly habit, Hsiang-kao massaged her back and legs. As usual, she gradually relaxed, a faint smile on her lips, as Hsiang-kao kneaded her weary muscles in the light of the oil lamp's flickering little flame.

Already half asleep, she murmured, "You come to bed too. Don't work tonight. You have to get up early tomorrow."

Soon the woman was snoring faintly. Hsiang-kao put out the lamp.

At dawn they rose promptly, and set off on their respective missions like a pair of ravens leaving their nest in search of food.

Just as the noon cannon sounded, and the drums and cymbals of the fair grounds on the shores of the Ten Monasteries Lake were at their noisiest, Chun-tao came through the Houmen Arch, bearing a basket of paper on her back, and headed west toward the Puya Bridge. As she neared the fair grounds, a man by the side of the road hailed her:

"Chun-tao, Chun-tao!"

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*Ching Dynasty scholar and statesman.

Even Hsiang-kao seldom addressed her by her given name. In the four or five years since she left the countryside, certainly no one had ever shouted it out like that in public.

"Chun-tao, don't you remember me?"

She turned to see a beggar sitting by the roadside. The piteous cry had come from him. His face was heavily bearded. He was unable to stand because he had no legs. The white metal buttons of his tattered grey uniform were already rusting and his skin showed through the splits in his shoulder seams. A nondescript army cap devoid of any insignia perched askew on his head.

Chun-tao stared at him wordlessly.

"Chun-tao, I'm Li Mao!"

She took two steps forward. Grimy tears were running down the man's cheeks into his tangled beard. Her heart beat wildly. For several minutes she was unable to speak.

"Mao, you're a beggar?" she said finally. "How did you lose your legs?"

He sighed. "It's a long story. How long have you been in Peking? What are you selling?"

"Selling? I collect scrap paper. — We can talk after we get home."

Chun-tao called a rickshaw, raised Li Mao in and put her basket on the vehicle's floorboard. While the rickshaw man pulled, she trotted along behind and pushed. Old Wu, standing at the head of her lane near the north wall clanging his little brass bowls, hailed her as they went by:

"You're home early today, Big Sister. Business must be good!"

"A relative's come from the country," she shouted back in reply.

At the compound gate, the rickshaw man helped Li Mao down. Chun-tao opened the gate with her key, then led Li Mao in. He crawled forward on his hands, like a performing bear, his amputated legs dragging behind him.

She brought out a suit of Hsiang-kao's clothing and drew two buckets of water from the well, just as Hsiang-kao did for her every day. She poured the water into a wooden tub and told Li Mao to bathe. After he finished, she filled another basin so that he could wash his face. Finally she helped him to a seat on the oven-bed, then went into the next room to bathe herself.

"Your place is nice and clean, Chun-tao. Do you live here alone?"

"My partner stays here too," she answered without any hesitation.

"Are you in business?"

"Didn't I tell you I collect scrap paper?"

"Collect scrap paper? How much can you earn in a day doing that?"

"Never mind questioning me. Let me hear about you first." Chun-tao spilled out the bath water and came into the room, combing her hair. She sat down opposite Li Mao.

Li Mao began his story:

"Chun-tao — ah, it's too long. I'll just tell you the main things. — After the bandits captured me that night, I hated them because they had made me lose you. I watched for my chance, grabbed one of their rifles, killed two of them and ran for my life. I managed to get to Shenyang just when they were recruiting for the army, and I joined up. All during the next three years I kept trying to get news from home. People said our village had been razed to the ground; no one knew what had happened to the title-deed to our bit of land. I had forgotten to take it with me when we ran away. And so I never asked for leave to go home for a look around. I was afraid if I did, I'd lose the few dollars' pay I was drawing every month.

"So I settled down to being a soldier, just living for pay day. As for becoming an officer, I had no hope of that. Then, last year, something happened — I must be fated to a life of bad luck. The colonel of our regiment issued an order saying that any man who could hit the bull's-eye nine shots out of ten would get double pay and be promoted. In the whole regiment, not one soldier was able to hit the target more than four times in ten, and even those shots weren't in the middle. But I sent nine bullets right into the red ball, one after another. Then to show how good I really was, I turned my back to the target, bent down and fired the tenth shot from between my legs. It hit the bull's-eye exactly in the center.

"When the colonel sent for me, I was very happy. I was sure he was going to praise me. Instead the pig became very angry. He swore I must be a bandit, and wanted to have me shot. He said nobody but a bandit could shoot so well. My sergeant and my lieutenant both pleaded for me; they guaranteed I wasn't a bad man. Although they convinced him not to shoot me, I lost my private's rank; I wasn't even a private second class. The colonel said an officer is bound to hurt the feelings of his men sometimes, and with a sharpshooter in the ranks, during battle he'd run the same risk of being shot from behind as in front; that although he'd be killed in either event, he'd rather not lose his life for the sake of someone's revenge. Nobody had any answer to that one. People could only urge me to quit the army and find some other trade.

"Not long after I left, I heard that the Japanese had occupied Shenyang and that dog of a colonel had led all his troops over in surrender. I was boiling mad. I swore I'd get the bastard. I joined the Volunteers and fought outside of Haicheng for the next few months. We gave ground slowly, retreating south toward the Great Wall. Two months ago we were northeast of Pingku and I was on patrol duty. I ran into the enemy and was hit in both legs. I was still able to walk then and took cover behind a boulder and killed a couple of them. When I finally couldn't hold out any longer, I threw my rifle away and crawled into the fields. There I hid one day, two days — with still no sign of our stretcher bearers. My legs were swelling badly. I couldn't move. I had nothing to eat and nothing to drink. I just lay there and waited to die. Luckily a man came

by with a big cart. He picked me up and brought me to a first-aid tent. They took one look at me and rushed me to a field hospital in Peking. But it was already the third day. My legs were too far gone. The doctor had to amputate.

"I was in the hospital for more than a month. I pulled through alright, but my legs are gone. I thought to myself — In this town I haven't a single relative or friend and I can't go home; even if I could, how can I till the land without any legs? I begged the hospital to keep me on and give me a small job — any kind. The doctor said the hospital cures people but it doesn't support them and it's not its duty to find work for them. This city has no soldiers' sanatorium so all I could do was beg on the streets. Today is exactly the third day. Lately I've been thinking I can't stand this much longer; it would be better to hang myself and get it over with."

Chun-tao listened intently. Her eyes were moist but she said nothing. Li Mao paused to wipe the sweat from his brow.

"And what about you?" he asked. "Though this place is kind of cramped compared with our broad, open countryside, from the looks of things you're doing all right."

"Who's doing all right? No matter how bad things are, a person still has to live. You can see people with smiles on their faces even at the gates of hell. I've been collecting scrap paper for a living, the past few years. A fellow by the name of Hsiang-kao is my partner. He and I share everything, you might say. We can get by in a pinch."

"You and he live here together?"

"Yes, we both sleep on this oven-bed." Chun-tao replied without the least hesitation, as if she had definite views on the subject for a long time.

"Oh, then you're married to him."

"No, we just live together."

"In that case, are you still my wife or aren't you?"

"No, I'm not anybody's wife."

Li Mao's pride as a husband was hurt, but he couldn't think of what to say. His eyes were fixed on the ground, not that he was looking at anything of course, but because he was rather ashamed to face his wife.

"Everyone must be laughing at me for a cuckold," he said at last in a low voice.

"Cuckold?" The woman's face hardened a bit at the word, but she spoke without rancor. "Only people with money and position are afraid of being cuckolds. A man like you — who knows that you're even alive? Besides, cuckold or not, what's the difference? I'm independent now. Whatever I do can't have any effect on you."

"But we're still married, after all. As the old saying goes: 'One night of marriage, hundred days of bliss—' "

"I don't know anything about any hundred days of bliss," Chun-tao interrupted. "Several hundred days of bliss have passed since then. Nearly

five years without a word. I'm sure you never dreamed we'd meet again either. I was here alone. I had to live. I needed someone to help me. After living together with him all these years, of course I don't feel the same about you any more. I brought you home today because our fathers were friends, because we come from the same village. You may claim I'm your wife, but I deny you. Even if you take the case to court, I'm not so sure you'll win."

Li Mao fumbled at the pouch in his belt as if searching for something. But then he stopped and stared at Chun-tao, and his hand dropped back and rested on the mat covering of the brick bed.

Li Mao was silent. Chun-tao wept. The shadows on the floor softly lengthened.

"Alright, Chun-tao, if that's how you want it. I'm a cripple. Even if you came back to me, I couldn't support you," Li Mao said sensibly.

"I can't throw you over because you're crippled. But I can't give him up either. Why don't we all just live here, and no one think about who's supporting whom, what do you say?" Chun-tao, too, spoke the words that were in her heart.

Li Mao's stomach rumbled faintly.

"Oh, here we've been talking all this time and I haven't even asked you what you'd like to eat. You must be terribly hungry."

"Anything at all. I haven't eaten since last night. I only had some water."

"I'll buy something." As Chun-tao hurried from the house, Hsiang-kao gaily entered the courtyard. They collided under the arbor.

"What are you so happy about?" she asked him. "Why are you home so early?"

"I did some good business today. This morning I went through that load of paper you brought home last night, and what did I find but some Ming Dynasty petitions sent to the Emperor of China by the King of Korea — ten of them, worth at least fifty dollars apiece! I just brought a few down to the exchange to see what they'll bring from the customers: I'll take some more down later. I also found two stamped sheets of paper that the experts say are Sung Dynasty. I've been offered sixty dollars for them already, but I was afraid to sell. Maybe that's too cheap. I brought them back to let you take a look. See. . . ."

He undid the cloth wrapper of his bundle and took out the documents and the stamped paper. "This is the imperial seal." He pointed at the stamped imprint.

"Except for that mark, I don't see anything special about this paper. Fine foreign paper is much whiter," said Chun-tao. "Those Palace officials must be as blind as I am."

Hsiang-kao laughed. "If they weren't a little blind how could people like us earn a couple of dollars now and again?"

He retied the bundle. "I say, wife —"

Chun-tao glanced at him sharply. "I told you not to call me that."

Hsiang-kao ignored her tone. "You've come home early too. Business must be not bad."

"I bought another basketful, the same as yesterday's."

"Didn't you say there was a lot more?"

"They sent it all to the Morning Market to use for peanut bags!"

"Never mind. We've done very well today. It's the first time we've done more than thirty dollars' worth of business in a day. Say, it isn't often that we're both home together in the afternoon. Why don't we take a stroll around the fair grounds at Ten Monasteries Lake? It's nice and cool there."

He went into the house and put his bundle on the table. Chun-tao followed him in. "We can't," she said. "We have a visitor today." Raising the door curtain of the inner room, she nodded to Hsiang-kao, "Go on in."

He walked into the next room with Chun-tao right behind him. "This is my former husband," she said to Hsiang-kao, and to Li Mao she said, "This is my partner."

The eyes of the two men met. If the pupils of each man's eyes were spaced equally far apart, the lines of vision would have been exactly parallel. Neither man spoke. Even the two flies resting on the window sill were silent. The room remained hushed for several moments.

"Your name, sir?" asked Hsiang-kao courteously. Of course, he knew very well.

They began to chat.

"I must go out and buy a couple of things," said Chun-tao. "You probably haven't eaten either," she said to Hsiang-kao. "Will griddle cakes be alright?"

"I've eaten. You stay here. I'll do the buying."

Chun-tao pushed him to a seat on the brick bed. "You stay here and entertain the guest," she insisted with a smile. She went out.

The two men were left alone in the room. In a situation like that, if they hadn't liked one another on sight, they might have fought to the death. Fortunately, they had formed a mutual liking. We needn't think because Li Mao had lost his legs that he couldn't fight. We must remember that Hsiang-kao's only exercise the past four or five years had been wielding a pen. Li Mao was strong enough to have killed him. If he had a gun, it would have been even easier. One crook of the trigger finger and Hsiang-kao would have crossed the Bridge to the Outer World.

Li Mao told Hsiang-kao that his father used to help Chun-tao's father on the farm during the busy seasons, and that the two were good friends. Because Li Mao was a crack shot, Chun-tao's father was afraid he would go off and join the army. To make sure he would stay and protect the local peasants, the old man gave his daughter to Li Mao in marriage. This was something Chun-tao had never mentioned to Hsiang-kao before. Li

Mao then told him of the conversation he had just had with Chun-tao, and the talk came around to the question that affected them both so vitally.

"Now that you husband and wife are reunited again, I'll leave, of course," said Hsiang-kao reluctantly.

"No. I've been away from her so long. And now I'm a cripple. I couldn't support her. It wouldn't be any use. You've lived together all these years. Why break up? I can go to a home for the disabled. I hear there's one here. I can get in if I can make the right connections."

Hsiang-kao was surprised. He hadn't expected such magnanimous conduct from a man he had considered a rough soldier. But though his heart agreed, his mouth continued to refuse. This is the courteous hypocrisy known so well by all who have had some book-learning.

"That's not right," replied Hsiang-kao. "I don't want to be known as a wife-stealer. And, thinking of it from your angle, you shouldn't let your wife live with another man."

"I'll write a paper disowning her, or I'll give you a bill of sale. Either way will do," Li Mao said with a smile. But his tone was quite earnest.

"How can you disown her? She hasn't done anything wrong. I don't want her to lose face. As for buying her — where would I get the money? Whatever money I have is hers."

"I don't want any money."

"What do you want?"

"I don't want anything."

"Then why write a bill of sale?"

"Because if we just agree verbally you won't have any proof. I might be sorry later and change my mind; that would make things awkward. Excuse me for talking so frankly, but that's the best way to get this thing settled. We can save the polite chatter for later."

Chun-tao returned with the sesame seed buns she had bought. Seeing the two men talking together so freely, she was very happy.

"I've been thinking a lot lately about finding another person to help us," she said to Hsiang-kao. "Now, by a lucky coincidence, Mao has shown up. He can't walk, but he'll be fine at home, sorting through the paper. You can be our outside salesman. I'll still do the collecting. The three of us will be a business company."

Li Mao made no reply, but picked up a sesame seed bun and began wolfing it down. It was as if he had just come back from the world of the starving and had no time for talk.

"Two men and a woman form a company? And you put up the capital?" Hsiang-kao asked needlessly.

"What's the matter? Don't you agree?"

"Of course, of course. I haven't any objections." Hsiang-kao couldn't bring himself to say what he was thinking.

"What can I do? What use will I be, sitting around the house all day?" Li Mao was rather hesitant too. He understood Hsiang-kao's meaning.

"Now both of you just take it easy. I've got it all figured out."

Hsiang-kao uneasily moistened his lips. Li Mao continued eating, but his eyes were fixed on Chun-tao. He waited to hear what she had to say.

Collecting scrap paper is probably an occupation in which women play the leading role. Chun-tao had already evolved a plan. Li Mao would stay home and pick out the used postage stamps and the picture cards in the empty cigarette packs. The job required only eyes and hands, and he could do it. She calculated that if he could find a hundred and some odd cigarette pack pictures every day, that would cover the cost of his food. If, each day, he could also find even two or three good, relatively rare, stamps, that would be even better. About ten thousand packs of foreign cigarettes were sold in Peking daily (the foreign cigarette packs were the ones containing the premium picture cards). Chun-tao thought that she could collect, say, one per cent of these without much difficulty. Hsiang-kao would concentrate on looking for letters of famous people and other comparatively valuable items. Needless to say, he was already an expert, and needed no further guidance. Chun-tao herself would do the heavy work. Unless there was a big rain storm, she would go out every day, regardless of the wind or cold. In fact she would make a special point of working in the bad weather, because on such days some of her competitors were likely to stay home.

Glancing at the sun through the window, she estimated it was not yet two o'clock. She went out into the courtyard, put on her battered straw hat, then called through the door to Hsiang-kao:

"I must inquire whether there's anything else being thrown out of the Palace. You look after him. I'll be back tonight and we can talk some more."

Hsiang-kao knew it was hopeless to try and detain her. He let her go.

Several days went by in silence. But two men and a woman sleeping together on a single brick oven-bed of course was very awkward. The institution of polyandrous marriage after all hasn't too many adherents in the world, one of the reasons being that the average man cannot rid himself of his primitive concepts regarding his rights as a husband and father. It is from these concepts that our customs and moral codes arise. Actually, in our society, only the parasites and exploiters observe the so-called customs; people who have to work for a living have very little respect for them in their hearts.

Take Chun-tao, for instance. She was neither a well-to-do matron or a fashionable young miss. She was not likely to go dancing at some glittering ballroom, nor would she have any opportunity to play the

hostess at a big society function. No one criticized or questioned her conduct. Even if they had, it wouldn't have bothered her a whit. Only the local policeman was concerned with her comings and goings, and he was quite easy to handle.

The two men? Hsiang-kao, with a few years of schooling, had a vague idea of the precepts of the ancient feudal philosophers. But except for a mild interest in preserving appearances, he was the same as Chun-tao. From the time he moved in, he was completely dependent on her. To him, her word was law. He obeyed her because it was to his benefit to do so. Chun-tao told him not to be jealous, so he cast aside even the seed of jealousy.

As for Li Mao, his demands were simple. If Hsiang-kao and Chun-tao would let him live with them for a day, he would stay for a day; if they treated him as a relative, he would be quite satisfied. Travelling around so much, a soldier always loses a wife or two. Li Mao's problem was also one of appearances.

Nevertheless, although Hsiang-kao was not jealous, a number of other disturbing things kept coming between the two men.

The summer days were still stifling hot, but Chun-tao and Hsiang-kao were not the sort of people to go to exclusive vacation resorts. They had to get on with their work. At home, Li Mao was beginning to learn the trade. He could already distinguish between which paper should be sent to the toilet paper makers and which he should keep for a final appraisal by Hsiang-kao.

Coming home one day, Chun-tao found Hsiang-kao waiting for her as usual. It was already late, and as she entered the house she could smell incense burning.

"When did we take to burning mosquito-repellent incense?" she called to Hsiang-kao, who was sitting beneath the arbor. "You're liable to burn the house down too, if you're not careful."

Hsiang-kao made no reply, but Li Mao said, "We're not trying to drive away the mosquitoes, we're just purifying the air. I asked Brother Hsiang-kao to light it for me. I'm figuring on sleeping outside tonight. It's too hot inside. With three people sleeping together, it's really uncomfortable."

"Who does this red card on the table belong to?" Chun-tao asked, picking it up.

"We talked it over today," said Li Mao from the brick bed. "You go to Hsiang-kao. That's the contract of sale."

"Oh, so you've got it all settled among yourselves! Well, and I say it's not up to you two to dispose of me!" She walked over to Li Mao with the red card. "Was this your idea, or his?"

"It's what we both want. The way we've been living, I'm not happy and neither is he."

"We talk and talk and it's still the same question. Why must you two always think about this husband and wife business?" Angrily, she tore the card to bits. "How much did you sell me for?"

"We put down a figure just for the looks of things. No real man gives his wife away for nothing."

"But if he sells her, that makes everything alright, does it?" She walked out to Hsiang-kao. "You've got money now. You can afford to buy a wife. Why not spend a little more and —"

"Don't talk like that, don't talk like that," Hsiang-kao pleaded. "You don't understand, Chun-tao. The last few days, the people in the trade have all been laughing at me —"

"Laughing?"

"Yes. . . ." Hsiang-kao's voice trailed off. As a matter of fact, he didn't feel very strongly about the matter. Nine cases out of ten, he did whatever Chun-tao wanted. He didn't know why she had such power over him. At times he thought a certain thing should be done this way or that, yet when he came face to face with her, she was like a queen whose every command he had to obey.

"So you can't forget you're a scholar — just because you've read a couple of books. Scared to death that someone will scold you, laugh at you."

From the earliest days, real control over the people has been exercised not through the teachings of the sages but by cursing tongues and blows of the whip. Curses and blows are what have maintained our customs. But in Chun-tao's state of mind she was ready to return "A curse for a curse, a blow for a blow." No weakling, while she didn't pick on anyone, she wouldn't take abuse from others either. Just hear how she instructed Hsiang-kao, and you'll see:

"If anyone laughs at you, why don't you hit him? What are you afraid of? What we do is nobody else's business."

Hsiang-kao was silent.

"Let's not talk about this any more. Why can't the three of us go on living as we are?"

The room was still. After the evening meal Hsiang-kao and Chun-tao sat beneath the arbor as usual, but both were unusually quiet. They didn't even recite any passages from the scriptures of the day's business.

Li Mao called Chun-tao into the house. He urged her to become Hsiang-kao's wife officially. He said she didn't understand a man's psychology. No one wanted to be a cuckold; nor did anyone want to become known as a wife-stealer. Taking out a red card which was already turning brown, he handed it to Chun-tao.

"This is our marriage certificate. That night we fled, I took it from the shrine and put it in my shirt. I'm giving it back to you, so now we can be considered no longer married."

Chun-tao accepted the card from him without a word, her eyes fixed on the torn mat covering the brick bed. She sank to a seat beside her crippled husband.

"Take it back, Mao dear, I don't want it. I'm still your wife. 'One night of marriage, a hundred days of bliss' — I can't wrong you like this. What kind of a person would I be if I threw you over because you can't walk or work?"

She placed the red card on the brick bed.

Li Mao was deeply moved. "I can see that you like him a lot," he said in a low voice. "You'd better live with him. When we get a little money scraped together, you can send me back to the country, or to a home for disabled soldiers."

"It's true these last few years we've been living together, we've been getting along fine," Chun-tao replied softly. "If he were to go, I'd miss him terribly. Let's ask him in and see what he thinks."

"Hsiang-kao, Hsiang-kao," she called from the window. No response. She went outside. Hsiang-kao was not there. This was the first time he had ever gone out at night alone. Chun-tao was stunned. She called toward the house:

"I'll go look for him."

She was sure Hsiang-kao had only gone up to the corner. But when she asked Old Wu, the old man said he had seen him going toward the main street. She went to all of his usual haunts, but Hsiang-kao was nowhere to be seen. It's very easy to lose a person. Once they get out of sight, they disappear without a trace.

It was nearly one in the morning when Chun-tao, heavy-hearted, returned home.

The oil lamp in the room was already extinguished.

"Are you asleep? Has Hsiang-kao come back yet?" she asked. Striking a match, she lit the lamp and peered at the brick bed. A chill of terror ran through her veins. Li Mao had hanged himself with his belt from the top of the window lattice. She managed to control herself sufficiently to climb up and lower him to the bed. Fortunately, the time had been short and it wasn't necessary to call for help. By kneading his chest, she gradually was able to revive him.

Taking one's own life for the sake of another is the deed of a knight-errant. If Li Mao hadn't lost his legs he would not have had to resort to such a measure; but for the past few days he had been thinking there was little hope in store for him, that it would be best to do away with himself and let Chun-tao live in peace.

Although Chun-tao didn't love him, she had a strong sense of duty to him. She comforted and reassured him, talking to him until the sky turned light. At last he slept and Chun-tao got down off the bed. On the floor she saw the charred remains of a red card — their marriage certificate. Transfixed, she stared at it for a long time.

All that day she didn't go out of the door. In the evening, she sat beside Li Mao on the brick bed.

"Why are you crying?" she asked him. Tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"I've wronged you. What did I come here for?"

"Nobody's blaming you."

"Now he's gone, and I haven't any legs —"

"You mustn't think like that. He'll come back."

"I hope so."

Thus another day passed. When Chun-tao arose the next morning, she picked a couple of cucumbers from the vine and peeled and sliced them. Carelessly mixing a few ingredients, she grilled a big griddle cake, and brought it with the cucumbers to a small table on the brick bed. She and Li Mao ate together.

Then Chun-tao donned her battered straw hat and fastened her basket on her back.

"You're in low spirits today, don't go out," Li Mao said to her through the window.

"I feel worse sitting around the house."

Slowly, she walked through the gate. Work was part of her very being. Even though she was depressed and unhappy, she still wanted to work. Work is the only thing Chinese women seem to understand. They don't seem to understand love. All their attention is concentrated on the routine problems of life. Love's flowering is only a blind, stifled stirring in their hearts.

Of course love is merely an emotion, while life is tangible and real. The art of talking learnedly of love while reclining behind a silken curtain or sitting in a secluded forest glade is an importation brought on ocean-going steamers — the "Empress" of this, the "President" that. Chun-tao had never been abroad, nor had she ever studied in a school run by blue-eyed foreigners. She didn't understand fashionable love. All she knew was a dull, unaccountable pain.

She wandered from one lane to the next. Endless dust, endless streets engulfed the downcast young woman. "Matches for scrap paper!" she called occasionally. Yet at times she walked by a pile of discarded paper without giving it a glance. Once or twice, when she was supposed to give two boxes of matches in payment, Chun-tao gave five. After muddling through the day, she returned home with the black-cloaked ravens, those rascals who are good for nothing but cawing raucously and stealing food. At the gate she saw the new residents' identification card which the police had posted, stating that Hsiang-kao and she, his wife, were the residents-in-charge. The pressure on her heart grew heavier.

As she entered the courtyard, Hsiang-kao came running out of the house.

Chun-tao's eyes went wide. "You've come back! . . ." she cried, and then she couldn't speak for the choking tears.

"I can't leave you. Everything I have I owe to you. I know you want me to help you with your work. I can't be so callous. . . ."

He had been drifting about aimlessly for two days. His feet seemed to be dragging heavy iron fetters, fastened at one end to Chun-tao's wrist. To make matters worse, wherever he went he saw the cigarette ad with the girl who looked just like Chun-tao. He was so miserable, he didn't even know he was hungry.

"Brother Hsiang-kao and I have talked it over," said Li Mao. "He's the resident-in-charge, I'm the sub-tenant."

Hsiang-kao helped her take off the basket, as in the old days, at the same time wiping the tears from her face. "If we all go back to the country," he said, "Li Mao will be the resident-in-charge and I'll be the sub-tenant. You're our wife."

She made no reply but went into the house, hung up her hat, and took her daily bath.

Once again Chun-tao and Hsiang-kao began reciting passages from the scriptures of the day's business under the cucumber arbor. They agreed that after they sold that paper from the Imperial Palace, they would use some of the money to set up a stall for Hsiang-kao in the public market; perhaps they could also find a somewhat roomier place to live, too.

A moth, flying into the house from the arbor, snuffed out the oil lamp's tiny flame. Li Mao was fast asleep, for the Milky Way was already low in the sky.

"We ought to sleep too," the woman said.

"You get into bed first. I'll come and massage you in a minute."

"You don't have to. I didn't walk very far today. We have to be up early tomorrow. Don't forget to take care of that business. We haven't shown a profit for days."

"Say, I forgot to give it to you. On the way home today, I made a special trip to the second-hand market and bought you a hat that's practically new. What do you think of it?" Groping, Hsiang-kao found the hat and handed it to her.

"How can I see anything in the dark? I'll wear it tomorrow anyhow."

A hush fell on the courtyard. The scent of tuberoses wafted lazily on the night's gentle breeze. In the room soft voices could be faintly heard.

"Wife. . . ."

"I don't want to hear it. I'm not your wife. . . ."

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

Stories About Children

CRICKETS

Jen Ta-lin

It was an especially hot summer. Although the township of Chiling was located in the hills, it was so hot in the day-time that even if stripped to the waist, perspiration would pour off one's body. Only at sunset a cool breeze smelling of mugwort and resin would blow down from the hills. That was the time then, after an early supper, when we would put on a shirt and go to watch a cricket-fight in front of the Chou Family Pavilion, each with a palm-leaf fan stuck in the back of his trouser tops.

I had the most marvellous time that summer. Since I had just finished primary school and taken my entrance exam for middle school, I had no school work at all to do during that vacation. Besides, the chairman of the agricultural producers' co-op hadn't said anything yet about work. So I went fishing and swimming during the day and looking for crickets in the evening. Only once in a while my brother would ask me to do some easy job for him.

One day, two of my friends brought out their crickets for a contest. Both insects were fierce fighters. I was watching with great interest among the crowd when I felt someone nudge me. When I turned to see, there was Hsu Hsiao-kuei pulling me aside.

"What's it all about?" I asked as I followed him to a big date-tree. He stopped and produced two letters from his pocket, one for himself, one for me, which had just arrived.

A glance at the envelope told me it came from the middle school where we had sat for entrance exams. There was a mimeographed sheet that I read over as quickly as I could.

"What does it say?" Hsu Hsiao-kuei leaned over my shoulder to see.

"Flunked the exam," I said coolly.

"Flunked? Then I needn't look at my letter at all," he sighed.

But I snatched the letter from him and tore it open. Sure enough, the letter had the same news for him. "So neither of us is admitted," he said at last. "What shall we do?"

Shih Hsiao-fen, the daughter of the co-op chairman, was within earshot. She had finished primary school earlier and been working in the fields some time already. I raised my voice for her benefit:

"What shall we do? Work in the fields, of course, produce more grain for our country! I wouldn't be surprised, even, if we became famous for our results. . . ."

It was easy to talk big. When my brother woke me the next morning, I yawned at him impatiently: "Do you have to wake me in the wee hours?"

"It's not early for us members of the co-op. Go wash your face with cold water, and you'll be wide awake! Starting from today, you'll have to get up earlier. The co-op chairman has put you in my team."

I jumped up, gave my face a lick and a promise, grabbed my straw hat, and off I was after my brother.

On the way he told me that we were going to cut the early rice, starting with the 20 *mou* of fields on which they got a thousand catties per *mou* and which were meant to set an example for mutual-aid teams and peasants working individually. Any co-op member who knew anything about harvesting was called out. The work had to be done quickly and well, without any waste of grain. Brother also said — probable as a threat — that if I didn't know how to cut the rice, I could join the children who would do the gleaning and get their work-points for it. I gave him an angry glance as I said casually: "Who wants to glean! Of course, I've never cut rice before, but I'm sure I'll handle the sickle well enough, and not any worse than you, for that matter."

There were a great many people working in the fields when we got there. Shih Hsiao-fen was cutting away with back bent, her trouser legs rolled up high. My friends Chao Ta-yun and Hsu Hsiao-kuei were also there. Chao Ta-yun had finished primary school with us, but had long ago decided to take up farming, so he hadn't sat with us for middle-school entrance exams.

Soon, the co-op chairman arrived. He gave us an appraising glance and said: "You've never worked in the fields before. I'll give you a test today."

"I'm sure to pass, Uncle Chen-ken!" I was quick with my answer. "Last summer vacation, I helped a mutual-aid team and harvested the rice from one-tenth of a *mou* for them."

Chao Ta-yun said nothing, and Hsu Hsiao-kuei merely rolled up the sleeves of his blue cotton jacket as high as they would go. So we started to work.

I had always had a good deal of pluck. I thought I wasn't doing so badly at cutting the rice. I remembered what brother had told me: Hold the rice stalks loosely and the sickle tightly; use your arm so that you can cut a whole bundle at one time. I looked at Hsu Hsiao-kuei out of the corner of my eye. Ha ha, he couldn't keep up with me! There he

was, a good five or six feet behind me. Then I saw him whetting his sickle. He must have blunted the edge. After a while, when I turned to look at him once more, I saw him standing there rolling up his sleeves again. I knew he wouldn't be able to pass his "test," just as I had thought. Hsu Hsiao-kuei had been spoilt by his mother ever since he was a baby. All he could do was cutting grass for the sheep. While I was thinking about all this, I worked even more efficiently. I felt I was easily the best among the three of us. . . .

Suddenly a cricket hopped out from under my feet. I could see plainly that it was not an ordinary cricket, but a genuine snake cricket.

I threw down my sickle and went for the cricket. But I wouldn't have believed it could bite so hard that I had to let it get through my fingers. Ha, my little beauty, I thought, you won't escape me, there's no stone here for you to hide under! But the cricket hopped and hopped and finally got on to the grain stalk I had just cut. Annoyed, I shook the sheave. I even knocked it against the ground. Finally the beast was safely in my palm. I said: "Now don't you fuss, my little beauty! I'll call you General Black Feelers, since your feelers are so long." And I stuck the cricket into a small bamboo tube which I always had in my pocket. But as I stood up and looked around, my heart fluttered although I said I had pluck. For there was the chairman of the co-op right behind me!

"What were you doing just now?" he asked me, smiling.

I felt my ears burning. "I caught a huge cricket, Uncle Chen-ken," I answered quickly. "It's a snake cricket, it looks deadly. I'm sure it'll be a match for Fu-hsing's Redhead King! . . ."

"Yes, crickets make very interesting sport. I used to like watching crickets fight myself. But now, Li-hsuan, I think you better join them," he pointed to the back. "Gleaning also gets you work-points."

"Uncle Chen-ken, I don't want to glean, I want to help with the harvesting!" I was very urgent. "I . . . I'll never catch crickets again while I'm working!"

"I'm glad to hear you say so," he laughed. "I've just taken a look at your work. It's true you cut fast, but what about the rice that's still standing untouched?"

"I'll be more careful," I promised. "I'll learn to do the job properly!"

"You can learn some other time," was Uncle Chen-ken's reply. "This is the 1,000-catty field which serves as an example for others. You can learn when we harvest on the other fields."

So I was driven to the gleaners' group. Fortunately, Hsu Hsiao-kuei and Chao Ta-yun were already there.

"Seems all three of us have bad luck," I said.

Hsu Hsiao-kuei gestured as he whispered to me: "Don't rub it in! Chao Ta-yun has cut his ankle and is bleeding badly."

I looked at him. Sure enough, he must have given himself a nasty gash. Blood was dripping from under the leaf he had put over it.

"How did you cut yourself so badly?" I asked.

Chao Ta-yun bit his lips and wiped off some blood with his finger. He stared at the field as he replied softly. "The sickle slipped off. Maybe I didn't hold it right — I did feel a bit awkward when I cut the rice." He moved his arm to show how he had been holding the sickle. Then he clenched his fist and hit it dejectedly against his thigh.

So all we could do then was glean, together with the children. The most unpleasant thing about it all was that Shih Hsiao-fen was still harvesting, her sickle cutting the rice very competently quite close to us. Every time she had cut a bundle of rice stalks, she stood up and swung her plaits back, giving us a big smile.

Right after supper that day, I visited my friend Fu-hsing.

"Come on, let our crickets have a go at each other."

"How's that?" he said. "You haven't caught another one, have you?"

I opened the lid of the cricket pot in which I kept my treasure just a little to show him. "My new General Black Feelers, a real snake cricket that's positively deadly." Then I told a little lie. "I caught it beside a curled-up snake."

"You did! Then we'll have a good fight." Fu-hsing was excited, but he was also a little worried for his cricket. "My Redhead King is a good fighter that's beaten twelve opponents already!"

"Don't worry — your Redhead King will be beaten by my snake cricket with its poisonous claws!"

People crowded around as we set up our crickets for a fight outside the Chou Family Pavilion. My General Black Feelers showed his mettle — as soon as I tickled him with a blade of grass, he began chirping and rushed forward. The two crickets immediately got their teeth into each other. But oh — the Redhead King threw my General Black Feelers right

out of the pot! There were murmurs of disappointment among the onlookers. I picked my General up and put him back into the pot. His teeth would not come together and one of his legs was hurt badly. When I tried to make him fight by tickling him again with a blade of grass, he ran away as fast as his limp would allow him. The people around burst out laughing and Shih Hsiao-fen sneered at me: "There goes your General Black Feelers! Looks more like General Braggart!" I felt I would never live down the humiliation. . . .

I sat down under the date-tree looking at the hills opposite. By now, it had got dark and the breeze was pleasantly cool. I sat there all alone, not wanting to go home.

Hsu Hsiao-kuei finally came and tried to comfort me. "Don't feel so bad about it! It was just a fake, that snake cricket, you needn't carry on so about it. . . ."

I couldn't have said why, but listening to him made me even sadder. An owl hooted in the distance, so that there was an echo from the valley.

We sat like this for a while. "No matter how, but I have to get my revenge," I said finally. "Even if I have to look inside a coffin lid, I'll have to catch a real snake cricket. I won't feel good until I've beaten Fu-hsing!"

"I'll help you!" said Hsu Hsiao-kuei. "There must be snake crickets in the graveyard near our house. I hear them chirp every night."

"A real snake cricket does not chirp all the time. It chirps twice at the hour of the second watch, three times at the third watch, and five times at the fifth watch, at daybreak."

"Then let's go at night! But my mother mustn't know a thing about it, she'd be worried stiff. She says there are ghosts in the graveyard. . . ."

A shiver ran down my spine. But I said stoutly: "I don't believe in ghosts. We can handle your mother all right. You sneak out as soon as it gets dark. Agreed? Hsu Hsiao-kuei, let's do it tonight! And if we catch a real snake cricket, it'll belong to both of us."

Hsu Hsiao-kuei grew so excited as I talked that he agreed at once. It was a rare chance to find him ready for adventure.

That night, when my brother had gone to a meeting at the co-op, I took the torch which he had left behind and sneaked up to Hsu Hsiao-kuei's gate. A few minutes later, we set out together for the graveyard.

The sky was dotted with clouds that now and again covered the half moon. It was very quiet, only the frogs croaked occasionally. A bird piped strangely in the valley some distance away, just like a baby's wail.

My hair stood on end and I called Hsu Hsiao-kuei's name to reassure myself. He came up close and held on to me. I felt his hand icy cold in mine. When we reached the graveyard, the moon was hidden behind the clouds. We squatted down and waited quietly for the crickets to chirp. The wind seemed to blow harder; it penetrated through our buttoned-up clothes. After a blast, we heard a rustling sound on our left

from a patch of tall reeds. Hsu Hsiao-kuei stared at the graves, many of which had fallen in, with wide-open eyes. I felt how frightened he was.

"Isn't it funny that not a cricket is chirping?" I said. "Is it because it's so cold tonight?"

"Maybe they aren't going to chirp at all? Let's go home. . . . I'm not feeling well. . . ."

I knew he was sorry he had come at all. To tell the truth, I myself didn't mind going home soon. To squat beside the graves in the dark really was no fun. But, in order to renew our courage, I said in an off-hand manner: "If a ghost comes up really, he'll have a tough time of it. . . ."

Before I had finished my sentence, a bird flew suddenly out of the patch of reeds near us. It startled me so that my back was sticky with cold sweat.

Hsu Hsiao-kuei gripped my hand and whispered: "Let's go home quickly. I'm afraid. . . ."

"Quiet!" I said tensely. There was the sound of someone walking slowly in big strides among the reeds. . . .

My head was swimming and my heart almost stopped beating. Hsu Hsiao-kuei started up and suddenly turned to run. He went so fast, it seemed he was being chased by a monster. He tripped on a mound, but got up as quickly as he could and ran on home.

Then the sound in the reeds died down. I was just thinking of running away myself when I heard light footsteps behind me. I nearly lost consciousness. I don't know where I got the courage, but I remember that I switched on the torchlight. Someone was coming towards me, stopped, patted me on the shoulder and said softly:

"What are you doing here, Lu Li-hsuan?"

It was only then that my heart started to beat again. I felt so limp that I just lay down on the ground and breathed deeply: "Oh, it's you, Chao Ta-yun! You . . . you frightened Hsu Hsiao-kuei right out of his wits!"

"I hadn't any idea that I'd run into you here!" Chao Ta-yun laughed.

"Are you also looking for crickets?" I asked him.

"I'm not so keen on them as you are!" he teased.

As a matter of fact, he had been cutting reeds. There was not enough fuel to be had in our district, so people often used dry reeds instead. But when I looked at the reeds he had cut, I saw at a glance that he hadn't been thinking of fuel only. There must have been another purpose. . . . Reeds were growing densely in those parts, waist-high, very much like rice stalks. In the plot where Chao Ta-yun had cut them, not a single reed was left. And the reeds were tied neatly in sheaves like the rice harvested in the fields. It was obvious that he was practising for the

cutting of rice. Since he too had only recently finished primary school, his skill was no better than mine.

"Hey, so you're practising how to reap!" I accused him.

"You can call it that if you like." After a pause, he added: "I'm just like you, without any experience. How can I do a thing properly if I don't learn anything about it?"

"But why do you have to learn about it at night, instead of during the day?"

"I'm too busy in day-time. I have to help glean the fields, carry water for my mother and feed the pigs. I have no extra time at all," he answered. "Besides, I'd feel bad if the others knew about my silly way of learning. . . ."

I promised not to tell anybody about it except Hsu Hsiao-kuei who must have taken Chao Ta-yun for a ghost. I would have to tell him in order to rid him of his superstition. Chao Ta-yun agreed. Then he gathered up the reeds he had cut, and we went home together.

* * *

When the harvesting was done on all the 1,000-catty fields, it began on the other early rice fields. Again we took up our sickles and went through another "exam" by Uncle Chen-ken. I still couldn't make the grade although I didn't even try to catch any crickets this time, and if they had hopped right into my hand. I worked as hard as I knew how, but Uncle Chen-ken said the way I did it was still very rough, no improvement at all on my last performance. If anything, it was perhaps even worse than last time. If everybody cut the rice like I did, our output would go down at least 15 per cent. And right then and there, he praised Chao Ta-yun who had improved tremendously, cut the rice very carefully according to standard and who therefore would earn nine work-points. Not only that. Uncle Chen-ken said: "Now there's a real primary school lad for you!" as if I were a false one.

Hsu Hsiao-kuei stayed in bed for three days after our graveyard adventure. He refused to believe me when I told him it was Chao Ta-yun who had frightened him so. His mother blamed Uncle Chen-ken bitterly behind his back because he'd made her son work in the fields in the scorching sun which she claimed made the boy ill. Never again would she allow him to help with the harvest.

Chao Ta-yun was accepted as a real member of the co-op shortly afterwards. Every night he helped the others assess their work-points, and once every so often he voiced an opinion in a meeting of the co-op members. But I still was doing odd jobs — sometimes I helped with the harvest, sometimes I was just treading the water-wheel, for which I got a mere work-point or two at the utmost. Mornings and evenings I still spent looking for crickets.

One day, while we were having a chat in front of the Chou Family Pavilion, Chao Ta-yun came up from the river where he had been washing his feet. Laughing, he took a match-box from his pocket. "Here, I've caught a cricket, too. Is it any good, do you think?"

We were all surprised. "What? Chao Ta-yun catching crickets?" I said. "Then dogs can catch rats!"

"What kind of a cricket is it that you have?" asked Hsu Hsiao-kuei. "A centipede cricket, snail cricket, snake cricket, or what? The centipede cricket has a red body. It is very fierce, though not so fierce as a snail cricket. Because centipedes are afraid of snails. . . ."

"Don't talk so much," I cut him short. "This is his first cricket. And what does he know of crickets? Let's look at it! Perhaps it's not a cricket at all, but a grey cockroach."

Chao Ta-yun patiently let us say all we wanted to say. Then he opened a match-box slowly and let us have a look inside.

One glance at his cricket was enough to make me green with envy. It was a very big cricket with a shiny black head.

I went quickly to fetch Fu-hsing, then I helped Chao Ta-yun to have his cricket fight Fu-hsing's.

Many people came to watch. Chao Ta-yun's cricket looked a bit stupid like himself and did not stir at first. The onlookers were beginning to mutter, but suddenly the feelers quivered and the insect crept slowly forward. When Fu-hsing's Redhead King rushed forward, the

other swooped on him, got hold of his neck and threw him. Everybody cheered. Then the two wrestled and fought so fiercely that we could hardly tell which was which. At first, the Redhead King had it over the other. He hooked his jaw into the enemy, pushed him to the edge of the pot and chirped victoriously. Then suddenly things changed. Chao Ta-yun's cricket got hold of the Redhead King by his neck and dragged him on his back for two rounds along the edge of the pot. So the Redhead King lost some of his dignity. But he still tried to struggle, although his opponent struck him on the body and tail. Finally, Chao Ta-yun's cricket hooked him in the jaw and threw him out of the "battlefield."

Never had we seen such a fierce fight. We all were glued to the ground by the sight of it and forgot even to cheer. Chao Ta-yun had won and his cricket got the title "Generalissimo Blackhead."

Now our interest in cricket-fights was even greater than before. We had a new "Generalissimo" and everybody wanted to try his pet against him. Chao Ta-yun did not refuse anybody. All you had to do was ask him after supper and he would let his "Generalissimo" fight four crickets one after the other. But not a single one was able to beat the "Generalissimo."

The weather became cooler after a time, and I found a cricket among the graves at last. It was not an ordinary one. It had a red spot on its back. I pinned great hopes on it. After supper, I went straight to Chao Ta-yun even before I had washed my feet.

"Quick, Chao Ta-yun," I said. "This time your Generalissimo Blackhead will lose face. I got a real centipede cricket with a red spot on his back."

"There's no more Generalissimo Blackhead," he said. "I've set him free."

"You're lying!" I shouted in great surprise. "How could you do a thing like that?"

"It's true, though. I really set him free. What's the good of keeping a fighting cricket? I don't have so much time now. I am learning to plough. It's a very interesting job and more difficult than cutting rice. . . ."

"You! . . . you . . . oh, how could you!" I was so disappointed I nearly cried.

After a short silence, I took the cricket pot and threw it to the ground hard. It broke and my cricket crept out from among the bits with one leg hurt.

That night, Uncle Chen-ken called me to the co-op office. He asked me to sit opposite him, gave me an abacus and said slowly: "Here is an arithmetic problem for you. I hope you can work it out quickly. A student gets seven points in Chinese, nine in arithmetic, ten in natural science, ten in music and six in sports. How many points is that altogether?"

"Forty-two!" I answered immediately.

"There is another student who gets four points in Chinese, three in arithmetic, seven in natural science and eight both in music and sports. So he gets. . . ."

"Thirty points!" I answered even before he had finished. But I was wondering in my mind: Were there really such students? And was the school using the five-point system or the hundred-point system? If it was the five-point system, then how could they get nine and ten points? If the hundred-point system was used, then they certainly were very poor students!

Uncle Chen-ken saw my doubts. "Fool," he said. "These are not marks of students but work-points of two co-op members. All right, you have passed your exam this time." He told me that twenty households had been newly admitted as members of the co-op. Because of this expansion, a new book-keeper would be needed. Then he said solemnly, "Tomorrow, you start as assistant book-keeper of our co-op."

I went to the office very early the next day and started my work. Since then, I haven't looked for crickets any more, I'm too busy. And I don't know why, but since Chao Ta-yun set his cricket free, our interest in catching crickets had died, anyway.

Translated by Yu Fan-chin
Illustrations by Sha Keng-shih

AT THE SEASIDE

Hsiao Ping

How glad Second Lock was to be visiting granny again! It was over five years since he had been here.

Granny lived by the Yellow Sea. North of the village was a little estuary. At high tide it was one huge sheet of water — there seemed no end to it; but at low tide a stretch of golden sand appeared. South of the village were sand dunes covered with knot-grass, and from these dunes he could see the ocean. He loved to gaze at the sea, sapphire blue, with golden flecks dancing over it. There were fish, crabs and lobsters in it. There must be some very, very big fish too. His teacher had told him that some sea fish were bigger than houses, but Second Lock had never seen fish of that size. He had not seen so much as a small one since coming here. He wondered where they'd all gone to.

With granny lived Second Lock's uncle and aunt, their son Tiger, and their daughter Flower. Second Lock played on the beach every day with Tiger. The sand was fine and soft. They lay on their backs, unbuttoned their shirts and basked in the sun. Tiger was a year older than Second Lock, but not as tall; and since they were both in the fourth form Second Lock did not think much of him. True, he was a squad leader of the Young Pioneers; but Second Lock had become a Young Pioneer himself just before the holidays, and he thought his own squad leader far more capable than Tiger. On the other hand, Tiger did know many things which Second Lock didn't. He knew, for instance, just when the tide would turn, what kind of tide brought fish with it, and what kind of weather made the crabs come out. Each time he dug the smooth sand he could turn up a clam. Eventually, Second Lock had to admit that Tiger knew much more about the sea than he did; but he couldn't understand why his cousin kept finding fault with him.

"Granny," he cried once, "I saw sails today! Snow white they were. Ever so many of them! Far out to sea, and they weren't moving at all!"

"Not moving?" put in Tiger. "Who told you they weren't moving? They were so far away that you couldn't see it, that's all!"

Another time, Second Lock picked up some pretty, boat-shaped objects on the beach, and showed them to Tiger with delight.

"Can't you see those are cuttle-bones?" Tiger gave a guffaw. "We throw them away, but here are you bringing them home!"

And Flower ran to tell her grandmother:

"Granny! Second Lock has been bringing cuttle-bones home!"

Why couldn't the little busybody hold her tongue?

Second Lock liked to squat on the beach when the tide was coming in, to watch the waves rolling up from the far horizon. When the roaring, foaming water seemed about to engulf him, he would jump backward. Then the waves receded just as they reached his feet, and cool salt water sprayed all over his face. The next moment the tide would be after him again, and he'd have to jump further back. In this way, he fancied, he led the sea right up to the foot of the sand dunes. But when he climbed one of the dunes, instead of following him the sea gradually calmed down. Second Lock was disappointed. He had hoped to lure it right up over the dunes!

What Second Lock enjoyed most was fishing with Tiger. Once they took uncle's fishing net without telling him, and ran to the estuary north of the village. The tide was rolling up.

"Quick, Second Lock!" enjoined Tiger softly, pointing at the water. "Look at that shoal of fish!"

Not one could Second Lock see. But from that moment Tiger seemed a grown-up in his eyes. He believed his cousin implicitly, and carried out all his orders without hesitation. Sure enough, while they were still drawing the net ashore, Second Lock saw fish leaping and struggling in

it. Anxious and overjoyed, he grew hoarse from shouting. This one catch filled half a bucket. Second Lock stared at the fish, and could hardly believe his eyes.

When the tide had ebbed, he went with Tiger to the estuary beach to dig up clams. The clams were as big as Second Lock's fist, with thick shells beautifully marked; but they buried themselves so deep in the sand and the tide had washed the beach so smooth that Second Lock could not find a single one, however hard he looked. Each time Tiger used his hoe, though, he unearthed one. Then Tiger explained that there was a tiny hole over each clam's hiding place because it needed air, and Second Lock saw such holes all along the beach. Still, when he dug them up he discovered nothing except a few crabs the size of his thumb. He was very disappointed. At that, Tiger told him that most of the clams on that part of the beach had already been caught, but there were plenty left on the north of the estuary, and if Second Lock liked they could go there to dig for them.

Second Lock was too pleased for words! He longed to take a big box full of clams home with him. Then when school began he would spread five, ten, or even more clam shells on his desk, to the envy of his classmates. One should hold slate pencils, one ink, one red paint, another green.... His schoolfellows were bound to gather round for a look, and he'd give them one shell each. No, he'd only give shells to his friends, not to those he didn't like.

But while he looked forward to being taken north of the estuary, his cousin seemed to have no intention of going. And self-respect prevented Second Lock from asking for any favour, much as he longed to go.

It was dusk one day when Second Lock and Tiger came back from the beach. Aunty and granny were preparing supper, with Flower tagging after them. When granny turned round, she nearly knocked the little girl over.

"How d'you expect me to get anything done?" she snapped. "I seem to have grown a tail."

Flower seized the hem of her jacket.

"Where is it?" she cried. "Let me see it!"

"Be a good girl now, Flower," begged granny, a pile of bowls in her hands. "Go and play with Second Lock."

"I don't want to!" Flower pouted.

"*You* don't want to, indeed!" thought Second Lock. "I wouldn't play with you even if you begged me!"

After supper, granny and aunty washed up while Tiger swept the courtyard after feeding the pigs. Second Lock spread a mat on the threshing-floor in front of the house and lay down on it. The sky glittered with stars. From time to time a cool, salty breeze blew over from the sea. He couldn't sleep, partly because of the mosquitoes buzzing round him and partly because of his eagerness to catch those clams Tiger had

told him about. Soon Tiger came along with another mat under his arm. He spread this beside Second Lock and lay down, then whispered:

"Let's dig for clams on the beach north of the estuary tomorrow. Are you game?"

"Of course!" cried Second Lock, springing to his feet. "Why should I be afraid?"

"Don't shout!" warned Tiger, punching him in the leg. "We mustn't let dad know."

Second Lock shot out his tongue.

"Why not?" he whispered.

"Why not? Children aren't allowed north of the estuary. You can get drowned there at high tide if you don't run pretty fast."

"What shall we do then?" Second Lock felt a little scared.

"It's all right. We'll start back as soon as the tide comes up."

Uncle came to the gate with a shirt thrown over his shoulders, and sent Tiger off with a message to the co-op. Second Lock was wildly excited, and he gave free rein to his fancy before he dozed off. That night he had many dreams. He dreamed that he and Tiger dug up a whole basketful of clams. The basket became so heavy they couldn't lift it, and while they were struggling with it the tide bore down on them like a moving wall! He started crying with terror, while Tiger swam away. The tide drew nearer and nearer, and as he turned and raced towards the beach another great wave barred his way. He jumped hard and woke up in a cold sweat, his heart drumming wildly. The red sun was rising over an island in the sea, and the threshing-floor was deserted.

Second Lock got up, and ran into the house with the mat under his arm. Aunty was carrying rice to the table, Tiger was feeding pigs in the courtyard, and granny was telling Flower a story. As soon as they sat down to eat, Second Lock started shovelling rice into his mouth as if he were pouring it down his throat. Granny watched him in dismay and set down her bowl.

"Don't bolt your food like that, Second Lock!" she warned.

Flower craned her neck to see what her cousin was doing, but he had already finished.

He slipped to the gate of the courtyard and waited there impatiently for Tiger. After what seemed an age his cousin appeared. They winked at each other and set off at a run.

"Tiger!" called uncle suddenly after them. "Where are you taking your cousin? You haven't even swept the courtyard yet!"

Tiger came to a sudden stop, like a car abruptly braked. And Second Lock's heart was sinking when granny came to their rescue.

"Let'em go!" she said to uncle. "They've been studying for a whole year. Why shouldn't they do as they like for a change? 'Even imps in hell get three days off each year.' "

Then uncle relented, simply warning them: "You're not to go north of the estuary, though."

Tiger shouted something in reply, then took Second Lock's hand and ran off with him again.

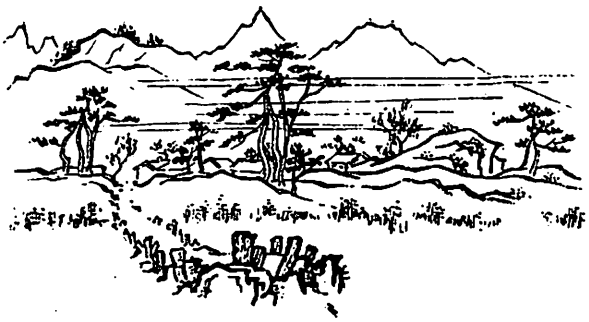
The tide was at low ebb. The sky was azure blue, and the sun on the golden sand quite dazzled their eyes. Tiny crabs were busily digging holes. They had dotted the smooth beach with balls of sand like peas, and were still throwing up more and more. The sand glistened in the sunshine like pearls, whirling in the air for a second before it fell. A warm breeze was blowing from the sea, carrying the tang of the ocean.

"Bother it!" Tiger stopped. "We forgot to bring a basket and a hoe."

Second Lock halted too. Tiger looked back, then cast a glance at the sun.

"Never mind," he said, with a gesture of dismissal. "Let's go on. We can scoop them up with our hands and wrap them in our shirts."

They continued to run forward. The soft sand balls rustled beneath their bare feet, pleasant-



ly tickling their soles, and soon they came to a line of jagged rocks. This reef was not very high, and at full tide only its top showed above water.

"We're already in the sea," thought Second Lock.

He turned his head, and found granny's house had disappeared. Ahead, in the estuary, a narrow white strip of water was still gleaming faintly, as it had when he looked across from the shore.

"Aren't we nearly there?" he asked.

"We've still quite a way to go." Tiger did not even look up. "We've only come three *li* out of ten."

"What! Ten *li*? Won't that take us right into the sea?"

But Tiger bounded forward without a word. And, not wanting to seem like a coward, Second Lock followed.

After the sand, they came to a mud flat in which sharp stones and broken shells were embedded. The mud was sticky and slippery. Second Lock cut his feet time and again, and found it harder and harder the further they went. He picked his way carefully on tiptoe, but had to drag his feet out after every step. Even so, he stumbled several times, till his white shirt and trousers were smeared with mud, and his backside ached from falling. Not once, though, did Tiger fall. He pattered on, bringing his soles down flat on the mud, and stopped every so often for his cousin.

The sun was almost directly overhead by the time they reached the estuary. What had seemed a white thread from the distance was actually broad enough to carry a large junk. Tiger calmly stripped off his clothes and, holding them high above his head with one hand, waded slowly into the water. Second Lock followed his example, keeping close behind him. The tide was ebbing very swiftly. Second Lock could barely keep his balance, and nearly fell again. Fortunately the water was not deep, reaching only to their arm-pits. Tiger supported his cousin with one hand, and so they reached the far shore.

They were now on a vast golden beach. It stretched as far as the eye could see, and not a soul was in sight! Tiger put down his clothes and set to work building two sand castles by the water. Second Lock was wondering what his cousin was doing when Tiger stood up and said: "I'm going further on, where there are masses of clams. But you must stay here to keep watch. Call me when the tide has turned and is washing these castles away. Then we'll have to start back at once."

Second Lock was not too pleased with this arrangement, but he had to agree to it.

Tiger ran away, naked as he was. Second Lock lay on the beach and fixed his gaze on the sand castles. The sun beat down on him, and soon a layer of white salt covered his body. Beginning to feel lonely, he sat up and looked around. Tiger was far away. In the distance, some seagulls were circling low over the ocean. All at once he felt quite deserted and began to panic. There was no one near. He couldn't even see

his grandmother's house. What would he do if the tide rose suddenly? His flesh began to creep.

He remembered an accident that had happened the previous summer. It was a fine day and he was bathing with some other children in the river by his village. The water was clear, and not too deep. But all of a sudden they heard a roar from upstream, and someone cried out in alarm. When he looked up, he saw the river swelling. A crest of muddy water about two feet high was raging towards them. Terrified, he started to hurry towards the shore. Poor Little Fa of West Street cried for all he was worth.

"Take me with you, Second Lock!" he screamed. "I can't run!"

But Second Lock couldn't run either, so he wasn't able to help Little Fa. Luckily, Uncle Fu-shan was on the threshing-floor near by. He rushed over with a wooden pitchfork in his hand, and pulled Little Fa ashore with it. The boy was white with terror. . . .

But gradually Second Lock calmed down. The sea was quiet, with scarcely a ripple on it. The gulls were still circling low. When he looked at the sand castles, they hadn't budged. The water had neither risen nor fallen. Second Lock had no idea how long he had been there, and was beginning to grow sleepy. He dared not sleep, though, and started scooping up the sand by his side to keep himself awake. He dug down and down till he reached something hard and slippery. He sat up quickly to look. A big, coloured clam!

He opened his mouth instinctively to call Tiger, but then thought better of it. He'd collect a whole pile of clams to surprise Tiger when he came back. "Aha!" he said to himself. "He's not the only one who can catch them!"

Standing with legs wide apart, he bent down to dig again. In a little while he turned up another clam. He went on scooping, oblivious to everything else. Sweat began to stream down his forehead, he broke his nails, and his fingers started to bleed; but he felt no pain at all. He tried to fix each clam in his memory, so that he could tell his mother and sister when he got home which he had caught, which was his first find, and which his second. . . .

The clams lay submissively on the sand, making no attempt to escape or even to stir. Still, Second Lock could not rest quite easy about them. He moved them further from the water, built a high rampart of sand around them, and covered this with his shirt and trousers.

He went on digging in a frenzy, placing more and more "prisoners" inside his rampart. At first he dug only near by, to keep an eye on them. Then, confident that they could not escape, he started digging further and further away, only going back for a look when he had to escort new prisoners. Later, he grudged the time needed to carry the clams there one by one. He took his shirt with him and wrapped each new find in that, not going back till he had collected about ten.

Time plays curious tricks on us. Sometimes an hour seems longer than a day, and sometimes a day seems to pass in a matter of minutes. Second Lock was so absorbed in his work that he lost track of the time, till he happened to raise his head and saw that the sun had moved quite far to the west. Then, with a start, he remembered the two sand castles. He raced back to have a look at them; but at the shore he stood aghast. Not a trace of them could be seen: the stream had widened — the water in it was muddy.

Second Lock was horror-struck. He rushed madly to and fro, waving his shirt and trousers and calling Tiger at the top of his voice, though he could see no sign of him. A long time passed before Tiger appeared to his left. Second Lock shouted louder than ever and ran towards his cousin, then turned to look back at the estuary. How quickly the sea had changed! Water was surging up the beach, swallowing five feet or more in the flash of an eye. Now Tiger was running to meet him too, but how slow he seemed! A three-year-old could surely run faster than that.

When Tiger came up with Second Lock, he understood everything at one glance, and glared at his cousin in silence. By this time, the tide had reached them. The expanse of water was twice as wide as before. Second Lock looked at Tiger and burst into tears.

Tiger broke the silence to say, "Let's have a go at it! Hold on to my foot, and I'll try to tow you across."

Second Lock stopped crying and followed him into the water. As soon as it reached their shoulders, Tiger began to swim; but when Second Lock seized one of his feet they both began to sink. Then Tiger grasped Second Lock's arm and helped him back to the shore. Too stunned now even to cry, Second Lock clutched at his cousin, who had also turned pale.

The foaming water was rising fast. It had nearly reached Second Lock's rampart. Catching sight of his cousin's white cotton trousers, Tiger seized them and tied the ends of the legs with his belt, then soaked them in the water, whirled them through the air and plunged them again in the tide. The legs, filled with air, floated up like water-wings, and grasping the top of the trousers firmly, Tiger pulled Second Lock to him. Without a word he pushed him into the water, tucked the inflated legs beneath his arms, and handed him the other end.

"Hold on tight!" he ordered. "Don't let go, whatever happens!"

Using one arm to swim, with the other Tiger tugged Second Lock after him, while the air in this improvised buoy hissed as it escaped.

That was a difficult trip! Tiger forged painfully forward, foot by foot. By the time they were half way across, the two water-wings were shrinking and Second Lock was slowly being submerged. But making one last great effort, Tiger swam three or four yards more and felt for the bottom. The water was only waist high! Second Lock nearly burst with joy as he waded ashore.

"Wait a second," said Tiger, "while I go back for our things."

He plunged once more into the water. Presently he returned with his own clothes and Second Lock's shirt, which was wrapped round both boys' clams.

Second Lock kept up well as they raced towards the village. Forgotten the pain in his feet and his exhaustion. On and on they ran. Soon they passed the reef, now half submerged, and looking over his shoulder Second Lock saw a huge white sheet of rolling water. Surely the sea was catching up with them! Tiger told him that the current ran faster here than south of their home, some seven to eight *li* an hour. Even so, they succeeded in outstripping it, to Second Lock's immense relief. And at last they were back in the village. A girl carrying two buckets to the well made a mocking sign at them.

"Aren't you ashamed to run about naked?" she asked. "You'd better hurry home. Your father's been looking for you everywhere."

At the next tree, Tiger helped Second Lock to untie his trousers, wring them out and hang them on a branch to dry. After scrambling into his own clothes he sat down gloomily on the grass, wondering how he could explain this business to his father. Second Lock was far from happy too. Northwards, a vast expanse of water met his eyes. Shuddering involuntarily, he looked at Tiger. His cousin had changed completely

in his eyes. What a wonderful fellow he was! Why had he never realized this before?

"I say, Tiger!" he blurted out. "I like you ever so much. I really do. Let's be friends all our lives — what do you say?"

Tiger sat there without answering, gazing vaguely out to sea, frowning as he clasped his knees. After quite a long time he said:

"If my old man asks you any questions when we get back, don't tell him everything, understand? Just say I was the one who took you to the estuary north of the village: it wasn't *your* idea. . . ."

Translated by Tso Cheng
Illustrations by Sha Keng-shih

CHUBBY AND LITTLE PINE

Kao Hsiang-chen

One Saturday afternoon in early April, a boy and girl were running through the crowd in the park. The girl was chasing her younger brother, Little Pine, who was only four. A slight child with full, rosy cheeks, he was wearing a navy blue sailor suit with white stripes, and an old leather belt. He felt so brave and dignified in this costume that he fancied himself a real sailor.

Little Pine was running so fast that the two ribbons at the back of his cap danced in the air, and he kept looking back at his sister. Happiness flashed from his big, bright eyes which were hidden behind long lashes.

His sister was seven, in the first form at school. She had on a pretty coloured print blouse and a blue skirt. Because she was plump as a pumpkin, everyone called her Chubby. Her face was flushed from running, and her high, intelligent forehead was damp.

"Wait for me, Little Pine, or I shan't play with you!" she shouted between pants.

Little Pine turned round. There was nothing he dreaded so much as Chubby refusing to play with him. But he knew she was only bluffing. There were no trees here for her to hide behind. Besides, Little Winter, Little Wood and the others hadn't come, so there was no one else for her to play with. Not scared in the least, he gave a contented chuckle, walked back a few steps, then turned to run on again.

Bang! — he bumped into someone and fell. When the stranger helped him up Little Pine was annoyed. Only cry-babies couldn't pick themselves up after falling. He never liked being helped up.

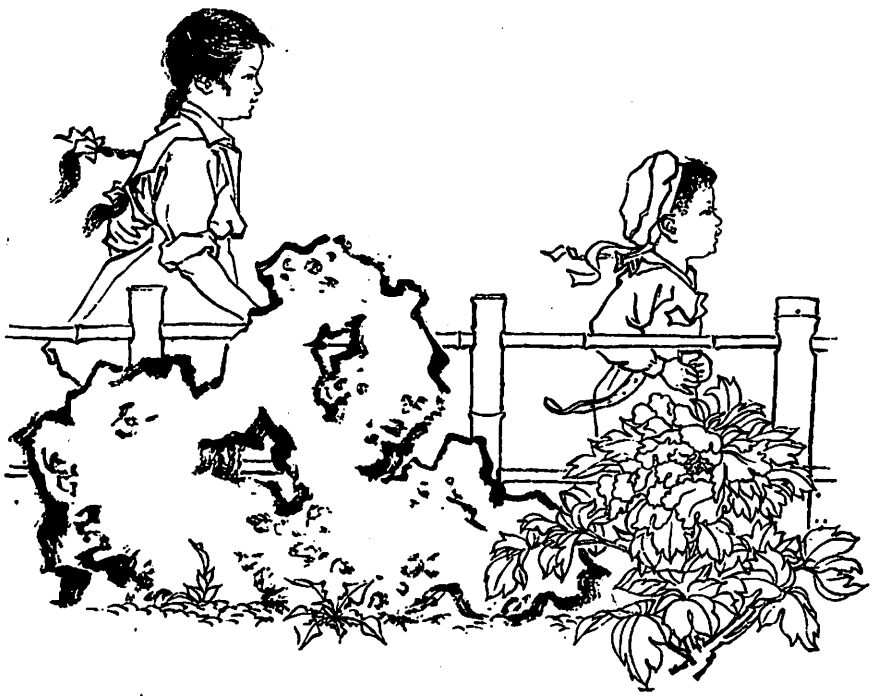
"Don't! I can get up myself!" He threw himself flat again, then scrambled up, dusted his clothes and scampered off once more.

He came to a stop by the side of a big, deep pond. On the opposite shore were some bushes, and a small boat was moored to a tree. What fun if he could get on it! That was a real boat! Not far from him several large, white swans were swimming, curving their long necks to dip their heads in the water. When they raised their heads, drops rolled down their glossy backs. Little Pine picked up a pebble and threw it into the pond. The swans swam proudly off, holding their heads very high.

"Come back! Come back! I won't hit you if you come back!" He picked up another pebble. But the swans would not listen to him. They swam away towards the centre of the pond. He opened his eyes very wide and pursed his lips, taking aim with his second pebble.

"Don't! You'll fall in!" Chubby had caught up with him. Little Pine didn't like being shouted at. Mummy never talked like that, neither did the aunties in the kindergarten.

"I'm going to throw it, so there!" And he showed that he meant what he said. Cocking his head, he raised one hand to his shoulder. He didn't actually mean to hit the swans, but he wanted to frighten his sister. What right had she to shout at him so loudly?



"I won't bring you next time if you're so naughty," said Chubby. "I'm going home to tell mummy."

"You're the one who's naughty. I can come by myself."

This made Chubby really angry. She turned and left. But after a few steps she stopped. The pond was large and deep; what if her brother fell in? At first Little Pine stood obstinately there, his gaze fixed on the pond. When he couldn't hear Chubby's footsteps any more, he stole a glance over his shoulder. She was still there! So she loved him after all, and wouldn't leave him all alone. He slowly lowered his hand.

Chubby ran up to him and, imitating their mother, said very slowly and gently:

"Good Little Pine! I do love you! Look at that big white swan," she added. "He's turned his head to look at you. He says you're a very, very good little boy. Now let's go to see the monkeys."

Little Pine's eyes sparkled.

"That big swan is smiling at me," he said with a laugh. "Look! He thinks I'm a little sailor. Don't you think I look like a sailor?" He clicked his heels, stood to attention and touched his old leather belt.

After watching the monkeys for a while, they pushed their way out of the crowd. Little Pine followed a plump girl in a blue skirt, so busy thinking of the smallest monkey that before he knew it he had gone quite a long way. He trailed round and round after the girl till she stopped to accost a group of Young Pioneers with red scarves. Only then did he realize that he had been following the wrong person! This plump girl in a blue skirt had a red scarf. His sister hadn't, although she longed for one. How pretty she'd look with a red scarf round her neck! But Chubby was not yet nine, so she couldn't have one. Little Pine knew all about it. She had told him more than once:

"Don't think I haven't got a red scarf because I don't learn my lessons well or because I quarrel with the others. No, nothing of the sort! It's just because I'm not nine yet. You have to be nine, you know."

Little Pine felt for her. When would she reach such an important age? But where was Chubby now? She must still be watching the monkeys. What a pet that small monkey was! The bigger one must be its sister. They kept on fighting each other. . . . Or maybe Chubby was hiding behind a big tree. Mummy liked to hide like that. Once she'd hidden behind a big tree and he'd looked for her ever so long without being able to find her; but he hadn't cried. In the end she suddenly ran out, to hug him and kiss him as if she'd lost him and been hunting for him all that time. And more than once he'd heard her tell other people:

"I hid behind a tree. Little Pine couldn't find me, but he didn't cry."

How silly it would be to cry in a game of hide-and-seek. Even when he had injections in the kindergarten, he didn't cry.

"How brave Little Pine is—a regular little hero!" said the aunty in the white dress. She even told the others: "Don't be afraid! See how

plucky Little Pine is! He didn't cry at all. That's what I call a good child."

The little hero was standing there now, rather at a loss. He looked at the big boys and girls in red scarves, and then gazed farther beyond. Perhaps Chubby would suddenly peep out from behind that big tree. But though he looked carefully, there was no one there. He didn't know what to do. How could he find his sister? His nose began to tickle, and the corners of his mouth drooped. The Red Scarves gathered round him. Embarrassed, he hastily wiped away his tears with the back of his hand.

"Who are you looking for, little boy?"

"Have you lost your way?"

"Who brought you here?"

Because they all spoke to him at the same time, Little Pine didn't know whom to listen to, and didn't really grasp any of their questions.

He hung his head, and looked vaguely at the ground. "Who did you come with?" The plump girl in the blue skirt knelt down beside him, and took his hand gently.

"My sister." At the sight of this girl he felt he was going to cry, so he opened his eyes very wide and blinked hard to stop the tears. His tears were quite obedient. They didn't fall.

"Can you tell me where you live?"

Little Pine nodded.

"Where?"

"Oh, a long, long way away. There's a big board on our gate with red characters on it. The characters are big too. And the telegraph pole near our door is e-nor-mous. Some people can climb the pole. I'm still too small. But when I grow up I'm going to climb it too."

The Red Scarves burst out laughing. Little Pine was embarrassed again.

"Where's your sister? Why has she left you alone?"

"Sister is hiding somewhere. Yes, she's hiding behind a tree." Little Pine looked at the trees again as he spoke.

"They're playing hide-and-seek," said one of the Red Scarves. "Let's go."

The Red Scarves went away. Little Pine stood there for a while, then followed them at a distance.

Chubby cried when she could not find her brother. A tall uncle asked her why she was crying and took her to the police station outside the park. The officer on duty received them very kindly. The tall uncle left after explaining what had happened, but Chubby went on crying. She remembered how cross she had been with Little Pine at the pond, and how she had quarrelled with him over some picture cards the night before. And now she might never see her brother again! If he could be found, she would gladly give him everything she had and do everything he wanted.

"Don't worry. Don't cry." The policeman comforted her. He sat down, drew her to him, and stroked her hair. "He's in the park, so it won't be hard to find him. Even if he were in the sky, we'd be able to find him. Don't you believe me?"

Chubby looked at him. She remembered all the stories her teacher had told her about policemen saving children, and stopped crying.

"I believe you," she whispered, nodding.

"Well then, you mustn't cry."

The policeman asked her a whole string of questions: What was her name? What was her brother's name? How old was he? What was he wearing today? . . . He didn't leave anything out, and Chubby told him all she knew.

"Does your brother look like you?" the policeman asked.

Chubby blushed at that. She used to like it when people said she was prettier than her brother; but now she thought Little Pine the best-looking and best-behaved boy there was.

"He's very good-looking," she said with a sob. "He's the best-looking and best-behaved boy there is."

The policeman laughed and turned his head to say: "Did you hear that? 'The best-looking and best-behaved boy there is.' Well, we're in luck today!" Only then did Chubby notice another policeman sitting on the steps by the door leading to the inner courtyard.

"I'd like to have a brother like that," said this other policeman. "But how could you be so careless? How could you lose your brother? Is this the first time you've brought him here?"

Chubby pouted and said nothing. The first time? Why, she'd been here many times! She couldn't remember the exact number, but this wasn't the first by any means. Mummy often told her: "Here's a job for you. Take your brother to the park and play with him there." And each time mummy would remind her to get off the bus at the fourth stop and be sure not to make any mistake. As if she didn't know they should get off at Tien An Men! The red walls there were so high that she could see them a long way off. She had even taught her brother to read the name Tien An Men on the bus sign. Chubby cheered up.

"You know," she told the policeman, "my brother can jump down from stone steps as high as your desk here. It's true."

"Good. That'll do." The officer on duty stood up, took his cap from a peg on the wall, and said to the other policeman: "You broadcast this, will you, Chu? Have you got it straight? A boy, four years old, in a blue sailor suit. You know the rest. I'm taking this little girl to have a look round the park."

While Chubby was in the police station, Little Pine was watching the Red Scarves playing on top of a small hill. The Red Scarves sat in a circle under a tree, singing. At first none of them noticed Little Pine standing there, but when they were singing *The Hearts of the World's*

People Beat as One, he suddenly joined in, louder than anyone else and out of tune. One of the girls moved to make room for him, and asked him to sit down; but Little Pine refused. He even walked a little away from them, and just stood there.

Dusk comes early in April. Now a little grey curtain seemed to have been let down, which soon covered the whole place. It was growing chilly. The plump girl in the blue skirt took off her light woollen jersey and put it on Little Pine. It reached almost to his ankles. Little Pine was very pleased, and thrust his hands into the deep pockets. Then the Red Scarves began to discuss their lessons, and because he could not understand what they were saying he ran about outside their circle.

"Don't run too far away. We shall wind up our discussion soon," said the plump girl.

Wind up? Discussion? What did she mean? He pretended to understand her perfectly, though.

"All right," he answered meekly.

Suddenly a pretty butterfly danced over his head and fluttered to the bushes at the foot of the hill. Little Pine rushed after it. But when he had made a few turns, the butterfly disappeared.

"Ha! It's afraid of me and has hidden itself," he thought, looking around for it. The green leaves on the branches rustled in the cool breeze. It seemed to Little Pine that a voice was calling his name; but the moment he listened hard the sound stopped. Very soon it came softly into the bushes again. "Doesn't matter," he thought. "It's not Chubby, nor any of the Red Scarves." Who else could be calling him?

Little Pine walked straight ahead. He had no idea where he was going. When he found

he was the only person about, he stood still for a moment in bewilderment, and thought of Chubby. How nice it would be if she were here with him. She could certainly catch that butterfly. She could make a whistle too with a leaf and blow the tune of *Red in the East. . . .* Tears tickled down Little Pine's cheeks. Then he raised his head and saw a big-bellied spider weaving its web on an ash tree. He didn't want the spider to see him crying, so he stealthily wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. He was afraid, though, it had already seen his tears; otherwise why should it have stopped moving so suddenly? Annoyed, he picked up a clod of earth and threw it up. Instead of hitting the spider, the clod came down on his shoulder.

Little Pine glared at the spider. "I'm not afraid of you!" he declared. "Have you ever seen me scared by a spider?"

When the loudspeaker kept repeating that Little Pine was wanted at the police station, people in the park began to look around. On a shady walk between lawns, a young mother said to the little girl by her side:

"Listen! A child has got lost. What will you do when you can't find your way?"

"I'm not afraid. I'm not four. I'm six already." The little girl spoke with great self-confidence. "If I couldn't find my way, I'd ask an uncle to tell me. Or an aunty."

"What uncle? What aunty?"

"Any uncle. Any aunty. They would all take me home." As the little girl skipped forward, the red bow on her hair danced merrily. Suddenly her attention was drawn to something in the distance, and she tugged at her mother's hand.

"Mummy! Look there! I've found him!"

Her mother had also seen the boy in the blue sailor suit standing on the hill in front of them.

By the time they had hurried up the hill, a stout woman of about forty was already there. The girl panted up to the boy, and asked:

"Is your name Little Pine?"

"No. Why should it be Little Pine?"

The boy ran towards his mother, who was sitting on the grass.

In the meantime, Little Pine had come out from the bushes. There was the big pond again, with no one else on this side, although many people were strolling on the opposite bank. The water in the pond had turned darker, and a light mist hovered above its surface. Those big white swans were still there, floating quietly near the shore beneath a tree. One of them was tucking its head under one wing. Little Pine stamped and shouted at them, but the swans pretended not to hear. They stayed motionless on the water.

Little Pine was about to pick up a pebble when he heard the announcement from the loudspeaker again. He widened his eyes in surprise and stood quite still, trying to catch every word. He could not understand

why the loudspeaker should be talking about him. It even mentioned the jersey he was wearing which belonged to the girl with the red scarf. and it asked people to take him to the police station.

"I'll take this boat and go there at once myself," he thought cheerfully, looking at the small empty boat moored by the shore. He slid down the slope as he would have gone down a slide. The slope was steep and stony, and there wasn't a landing-stage at the bottom. He tried to stop himself in time, so that he wouldn't tumble into the water; but this was not a slide. One of his feet was already in the pond. He turned pale, and was opening his mouth to shout, when a strong hand gripped his arm so that it fairly ached! He turned and saw a young uncle. On the shore stood a pretty young aunty.

"How lucky that we happened to be here!" she cried. "This little fellow might have been drowned! What a narrow escape!"

The young uncle said nothing. With some difficulty he lifted Little Pine ashore. The grave expression on his glowing face told Little Pine he had done something very bad. He reddened, and tears gushed from his eyes. The uncle put him down when they were ashore.

"Why did you come here alone?" he asked. "What did you want to do?"

Little Pine started sobbing.

"Don't cry, there's a good boy," said the aunty very gently. "Tell me, did you come by yourself?"

Little Pine liked this aunty much better than the uncle.

"My sister came too," he told her. "But now I can't find her. She's hidden."

"Oh, so you're playing hide-and-seek with your sister. Did you want to hide in the pond? What a sweet little fellow he is! The darling!" Little Pine understood that this uncle wasn't scolding him. Uncle even smiled at aunty, who smiled back, blushing. Little Pine was not afraid now.

"I wanted to cross over to the other side on this boat," he said. "They're looking for me."

"Who's looking for you?"

"The loudspeaker."

"The loudspeaker? What do you mean?" they asked together. They glanced at each other and smiled.

"I mean the loudspeaker. Listen! That one!"

The announcement came over again clearly from the opposite shore.

Uncle and aunty were as excited as if they had found a treasure. Holding hands, they bent over him.

"You are Little Pine, aren't you?" asked uncle.

"I am sure you are Little Pine," said aunty. "Am I right?"

"Do you really know me? Have you been to our house?" Little Pine felt much happier.

"Let's go," said uncle to aunty. "Let's take him to the police station. What an extraordinary thing!" Each took one of Little Pine's hands. But uncle stopped for a moment to say to aunty: "What do you say? I'm sure this is a good omen. . . ."

Little Pine could not understand what this meant. He thought uncle was probably saying something bad about him; otherwise why should aunty cast him such a reproachful glance? Aunty was really much nicer.

As they were walking on, Little Pine heard a familiar voice behind him: "Why should that policeman uncle say that he had on a light jersey? He was wearing a sailor suit."

"Don't worry," said some grown-up. "We'll find out when we get to the police station. There couldn't be any mistake."

Little Pine turned his head. It was Chubby with a policeman. Her eyes were red from crying, and the policeman was holding her hand. They were walking so fast that they very soon passed Little Pine, who stared after his sister's back but dared not call her. The sight of her red, swollen eyes and anxious face had upset him. She looked as if someone had snatched away all her picture cards.

"Little Pine!" Suddenly two big boys wearing red scarves ran up from another path and called to him. They were out of breath. "We couldn't think what had happened to you. When did you run away? You didn't even tell us you were going."

At this, Chubby and the policeman also turned back. The two Red Scarves hastily described how as soon as they heard the broadcast they had divided into groups and gone out in different directions to look for Little Pine. They also said that one of the girls had gone to tell the uncle who was making the announcement that Little Pine had on a light woollen jersey over his sailor suit. And they added that had they known he had lost his way, they would have taken him to the police station long ago. . . .

As soon as she saw her brother, Chubby rushed back and gripped his hand so firmly that it seemed she was afraid of losing him again. But when she saw his wet trousers and bespattered shoes, she snatched away her hand.

"Where have you been?" she grumbled. "What a sight you are! I'll never bring you here again!" But immediately she relented. "Aren't you cold?" she asked gently, bending over him.

Little Pine shook his hand shyly. He began to realize what a naughty boy he had been. Then the young aunty stroked his head and said:

"Little Pine will be good next time. He won't run off and get lost again, will he?" Little Pine nodded meekly. He glanced at Chubby, who was also looking at him. Her face was less frightening now. They gazed at each other in silence, then burst out laughing. It did seem ridiculous, but the more they laughed the more they wanted to laugh. Chubby was wiping her tears at the same time.

The officer on duty took Chubby and Little Pine to the station, returned the jersey to its owner and gave Little Pine a wash.

It was nearly dark when Chubby and Little Pine, wrapped up in a big towel, started home on a motor-cycle. The policeman drove so fast they seemed to be flying along the broad asphalt road.

"How fast we're going!" shouted Little Pine gleefully. "We shall pass that car — we *have* passed it!"

"We've passed another car now, and we shall pass the one in front," responded Chubby.

"When I grow up, I'll drive a motor-bike too. Then I can drive you to school," said Little Pine.

"Don't be silly! Will I still be in primary school when you grow up? Do you expect me to stay down every year? I shall have graduated from the university by the time you can ride a motor-bike. I shall be a doctor and stop people from falling ill."

"And I won't be in the kindergarten any more. I shall be a sailor in the navy. Oh, look! What's that?"

Before Chubby could see what he was pointing at, they had left it behind.

Suddenly the street lights were turned on. Everything was dazzling bright! The motor-bike went faster and faster. It passed buses, cars, and ever so many bicycles. A tall building, then a huge square, flashed past. The luxuriant trees that lined the road were flying back like a whirlwind.

Translated by Tso Cheng
Illustrations by Sha Keng-shih

KUAN HAN-CHING—*Outstanding Dramatist of the Yuan Dynasty*

WANG CHI-SSU

The second half of the thirteenth century was the golden age of Chinese drama, when many brilliant playwrights were to be found in Tatu (present-day Peking), the capital of the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368). Plays by more than a score of these writers have come down to us and are usually referred to as the Yuan drama. And the most outstanding, perhaps, of all the Yuan dramatists was Kuan Han-ching with his great gifts and splendid achievements.

From the tenth to the twelfth century in China, the growth of the urban class stimulated the development of such forms of literature as story-telling and the drama. During this period, more than a hundred years before the Mongol invasion, Kaifeng in the lower reaches of the Yellow River was the home of folk artists of every description — ballad-singers, minstrels, acrobats, and players who performed crude comedies. In 1126, however, North China was invaded by nomadic tribes from the northeast known as the Nuchen Tartars; and the capital of the Sung Dynasty moved from Kaifeng to Hangchow, south of the Yangtse River. For more than a hundred years the country was split into two. The Tartars who occupied North China brought with them martial riding songs; and once these were absorbed by the Chinese a new style of popular music called Northern Music developed, quite unlike the traditional Southern Music with its soft melodies. The tunes and pitches used in the Yuan operas were derived for the most part from the Northern Music.

During this period when China was divided, the form of art later to have the greatest influence on the Yuan drama was ballad literature. Known as *chu kung tiao*, or "tunes in different keys," these ballads were usually sung by a woman with a clapper. While telling her tale she often used simple gestures and was accompanied by other instruments. This was therefore a form of early drama.

A Yuan drama usually consists of four scenes: the opening, the development of the action, the climax, and the conclusion. These four scenes make up one act. In addition, short scenes called *chi tzu* are inserted when necessary to cover minor episodes. *Chi tzu* means a wooden peg,

of the type used by Chinese carpenters to fasten a structure together. If the story is too involved to be dealt with in four scenes, more than one act is used. The well-known Yuan drama *The Western Chamber*, for instance, comprises five acts.

The actors playing men's parts were called *mo*, the hero being known as *cheng mo*. Those playing women's roles were *tan*, the heroine *cheng tan*. A Yuan drama seldom had more than one hero or one heroine as the chief performer. For example, the heroine has the main role in Kuan Han-ching's plays *Snow in Midsummer* and *Rescued by a Coquette*; hence the other players merely have spoken parts, and do not do any singing. This practice grew out of the ballad tradition, for in the *chu kung tiao* one performer sang the whole story.

During the feudal period, Chinese intellectuals usually obtained official posts through the civil service examinations. But a fraction only of all the candidates passed; so during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, after amusement parks had appeared in the big cities, some scholars who had failed in the examinations began to write ballads and plays which were welcomed by the townsfolk, or even took part themselves in performances. After the Mongols invaded North China in the thirteenth century the examination system was temporarily abolished, so that many more scholars lost an important means of livelihood and went down appreciably in the social scale. Now that China was re-united, however, communications inside the empire as well as international trade routes by land and sea were kept open, and the mercantile economy prospered in such cities as Peking, Kaifeng and Hangchow. As a result, there was a further development of ballad literature and drama. Thus more intellectuals who had suffered through the abolition of the civil service examinations became professional writers for the stage.

The townsfolk of that time generally referred to the scholars who wrote for the theatre as "literati." And these literati had their own guilds which were known as Writers' Societies (*Shu Hui*). The members of these societies discussed their work and exchanged ideas with each other, occasionally even organizing dramatic contests. In this way they kept gaining new mastery of their craft. Kuan Han-ching was one of the most brilliant members of these Writers' Societies.

Since the historians and scholars who served the feudal landlord class despised folk literature, there is no full biography of Kuan Han-ching in any official history or scholarly work; but from the few poems and dramas of his which have come down to us and the records of his contemporaries we know that he lived from about 1225 to 1300, and wrote the bulk of his plays during the second half of the thirteenth century.

During the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, most of the ballad-singers and actresses in China were singsong girls who performed in the amusement parks in the big cities. Many of them were sold to brothels by parents too poor to support them, while a few were con-

demned to this life because their families had opposed the authorities. Since these girls suffered inhuman treatment at the hands of the ruling class, they thoroughly detested officials and the gentry. As a member of a writers' society, Kuan Han-ching must have been in close touch with these singsong girls and other members of the lower orders connected with them while he wrote and produced his dramas. Thus he came to understand and sympathize with them, and learned from them the techniques of folk literature and the idiom of the urban class. Without this experience, he and his great contemporaries could hardly have won the place they now hold in the history of Chinese drama.

We know the titles of more than sixty works by Kuan Han-ching, who was one of the most prolific writers of his day. Fourteen of his plays have been preserved, including such well-known dramas as *Snow in Midsummer*, *Rescued by a Coquette*, *The General Sets Out Alone* and *The Girl Disguised as a Fisherman*. All these have one common characteristic — while exposing the crimes of those in power they also show the bold and unwavering struggle of the common people against their decadent rulers. This is achieved by portraying the clashes between different individuals, and by creating various types of characters to express the play's main theme. Sometimes, also, the playwright makes use of artistic exaggeration to throw into strong relief the most significant traits of his characters.

This is the case in *Snow in Midsummer*, one of the most representative of Kuan Han-ching's remaining tragedies. This play was based on a story popular in the first century B.C. about a virtuous young widow of the Han Dynasty who lived with her mother-in-law in the Tunghai principality. The elder woman tried to persuade her daughter-in-law to remarry while she was still young; and when the girl refused, her mother-in-law committed suicide in order not to stand in her way. But a stupid magistrate accused her of forcing her mother-in-law to kill herself, and had her executed. Because of this injustice, so tradition had it, the district suffered from drought for three years.

Kuan Han-ching gives a new realistic significance to this well-known legend. For Tou Ngo's struggle against Donkey Chang, his father and the prefect reveals the complete lack of justice in local government and the unrest caused by such iniquitous rule; moreover, in her we have a truly noble heroine, outstanding for her courage and determination.

Under the Mongol domination, the law decreed that all the higher provincial officials must be Mongols or foreigners in their employ; but since these men were unfamiliar with local conditions, they had to employ Chinese as their assistants. Thus in the county and prefectural yamens, in addition to the Mongols and other foreigners you could find the scum of feudal Chinese society, who acted as the henchmen of the rulers. This was the main reason why the local politics of that period were more vicious than at any other time. The prefect and his secretary in *Snow*

in Midsummer are typical cases. At the same time, the fact that the local government was so corrupt naturally meant that all the evil forces in feudal society became more rampant. Thus Dr. Lu tried to strangle Mistress Tsai to avoid repaying his debt, while Donkey Chang and his father attempted to force her and Tou Ngo to become their wives. Such crimes were committed, of course, in other periods of Chinese history too, but during the Yuan Dynasty this lawlessness was more flagrant.

Tou Ngo, the heroine of this drama, lost her parents' protection when she was a child, and while she was still young her husband died. She was left with no one to rely on but her helpless mother-in-law. In those evil times, a lonely and defenceless young woman was bound to suffer greatly; but her hardships only strengthened her character and made her stubbornly resist all bullies and tyrants.

The depiction of Tou Ngo's character in the third scene reveals Kuan Han-ching's genius, and is a model of classical realism combined with romanticism. Tou Ngo is so considerate to her weak old mother-in-law that she does not want her to watch the execution; yet she proves herself unflinching in her defiance of the cruel authorities. "Because officers here have no concern for justice," she cries, "the common citizens cannot tell the truth!" This points out the fundamental problem of that day, voicing the bitterness of the people.

Just as *Snow in Midsummer* is one of the most outstanding tragedies in Yuan drama, *Rescued by a Coquette* is one of the best comedies. Through Chao Pan-erh's struggle with Chou Sheh and her final victory, Kuan Han-ching discloses the hypocrisy and cruelty of the ruling class as well as the comradeship and sense of justice of the people. Indeed, it is precisely these qualities that enable common folk to get the better of their oppressors.

In this play, by means of masterly realism Kuan Han-ching has created two typical and thoroughly convincing characters — Chou Sheh and Chao Pan-erh. Chou Sheh is more complex than many other villains in Yuan drama. The son of an official, he has his share of the hypocrisy and callousness of that class; but he is also a rich merchant. He boasts:

Thirty years I've been a glutton,
Twenty years I've been lucky with girls.

His business experience and long years of dissipation have given him considerable low cunning. Kuan Han-ching does not merely describe superficial details of Chou's appearance, but by a penetrating analysis lays bare his cruelty, fickleness and baseness.

While Chou Sheh is infatuated with the singsong girl Sung Yin-chang and wants to win her heart, he is willing to fan her in summer and warm her bed in winter; but as soon as she is his and he has taken her home, he gives her fifty strokes and declares that even if a husband kills his wife he will not be punished by death. Indeed, it is clear that such cruelty to women had the support of the feudal law. In the third scene,

Swallows and Peach Blossoms (180 cm. × 48 cm.)
Painting in the traditional style By JEN PE-NIEN

Chou's conversation with Chao Pan-erh and his asides when she asks him to write a divorce certificate for her friend display the man's craftiness very well, while bringing out the girl's skill and adroitness. We see that the cunning scoundrel has met his match. For however wily members of the ruling class may be, unless they realize the people's strength they are bound to look like fools. Hence Chou's final defeat at the hands of Chao Pan-erh is true to life.

It is worth noting that the tactics used by Chao Pan-erh to outwit Chou Sheh are the same as those employed by such men themselves. This reminds us of the Chinese proverb: Deal with a man as he has dealt with others. Bitter experience taught the singsong girls to be on their guard and to make use of the same tactics as the men who wanted to take advantage of them. This, again, is true to life. Moreover, if the weak want to get the better of the strong, they must prepare well in advance. In this drama Chao Pan-erh has a carefully thought-out plan of campaign to worst Chou Sheh, going so far as to procure the sheep, wine and red silk needed for a betrothal ceremony. This is why her success appears completely convincing.

As in the case of Chou Sheh, the playwright does not content himself with a superficial portrayal of Chao Pan-erh, but reveals her inmost nature and character by showing the struggle that goes on in her mind as the plot develops. In the second scene, for example, when Sung Yin-chang's mother brings a letter to Chao Pan-erh and asks her to save her daughter, Chao Pan-erh's first impulse is to refuse, because Sung Yin-chang ignored her advice when she married Chou Sheh; but then the thought of their former friendship and of the sad lot of all singsong girls makes her decide to help. This carries conviction, and shows her fine character. Again, on her way to Chou Sheh's home to rescue her friend, when she reflects that she may meet women of good family and compares her position with theirs, she is tormented by the thought that she will probably never rid herself completely of the bad habits she has learned in her profession. This, again, rings completely true, and brings home to us the unhappiness and indignation of the singsong girls so despised in feudal society.

Snow in Midsummer and *Rescued by a Coquette* reveal Kuan Han-ching's genius and the characteristic features of Yuan drama. Simple and unadorned, they are never monotonous. Their well-constructed plots and dramatic episodes make a strong appeal to spectators, while their close links with the people, their sympathy for the underdog and hatred for tyrants and bullies strike a chord in the hearts of all.

Kuan Han-ching was not only a playwright, but a producer and actor as well; hence he had first-hand experience of the theatre, and it is no accident that his plays stage so successfully. He is generally considered the foremost of the four great Yuan dramatists, the other three being Pai Pu, Ma Chih-yuan and Cheng Kuang-chu. Later ruling class scholars,

however, despised his works and underrated his talent; and since the majority of his plays did not meet with such critics' approval, they were never published and most of them have been lost. But the common people have always loved his plays. For seven hundred years, the humanity and realism shown in his works have exercised a wide influence on various forms of folk drama, enriching the Chinese theatre and encouraging men in their fight against feudal oppression. Since the liberation, some of Kuan Han-ching's dramas such as *Rescued by a Coquette* and *The Girl Disguised as a Fisherman,* which had not been produced for a long time, have been staged again and welcomed by theatre-goers. Thus in New China this early and most outstanding dramatist has received the recognition which he deserves.

Kuan Han-ching: Two Dramas

Snow in Midsummer

CHARACTERS

Mistress Tsai, *a widow*

Tou Tien-chang, *a poor scholar, later a government inspector*

Tou Ngo, *Tou Tien-chang's daughter Tuan-yun*

Doctor Lu

Old Chang

Donkey, *his son*

Prefect Tao

The officer in charge of executions

Executioner

Servant

Prefect

Secretary

Runners and attendants

PROLOGUE (Chi Tzu)

(*Enter Mistress Tsai.*)

Mrs. Tsai:

A flower may blossom again,
But a man is young only once.
We can do without rank and riches;
*All that we ask is peace and happiness.**

I am Mistress Tsai of Chuchow. There were three of us in my family; but unluckily my husband died, leaving me just one son who is eight years old. We live together, mother and son, and are quite well off. A scholar named Tou borrowed twenty taels of silver from me last year. Now the interest and capital come to forty taels, and I've asked several times for the money; but Mr. Tou keeps saying he is too hard up to pay. He has a daughter who is seven this year. She's a sweet girl, a bonny girl, and I've a good mind to make her my daughter-in-law; then he won't have to pay back the forty taels, and both sides should be pleased. Mr. Tou chose today as a lucky day, and is bringing the girl to my house himself; so I won't ask him to pay me back, but wait for him at home. He should be here soon.

(*Enter Tou Tien-chang, leading his daughter Tuan-yun.*)

Tou:

I have read ten thousand books,
*But still am as poor as Ssuma Hsiang-ju** of old.*
Some day, when I am summoned to the court,
There will be an end of this servile, wretched life.

My name is Tou Tien-chang, and the home of my ancestors is Changan. I have studied the classics since I was a child and am a very learned scholar; but my luck is poor, and I haven't yet passed the examinations. Unfortunately my wife has died, leaving me this only daughter, Tuan-yun. She lost her mother when she was three, and now she is seven. Living from hand to mouth, I moved to Chuchow and took lodgings here. There is a widow in this town named Tsai, who is very well off, and as

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* The lines in italics are declaimed or sung.

** A famous Han Dynasty scholar who ran off with Cho Wen-chun, the daughter of a rich man in western Szechuan. Since they were very poor, they kept a small tavern in Chengtu, where Ssuma Hsiang-ju's wife served as barmaid. Later Emperor Wu read his books and summoned him to court to be an official.

I had no money I borrowed twenty taels from her. Now, with the interest, I owe her forty taels; but though she has asked several times for the money, I haven't been able to pay her. And recently she has sent to say she would like my daughter to marry her son. Since the spring examinations will soon be starting, I should be going to the capital; but I have no money for the road. So I am forced to take Tuan-yun to Widow Tsai as her future daughter-in-law. (*He sighs.*) I'm not marrying my daughter but selling her! For this means the widow will cancel my debt and give me some cash for my journey. This is all I can hope for. While talking to myself I've reached her door. Mistress Tsai! Are you at home?

(*Enter Mistress Tsai.*)

Mrs. Tsai: So it's Mr. Tou! Come in, please. I've been waiting for you. (*They greet each other.*)

Tou: I've brought you my daughter, ma'am, not to be your daughter-in-law — that would be asking too much — but to serve you day and night. I must be going to the capital for the examination, so I will leave the child here and hope you will look after her.

Mrs. Tsai: Well, we are relatives now! You owe me forty taels including interest; but here is your promissory note back and another ten taels for your journey. I hope you don't think it too little.

Tou (*Gratefully*): Thank you, ma'am! Instead of asking for what I owe you, you have given me money for the road. Some day I shall repay your kindness in full. My daughter is a foolish child. Please take care of her, ma'am!

Mrs. Tsai: That's all right, Mr. Tou. You don't have to tell me. I shall look after your daughter as if she were my own. You can go with an easy mind.

Tou: If the child deserves a beating, ma'am, for my sake just scold her! And if she deserves a scolding, for my sake speak gently to her! As for you, Tuan-yun, this isn't like at home, where your father used to put up with your whims. If you're naughty here, you'll be beaten and cursed. Yet I have no choice but to leave you. (*He sighs.*)

Destitute, with no means of livelihood,
I have to abandon my own dear daughter here.
I must travel far down the dusty road,
And who knows if I shall return?
So I gaze at her sadly in silence. (*Exit.*)

Mrs. Tsai: Now Mr. Tou has left me his daughter, and gone to the capital for the examination.

Tuan-yun (*Crying*): Father! How could you leave me?

Mrs. Tsai: You'll be living with me now, dearie, as one of our family. And I shall treat you like my own child. There, now! Don't cry! Come and help me set the house in order.

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE I

(Enter Doctor Lu.)

Doctor:

I diagnose all diseases with care,
And prescribe as the Herbal dictates;
But I cannot bring dead men back to life,
And the live ones I treat often die!

My name is Lu, and I am considered a good doctor, so folk call me Doctor Lu. I own a drug shop at the South Gate of Shanyang. I've borrowed ten taels of silver from Mistress Tsai of this town, and with interest now owe her twenty taels. She keeps coming for the money; but I haven't got it. If she doesn't come back, so much the better. If she does, I have a plan. I'll sit in my shop now, and wait to see who turns up.

(Enter Mistress Tsai.)

Mrs. Tsai: I am Mistress Tsai. Since I moved to Shanyang I've lived quite snugly here. Thirteen years ago Mr. Tou Tien-chang left his daughter Tuan-yun with me to marry my son, and I changed her name to Tou Ngo. But less than two years after their marriage my son died of consumption; so now she's a widow. That was nearly three years ago, and she'll soon be out of mourning. I've told her that I'm going out of town to collect a debt from Doctor Lu. *(She walks on.)* Rounding the corner I've reached his house. Is Doctor Lu in?

Doctor: Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. Tsai: You've kept my money for a long time, doctor. You must pay me back.

Doctor: I've no money at home, ma'am. If you'll come with me to the village, I'll get money for you.

Mrs. Tsai: Very well. I'll go with you.

(They start walking.)

Doctor *(Aside)*: Here's a good spot, with no one about. Why not do it here? I've got the rope ready. *(To the widow.)* Who's that calling you, ma'am?

Mrs. Tsai: Where?

(The doctor strangles the widow with the rope. Enter Old Chang and his son Donkey. As they rush forward the doctor takes to his heels. Old Chang revives Mistress Tsai.)

Donkey: It's an old woman, dad, nearly strangled to death.

Chang: Hey, you! Who are you? What's your name? Why did that fellow try to strangle you?

Mrs. Tsai: My name is Tsai and I live in town with my widowed daughter-in-law. I came out today to ask Doctor Lu for twenty taels he owes me, never dreaming he would lure me to this lonely spot and try to strangle me to get out of paying! If not for you and this young man, it would have been all up with me!

Donkey: Did you hear that, dad? She has a daughter-in-law at home! Since we've saved her life, she ought to show her gratitude. Suppose you take her as your wife and I take the daughter-in-law — wouldn't that suit us both? Propose it to her, dad!

Chang: Hey, widow! You've no husband and I've no wife. How about the two of us getting married?

Mrs. Tsai: What an idea! When we get home, I shall give you a handsome sum of money to thank you.

Donkey: So you refuse! Do you think you can fool us by promising us money? The doctor's rope is still here: I'd better strangle you after all. (*He picks up the rope.*)

Mrs. Tsai: Wait! Let me think a moment, brother!

Donkey: What do you need to think for? You take my dad, and I'll take your daughter-in-law.

Mrs. Tsai: If I don't agree he'll strangle me! Very well. Come home with me, both of you.

(*Exeunt.*)

(*Enter Tou Ngo.*)

Tou Ngo: I am Tuan-yun, and my home was in Chuchow. When I was three I lost my mother; and when I was seven I had to leave my father, for he sent me to Mistress Tsai as her son's child bride, and she changed my name to Tou Ngo. At seventeen I married; but unluckily my husband died three years ago. Now I am twenty. There is a Doctor Lu outside the South Gate, who owes my mother-in-law twenty taels including interest; and though she had asked him several times for the money, he hasn't paid her back. She's gone today to try to collect the debt. Ah, how unhappy I am!

My heart is full of grief,
I have suffered for so many years!
If Heaven knew grief like mine, it would waste away.
From dawn to dusk I can neither eat nor sleep,
And the night's sad dream comes back again by day.
The silky flowers by the door bring tears to my eyes;
The full moon over the housetops breaks my heart;
Anxiety preys on my mind, grief makes me frown;
I grow listless and my thoughts begin to wander.

Will my unhappiness never end?

Is it my fate to be wretched all my life?
Who else knows grief like mine?
For my sorrow, like flowing water, never ceases.
At three I lost my mother, at seven was torn from my father;
Then the life of the husband I married was cut short;
So my mother-in-law and I are left as widows,
With no one to care for us or see to our needs.
Did I burn too little incense in my last life
That my lot in this life is so hard?
We should all do good deeds to make sure of a happy future;
So I mourn for my husband and serve my mother-in-law,
Obedient to all her bidding.

My mother-in-law has been gone a long time to collect that debt. What can be keeping her?

(*Enter Mistress Tsai with Old Chang and Donkey.*)

Mrs. Tsai: Wait here at the door while I go in.

Donkey: All right, mother. Go in and tell her her husband is at the door.

(*Mistress Tsai sees Tou Ngo.*)

Tou Ngo: So you're back, mother. Have you had a meal?

Mrs. Tsai (*Crying*): Ah, poor child! How am I going to break this to her?

Tou Ngo:

Why should her tears flow so fast?
Can there have been some unpleasantness over the debt?
Greeting her quickly, I beg her to tell me the reason.

Mrs. Tsai: How can I break such shameful news to her?

Tou Ngo:

She's shilly-shallying and looks ashamed.

What has upset you, mother? Why are you crying?

Mrs. Tsai: When I asked Doctor Lu for the silver, he lured me to a quiet spot, then tried to strangle me; but an old man called Chang and his son Donkey saved my life. Now Old Chang wants to marry me: that's why I'm upset.

Tou Ngo: That would never do, mother! Please think again! We're not so poor that we have no food or clothing. We're not in debt, or hard pressed by creditors. Besides, you are over sixty — how can you take another husband?

Mrs. Tsai: Of course you are right, child. But these two saved my life, and I promised them a handsome reward when I got back; then somehow they found out that I have a daughter-in-law and that both of us are widows. Since they have no wives, they said this match was made in Heaven and threatened to strangle me if I didn't agree to it. Then I lost my head and promised, not only for myself but for you as well, child. I couldn't do anything else!

Tou Ngo: Mother, listen to me!

To avoid evil spirits we choose a lucky day;
To solemnize a wedding we burn incense;
Now your hair is as white as snow,
How can you wear the bright silk veil of a bride?
No wonder they say it is hard to keep women at home,
If at sixty, when all thought of love should be over,
You've forgotten your former husband,
And taken a fancy to another man!
This will make our neighbours split their sides with laughter!

Mrs. Tsai: They saved my life. And now things have reached such a pass, I don't care if folk laugh.

Tou Ngo:

Though they save your life,
You're no tender bamboo shoot;
How can you paint your eyebrows again and remarry?
Your husband left you his property,
Bought land and made provision for the future,
For daily food and clothes in different seasons,
So that you and your son could remain beholden to no one.
Did he go to such trouble for nothing?

Mrs. Tsai: Child, they are waiting now to come in for the wedding. How can I refuse them?

Tou Ngo:

You say they want to marry in haste;
I'm afraid you'll repent at leisure.
You will be too sad to drink the wedding wine,
Your eyes too dim to tie the wedding knot,
Your mind too bemused to sleep in the bridal bed.
You want music to lead you to the painted hall
But I think it is too late for you to marry!

Mrs. Tsai: Stop scolding me, child. They're waiting at the door, both of them. Since it has come to this, I think you'd better take a husband too.

Tou Ngo: *You* take a husband if you must. *I* won't!

Mrs. Tsai: Who wants a husband? But they've thrust themselves on me. What can I do?

Donkey:

Now we shall marry into their family!
Our hats are brushed as good as new;
We've narrow sleeves like bridegrooms too!
This is good! This is fine!

(They enter and bow.)

Tou Ngo (*Ignoring their greetings*): Stand back, you fellows!

Women shouldn't believe all men say;

I'm afraid my mother doesn't want to be chaste;
That's why she's found this old country bumpkin here,
And this other fellow, who looks like a half-dead convict.

Donkey (*Making faces*): Look at us! Aren't we handsome fellows, quite good enough to be your husbands? Don't miss a fine chance. Let's go through the ceremony quickly.

Tou Ngo (*Ignoring him*):

Mother, aren't you ashamed
To force me into a marriage against my will?
Your husband worked in different cities and counties
To amass a well-earned fortune.
Remembering him, how can you let his estate
Go to this Donkey Chang?

(*Donkey pulls Tou Ngo to him but she pushes him over.*)

Tou Ngo:

See what widows have to put up with! (*Exit.*)

Mrs. Tsai: Don't be annoyed, old man. You save my life, so of course I must pay you back. But you see how difficult my daughter-in-law is, and as long as she refuses to have your son, how can I marry you? Let me entertain you here with good food and wine, while I gradually talk her round. Just wait till she changes her mind.

Donkey: That bitch acts like a silly virgin. Why did she have to fly into a rage and push me over, when I hardly even touched her? I won't stand for it. If I don't get her as my wife, I swear I'm no true man!

I've seen thousands of beautiful women,
But never met such a stubborn slut as this.
I saved the old lady's life;
How can you refuse to serve me as my wife?

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II

(*Enter Doctor Lu.*)

Doctor:

I am a doctor by trade,
And many the patients I've killed;
But what do I care if folk complain —
I've never closed down for one day!
There's a Mistress Tsai in town,
To whom I owe twenty taels;
She came here again and again to ask for the money,
And tried to ruin me.
In a fit of desperation
I took her to a lonely, quiet spot;

But two strangers turned up, and shouted:
"How dare you commit a murder in broad daylight,
And strangle an innocent woman?"
I dropped the rope in terror,
And took to my heels as fast as ever I could!
Though nothing happened that night,
I was frightened out of my wits;
I realized then that all life is valued in Heaven;
It is not simply dust on the wall;
So now I am mending my ways
And expiating my crimes,
Chanting a Buddhist sutra
For each patient I have killed.

I am Doctor Lu. To get out of paying the twenty taels I owed Mistress Tsai, I lured her to a lonely spot and was just going to strangle her when two men rescued her. If she comes again, how can I face her? It's a good thing I'm a single man with no family ties. I'd better pack up my belongings and slip away, to set up in business somewhere else. That's the idea.

(*Enter Donkey.*)

Donkey: I am Donkey Chang. Tou Ngo still refuses to marry me. Now the old woman is ill, I'm going to poison her; for once the old one is dead, the young one will have to be my wife. (*He walks on.*) There are too many people in town: too many eyes and too much talk. If folk see me buying poison, they will make trouble for me. The other day I noticed a drug shop outside the South Gate. That's a quiet place. I'll get the poison there. (*Arriving, he calls out.*) Doctor! I want a drug!

Doctor: What drug do you want?

Donkey: I want some poison.

Doctor: Who dares sell you poison? How can you ask such a thing?

Donkey: You won't let me have it then?

Doctor: I won't. What are you going to do about it?

Donkey (*Seizing him*): Fine! Aren't you the man who tried to murder Mistress Tsai? Do you think I don't recognize you? I'll take you to court.

Doctor (*In panic*): Let me go, brother! I've got it! I've got it! (*Gives him the poison.*)

Donkey: Well, since you've produced the poison, I'll let you off. We should always give folk a chance. (*Exit.*)

Doctor: Isn't that bad luck? That man who came to buy poison was one of the men who rescued the widow. Since I've given him poison, he may get me into further trouble later. I'd better close my shop and go to Chuochow to sell rat poison. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Mistress Tsai, looking ill. She sits down and leans over the table.*)

(*Enter Old Chang and Donkey.*)

Chang: I came to Mistress Tsai's house hoping to be her second husband; but her daughter-in-law wouldn't agree. Then the old woman kept us here, saying we mustn't be in a hurry to marry, and she would talk the girl round. Who would have thought that the widow would fall ill? Well, son, have you worked out our stars? When is the Red Phoenix*, coming into our lives?

Donkey: What good are the stars? What happens is up to us.

Chang: Mistress Tsai has been ill for several days, son. Let's go to ask after her health.

(*They greet Mistress Tsai.*)

Chang: How do you feel today, ma'am?

Mrs. Tsai: I'm feeling very poorly.

Chang: Is there anything you'd fancy to eat?

Mrs. Tsai: I'd like some mutton tripe soup.

Chang: Son, go and tell Tou Ngo to make some mutton tripe soup for her mother-in-law.

Donkey (*Calling towards the entrance*): Tou Ngo! Your mother-in-law wants some mutton tripe soup. Look sharp about it!

(*Enter Tou Ngo with the soup.*)

Tou Ngo: I am Tou Ngo. My mother-in-law is unwell and wants some mutton tripe soup; so I've made her some. Oh, mother! Widows like us should give folk no cause to gossip! Why keep Old Chang and Donkey here when they aren't relatives? Won't this make the neighbours talk? You mustn't consent to marriage behind my back, or involve me in this disgraceful business too. Some women are too flighty!

She wants to lie with a husband all her life,
Unwilling to sleep alone for half a night;
First she married one, and now she has picked another.
And the women she mixes with
Never discuss how to run a house,
But simply gossip and try to do others in,
Always up to some low tricks.
*Yet one talks like Lady Cho,** *who stooped to serve in a tavern;*
*Another like Meng Kuang,*** *who showed such respect to her husband;*
You can't tell their true character from their speech,
The only way to judge them is by their actions.
They're all of them faithless, all run after new lovers;
And before their husbands' graves are dry
They set aside their mourning for new clothes.

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*The star predicting marriage in Chinese astrology.

**See note on p. 133.

***Wife of Liang Hung of the Later Han Dynasty.

Where is the woman whose tears for her husband
*Caused the Great Wall to crumble?**
*Where is she who left her washing and drowned herself in the stream?***
*Where is she who changed into stone through longing for her husband?****
How shameful that women today are so unfaithful,
So few of them are chaste, so many wanton!
All, all are gone, those virtuous women of old;
For wives and widows today will not remain constant!

Mother, your soup is ready. Please taste it.

Donkey: Let me take it to her. (*He takes the bowl and tastes the soup.*) This hasn't much flavour. Bring some salt and vinegar.

(*Tou Ngo goes out. Donkey puts poison in the soup. Tou Ngo comes back.*)

Tou Ngo: Here are the salt and vinegar.

Donkey: Put some in.

Tou Ngo:

You say that it lacks salt and vinegar,
Adding these will improve the flavour.
I hope my mother will be better soon,
And the soup will serve as a cordial.
How glad I shall be when she is well again!

Chang: Son, is the soup ready?

Donkey: Here it is. Take it.

(*Old Chang takes the soup.*)

Chang: Have some soup, ma'am.

Mrs. Tsai: I am sorry to give you so much trouble. (*She feels nauseated.*) I feel too queasy to eat. You have it.

Chang: This was specially made for you, ma'am. Even if you don't feel like it, try a little.

Mrs. Tsai: No, I can't. I want *you* to drink it.

(*Old Chang drinks the soup.*)

Tou Ngo:

One says: "Try a little!"
The other says: "You have it!"

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* Thousands of the men conscripted by the First Emperor of Chin to build the Great Wall died. According to a legend Meng-chiang-nu, the wife of one of these conscripts, wept so bitterly at the wall that part of it crumbled.

** During the Spring and Autumn Period (722-481 B.C.) Wu Tzu-hsu fled from the state of Chu to Wu. A woman washing by a river took pity on him and fed him. Upon leaving, he asked her not to tell his pursuers which way he had gone; to set his mind at rest she drowned herself.

*** This legendary woman, whose husband left home, climbed a hill every day to watch for his return, till at last she was transformed into a boulder.

What a shameful way to talk!
How can I help being angry?
What kinship is there between our families?
And how can you forget your former husband?
You were once a loving wife;
Are you thinking: "Gold is held most dear;
When our hair turns white, our friends disappear"?
Is that why you are so eager to marry?
You want to live with this new man till you die,
Without a thought for the husband of your youth.

Chang: Why has this soup made me dizzy? (*He falls to the ground.*)

Mrs. Tsai (*Panic-stricken*): Take a grip on yourself, old man! Don't give up so easily! (*Wails.*) He's dead! He's dead!

Tou Ngo:

It's no use grieving for him;
All mortal men must die when their time is up.
Some fall ill, some meet with accidents;
Some catch a chill, some are struck down by heat;
Some die of hunger, surfeit or over-work;
But every death has its cause,
And others cannot prevent it;
For such is the will of Heaven,
And our span of life is predestined.
He has been here a few days only;
He is not of your family,
And he never sent you wedding gifts:
Sheep, wine, silk or money.
For a time you stayed together,
But now he is dead and gone!
I am not an unfilial daughter,
But I fear what the neighbours may say;
So now, if you'll take my advice, mother,
Just consider this your bad luck;
Give him a coffin and funeral clothes,
And pack him out of our house,
Sending his corpse to his own ancestral graveyard.
It's not as if you married him as a girl;
He's no relation — how can I mourn for him?
There's no need to be so overcome with grief,
Or to cry so bitterly!

Donkey: Fine! You've poisoned my father! What are you going to do about it?

Mrs. Tsai: Child, what shall we do now?

Tou Ngo: What poison did I have? He must have put it in the soup when he told me to fetch salt and vinegar.

This fellow forced my mother-in-law to keep him;
Now he's poisoned his father; but who does he think he can frighten?

Donkey: He was my own father. No one will believe you if you accuse a son of poisoning his own father. (*Shouts.*) Listen, neighbours! Tou Ngo has poisoned my old man!

Mrs. Tsai: Hush! Don't make such a noise! How you frightened me!

Donkey: So you're frightened, eh?

Mrs. Tsai: Yes, I am.

Donkey: Would you like to find a way out?

Mrs. Tsai: Yes, I would.

Donkey: Tell Tou Ngo to marry me and call me "dear husband" three times, then I'll let her off.

Mrs. Tsai: You'd better marry him, child.

Tou Ngo: How can you say that, mother?

A horse can't have two saddles;
I was your son's wife for two years,
Yet now you are urging me to marry again.
This is unthinkable!

Donkey: Tou Ngo, you murdered my old man. Do you want to settle this in private or settle it in public?

Tou Ngo: What do you mean?

Donkey: If you want it settled in public, I'll drag you before the prefect for a trial. A weak girl like you won't be able to stand the torture, so you'll have to confess to the murder of my father! If you want it settled in private, hurry up and agree to be my wife. That's an easy way out for you.

Tou Ngo: I didn't murder your father. I'll go with you to the prefect.

(*Donkey drags Tou Ngo and Mistress Tsai out.*)

(*Enter Prefect Tao with his runners.*)

Prefect Tao:

I'm a better official than most;
I make money out of my lawsuits;
But when my superiors come to investigate,
I pretend to be ill and stay at home in bed.

I am Tao Wu, prefect of Chuchow. This morning I am holding court. Attendants, summon the court!

(*The runners give a shout.*)

(*Enter Donkey, dragging in Tou Ngo and Mistress Tsai.*)

Donkey: I want to lodge a charge.

Runner: Come over here.

(*Donkey kneels to the prefect, who kneels to him.*)

Prefect Tao (*Kneeling*): Please rise.

Runner: Your Honour, this is a citizen who's come to ask for justice. Why should you kneel to him?

Prefect Tao: Why? Because such citizens are food and clothes to me! (*The runners shout.*)

Prefect Tao: Which of you is the plaintiff, which the defendant? Out with the truth now!

Donkey: I am the plaintiff. I accuse this young woman, Tou Ngo, of murdering my father with poisoned mutton tripe soup. This is my step-mother, Mistress Tsai. Let justice be done, Your Honour!

Prefect Tao: Who poisoned the soup?

Tou Ngo: Not I!

Mrs. Tsai: Not I!

Donkey: Not I!

Prefect Tao: If none of you did it, I wonder if *I* could have done it?

Tou Ngo: My mother-in-law is not his step-mother. His name is Chang, and ours is Tsai. My mother-in-law went to collect a debt from a certain Doctor Lu, who lured her outside the town where he tried to strangle her. This man and his father saved her life; so my mother-in-law took them in and fed them to repay their kindness, little thinking the scoundrels would want her to marry the old man and me to marry his son. As I am a widow, still in mourning, I refused. Then my mother-in-law fell ill, and told me to prepare some mutton tripe soup for her. But this fellow got hold of some poison, and when he took the soup from me he said there was not enough salt and vinegar in it, to get me out of the way while he secretly put in the poison. Luckily my mother-in-law suddenly felt too sick to drink the soup; so she offered it to his father, who drank a few mouthfuls and died. I had no hand in this. A poor woman I beg you, Your Honour, in your great wisdom, to see justice done!

Your Honour is as discerning as a mirror,
And can see men's innermost thoughts.
There was nothing wrong with the soup,
I know nothing about the poison;
He made a pretence of tasting it,
Then his father drank it and fell down dead.
It is not that I want to deny my guilt in court;
But I cannot confess to a crime I have not committed!

Donkey: Your Honour, their name is Tsai and ours is Chang. If the old woman hadn't married my father, why should she have kept us in their house? Her daughter-in-law may be young, but she's so stubborn and cross-grained she's not afraid of a beating.

Prefect Tao: Low characters are like that: they'll only confess when put to torture. Attendants! Bring the big bastinado to beat her.

(*The runners beat Tou Ngo. Three times she faints and they have to sprinkle her with water to bring her round.*)

Tou Ngo:

This terrible beating is more than I can bear.

You brought this on yourself, mother. Why complain?
May all women in the world who marry again
Be warned by me!
Why are they shouting so fiercely?
My spirit takes flight in fear;
I come to myself, then faint away again.
A thousand strokes, ten thousand dreadful tortures!
At each blow from the bastinado
My blood spurts out and my skin is torn from my flesh;
My body is gashed and bleeding!
Who knows the hate and bitterness in my heart?
Where could I have found the poison?
Oh, Heaven! why cannot the sun shine out on this darkness?

Prefect Tao: Will you confess now?

Tou Ngo: I swear it was not I who put in the poison.

Prefect Tao: In that case, beat the old woman.

Tou Ngo (*Hastily*): Stop, stop! Don't beat my mother-in-law! Rather than that, I'll say I poisoned the old man.

Prefect Tao: Since she confesses, let her sign a statement. Then fasten her in the cangue and throw her into the gaol for the condemned. Tomorrow I shall issue my verdict condemning her to death, and she will be taken to the market-place to be executed.

Mrs. Tsai (*Weeping*): Tou Ngo, my child! It's because of me you are losing your life. Oh, this will be the death of me!

Tou Ngo:

When I am a headless ghost, unjustly killed,
Do you think I will spare that vile scoundrel?
Men cannot be deceived for ever,
And Heaven will see this injustice.
I struggled as hard as I could, but now I am helpless;
I was forced to confess that I poisoned the old man;
For, mother, how could I save you except by dying?

(*She is led off by the runners.*)

Donkey (*Kowtows*): Thank you, Your Honour. When she's killed tomorrow, my father will be avenged.

Mrs. Tsai: Poor child! Tomorrow she will be killed in the market-place. This will be the death of me!

Prefect Tao: Let Donkey Chang and Mistress Tsai be released on bail. Attendants, clear the court, and bring me my horse; I am going home. (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE III

(*Enter the officer in charge.*)

Officer: I am the officer in charge of executions. Today we are putting a criminal to death. The runners must stand guard at the end of the road, to see that no one comes through.

(*Enter the runners. They beat the drum and the gong three times; then the executioner enters with his sword, leading Tou Ngo in a cangue.*)

Executioner: Get a move on! Get a move on! We mustn't keep the officer waiting too long.

Tou Ngo:

Through no fault of mine I am called a criminal,
And condemned to be beheaded —
I cry out to Heaven and Earth of this injustice!
My soul will soon fly to the underworld;
How can I but reproach both Earth and Heaven?
The sun and moon hang high by day and by night,
There are deities to control men's life and death;
Thus Heaven and Earth should know innocent from guilty;
How can they confuse the wicked with the good?
The good are poor, and die before their time;
The wicked are rich, and live to a great old age.
The gods are afraid of the mighty and bully the weak,
If we judge by the way they let evil take its course.
Ah, Earth! if you won't distinguish good from bad,
And, Heaven! if you won't distinguish wise from foolish,
You don't deserve to be worshipped as Heaven and Earth!
Tears pour down my cheeks in vain!

Executioner: Get a move on! We are late.

Tou Ngo:

The cangue round my neck makes me stagger this way and that;
And I'm jostled backward and forward by the crowd.
Will you do me a favour, brother?

Executioner: What do you want?

Tou Ngo:

If you take me the front way, I shall bear you a grudge;
If you take me the back way, I shall die content.
Please don't say it's the longer way.

Executioner: Now that you're going to the execution ground, are there any relatives you want to see? We can bring them to say goodbye to you.

Tou Ngo:

I am all lone; I have no relatives.
I must keep my grief to myself, and sigh in vain.

Executioner: Is there no one left in your parents' home?

Tou Ngo: I have only a father who went to the capital thirteen years ago to take the examination; but I've had no news of him since.

It is ten years since I saw my father's face!

Executioner: Then why did you ask me just now to take you the back way?

Tou Ngo: I'm afraid my mother-in-law may see me if we go the front way.

Executioner: You can't escape death, so why worry if she sees you?

Tou Ngo: If my mother-in-law were to see me in chains being led to the execution ground —

She would burst with indignation!
She would burst with indignation!
Please grant me this comfort, brother, before I die!

(*Enter Mistress Tsai, crying.*)

Mrs. Tsai: Ah, Heaven! Isn't that my daughter-in-law?

Executioner: Stand back, old woman!

Tou Ngo: Since my mother-in-law is here, let her come closer so that I can say a few words to her.

Executioner: Hey, old woman! Come here. Your daughter-in-law wants to speak to you.

Mrs. Tsai: Poor child! This will be the death of me!

Tou Ngo: Mother, Donkey Chang poisoned the mutton tripe soup to kill you, so that he could force me to be his wife. He never thought you would give it to his father, and his father would die instead. Because I didn't want you to suffer, I had to confess to murder, and now I am going to be killed. In future, mother, at New Year and the festivals and on the first and fifteenth of every month, if you have gruel to spare, give me half a bowl; and if you have paper money to spare, burn some for me, for the sake of your dead son!

Take pity on one who is dying an unjust death;
Take pity on one whose head will be struck from her body;
Take pity on one who has worked with you in your home;
Take pity on one who has neither mother nor father;
Take pity on one who has served you all these years;
And at festivals offer my spirit a bowl of cold gruel,
Or burn paper coins to my headless corpse,
As if I were your own child.

Mrs. Tsai (*Weeping*): Don't worry. I shall remember. Ah, Heaven! this will be the death of me!

Tou Ngo:

Don't cry any more, mother! Don't complain to Heaven!
Tou Ngo was fated to be wronged like this.

Executioner: Now then, old woman, stand back! The time has come.
(*Tou Ngo kneels, and the executioner removes the cangue from her neck.*)

Tou Ngo: I want to ask a favour, officer. If you will grant it, I shall die content.

Officer: What is it? Speak.

Tou Ngo: I want a clean mat to stand on, and a white silk streamer twelve feet long to hang on the lance.* If I am indeed dying unjustly, when the sword strikes off my head, not a drop of my warm blood will stain the ground. It will all fly up instead to the white silk streamer.

Officer: That's all right. We can allow you that.
(*The executioner brings a mat on which Tou Ngo stands, and a white silk streamer is hung on the lance.*)

Tou Ngo:

I would not make such a vow lightly;
But a terrible wrong has been done,
And unless I work some wonder
Men will not know that Heaven is unbiassed.
Not a drop of my blood shall stain the earth,
It shall all fly up instead to the eight-foot lance,
So that those around may see the miracle
And know that Tou Ngo was unjustly slain.

Executioner: What else do you have to say? This is your last chance to speak to the officer.

Tou Ngo (*Kneels again*): This is the hottest time of summer, sir. If injustice has indeed been done, three feet of snow will cover my dead body.

Officer: What! In the middle of summer? Your wrongs might be crying out to Heaven, but you couldn't make a single snowflake fall! Stop talking nonsense.

Tou Ngo:

In midsummer, you say, it cannot snow;
*Have you never heard how frost was caused in June?***
My blazing hate and fury
Can make the snow fall thick and white as cotton
To cover up my corpse;
So that I need no hearse and no white horses
To carry me to the ancient, lonely graveyard.

(*She kneels again.*) If injustice has indeed been done, sir, this district will suffer from drought for three whole years.

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*This was used as a flag-pole on the execution ground.

**Tsou Yen of the Warring States Period (403-221 B.C.) was a loyal subject of the Prince of Yen, but because an enemy slandered him he was imprisoned. Since such great injustice had been done, frost appeared although it was summer.

Officer: Be quiet! What a thing to say!
Tou Ngo:

You think Heaven knows no justice, men no pity?
Almighty Heaven will listen to men's prayers.
Once, in Tunghai, for three years no rain fell,
Because a good daughter-in-law was unjustly treated.
Now your district's turn has come.
Because officers here have no concern for justice,
The common citizens cannot tell the truth!

(*The executioner draws his sword.*)
Executioner: Why is it so suddenly overcast?
(*Offstage a storm is heard approaching.*)
Executioner: How cold the wind is!
Tou Ngo:

The floating clouds turn dark for me,
The blustering wind whirls round for me:
I have stated my three vows clearly!

(*She weeps.*) Ah, mother, you will see snow fall in summer and drought last for three years.

Then you will know Tou Ngo was unjustly slain!

(*The executioner beheads her, and her body falls to the ground.*)
Officer (*Startled*): What! It *is* snowing. How amazing!
Executioner: When I cut off a head, the ground is usually covered with blood. But all her blood has flown up to the white silk streamer: not a drop has stained the earth. This is certainly strange!
Officer: Injustice must have been done. Two of her vows have come true. I wonder whether the three years' drought she foretold will come true. Well, we shall see. Don't wait for the snow to clear, men. Carry the corpse to Mistress Tsai.
(*The attendants assent, and carry the body off.*)

SCENE IV

(*Enter Tou Tien-chang in official robes with a servant and attendants.*)
Tou:

Alone in the empty hall I meditate sadly;
The moon climbs over the peak and the woods are misty;
I am not so busy that I cannot rest,
But my troubled spirit will not let me sleep.

I am Tou Tien-chang. It is sixteen years since I left my child Tuan-yun. I went to the capital, passed the examination and was made a counsellor. And because I am able, just and upright, the emperor appointed me Inspector of the Huai River Area. I have travelled from place to place

investigating cases, and I have the authority to punish corrupt officials without first reporting to the throne. My heart is torn between grief and happiness. I am glad because I am a high official responsible for seeing that justice is done; and with my sword of authority and gold badge, my power extends for thousands of miles. I am sad, though, because when Tuan-yun was seven I gave her to Mistress Tsai; and after I became an official and sent for news of the widow to Chuchow, the neighbours said she had moved away—to what place they did not know—and there has been no word since. I have wept for my child till my eyes are dim and my hair is white. Now I have come south of the Huai River, and am wondering why this district has had no rain for three years. I shall rest in the district office, boy. Tell the local officers they need not call today. I shall see them early tomorrow.

Servant (*Calling out towards the entrance*): The officers are not to call on His Excellency today. He will see them early tomorrow.

Tou: Tell the secretaries of the different departments to send all their cases here for my inspection. I shall study some under the lamp.

(*The servant brings him the files.*)

Tou: Light the lamp for me. You have all been working hard, and you may rest now. But come when I call you.

(*The servant lights the lamp and leaves with the attendants.*)

Tou: I shall go through a few cases. Here is one concerning Tou Ngo, who poisoned her father-in-law. Curious that the first culprit's surname should be the same as mine! To murder one's father-in-law is one of the unpardonable crimes; so it seems there are lawless elements among my clan. Since this case has been dealt with, I need not read it. I'll put it at the bottom of the pile and look at another. (*Yawns.*) I suddenly feel drowsy. I suppose I am growing old, and am tired after travelling. I will take a short nap on the desk. (*He sleeps.*)

(*Enter Tou Ngo's ghost.*)

Tou Ngo:

Day after day I weep in the underworld,
Waiting impatiently for my revenge.
I pace on slowly in darkness,
Then am borne along by the whirlwind;
Enveloped by mist I come swiftly in ghostly form.

(*She looks about her.*) Now the door-gods will not let me pass. I am the daughter of Inspector Tou. Though I died unjustly, my father does not know it; so I have come to visit him in his dreams.

I am the inspector's daughter,
Not some monster come to terrify the world.
Why not let me step into the lamplight?
Why stop me outside the door?

(*She calls out.*) Ah, father!

Vain your sword of authority, badge of gold;

Can you save a wrongly slain ghost from a sea of woe? (She enters the room and weeps.)

Tou: (*Shedding tears*): Tuan-yun, my child! Where have you been? (*Tou Ngo's spirit leaves, and Tou wakes up.*) How odd! I fell asleep and dreamed that I saw my daughter coming towards me; but where is she now? Let me go on with these cases. (*Tou Ngo's spirit enters and makes the lamp burn low.*) Strange! I was just going to read a case when the light flickered and dimmed. My servant is asleep; I must trim the wick myself. (*As he trims the lamp, Tou Ngo's spirit re-arranges the file.*) Now the light is brighter, I can read again. "This concerns the criminal Tou Ngo, who poisoned her father-in-law." (*Puzzled.*) I read this case first of all, and put it under the others. How has it come to the top? Since this case has already been dealt with, let me put it at the bottom again and study a different one. (*Once more Tou Ngo's spirit makes the lamp burn low.*) Why is the light flickering again? I must trim it once more. (*As Tou trims the light, Tou Ngo's spirit once more turns over the file.*) Now the lamp is brighter, I can read another case. "This concerns the criminal Tou Ngo, who poisoned her father-in-law." How extraordinary! I definitely put this at the bottom of the pile just before I trimmed the lamp. How has it come to the top again? Can there be ghosts in this office? Well, ghost or no ghost, an injustice must have been done. Let me put this underneath and read another.

(*Tou Ngo's spirit makes the lamp burn low again.*)

The lamp is flickering again. Can there actually be a ghost here tampering with it? I'll trim it once more. (*As he trims the wick, Tou Ngo's spirit comes up to him and he sees her. He strikes his sword on the desk.*) Ah, there's the ghost! I warn you, I am the emperor's inspector of justice. If you come near, I'll cut you in two. Hey, boy! How can you sleep so soundly? Get up at once! Ghosts! Ghosts! This is terrifying!

Tou Ngo:

Fear is making him lose his head;
The sound of my weeping has frightened him more than ever.
Here, Tou Tien-chang, with all your lordly airs,
Will you let your daughter Tou Ngo bow to you?

Tou: You say I am your father, ghost, and offer to bow to me as my daughter. Aren't you mistaken? My daughter's name is Tuan-yun. When she was seven she was given to Mistress Tsai as a child bride. You call yourself by a different name, Tou Ngo. How can you be my child?

Tou Ngo: After you gave me to Mistress Tsai, father, she changed my name to Tou Ngo.

Tou: So you say you are my child Tuan-yun. Let me ask you this: Are you the woman accused of murdering her father-in-law?

Tou Ngo: I am.

Tou: Hush, girl! I've wept for you till my eyes grew dim, and worried for you till my hair turned white. How did you come to be condemned for this most heinous of crimes? I am a high official now, whose duty it is to see that justice is done. I have come here to investigate cases and discover corrupt officials. You are my child; if I could not control you, how can I control others? When I married you to the widow's son, I expected you to observe the Three Duties and Four Virtues. The Three Duties are obedience to your father before marriage, obedience to your husband after marriage, and obedience to your son after your husband's death. The Four Virtues are to serve your parents-in-law, to show respect to your husband, to remain on good terms with your sisters-in-law, and to live in peace with your neighbours. But regardless of your duties, you have committed the gravest crime of all! For three generations no son of our clan has broken the law; for five generations no daughter has married again. But now you have disgraced our ancestors, and injured my good name. Tell me the whole truth at once, and nothing but the truth! If you utter one false word, I shall send you to the tutelary god; then your spirit will never re-enter human form, but remain a hungry ghost for ever in the shades.

Tou Ngo: Don't be so angry, father. Don't threaten me like an angry wolf or tiger! Let me explain this to you. At three, I lost my mother; at seven, I was parted from my father, when you sent me to Mistress Tsai as her future daughter-in-law. At seventeen, I married; but unhappily two years later my husband died, and I stayed as a widow with my mother-in-law. Outside the South Gate of Shanyang lived a certain Doctor Lu, who owed my mother-in-law twenty taels of silver. One day, when she went to ask him for the money, he lured her outside the town and tried to strangle her; but Donkey Chang and his father came by and saved her life. Donkey Chang knew that she had a widowed daughter-in-law. "Since you two have no husbands," he said, "you had better marry us." At first my mother-in-law refused; but he threatened to strangle her if she didn't give her consent, so she was frightened into taking them home and keeping them. Donkey tried to seduce me several times; but I always resisted him. One day my mother-in-law was unwell and wanted some mutton tripe soup. When I prepared it, Donkey and his father were there to inquire after her illness, and he told me to let him taste it. "It's good," he said. "But there's not enough salt and vinegar." When I went to fetch more, he secretly poisoned the soup, meaning to murder her and force me to marry him. Suddenly though, my mother-in-law felt sick, and instead of drinking the soup she gave it to Old Chang. Then blood spurted from the old man's mouth, nose, ears and eyes; and he died. At that Donkey said, "Tou Ngo, you poisoned my father. Do you want to settle this in public or in private?" "What do you mean?" I asked. "If you want it settled

in public," he said, "I shall take the case to court, and you will pay for my father's death with your life. If you want it settled in private, then be my wife." "A good horse won't have two saddles," I told him. "A good woman won't remarry. I'd rather die than be your wife. I'll go to court with you." Then he dragged me before the prefect. I was tried again and again, and tortured; but I would rather have died than make a false confession. When the prefect saw that I wouldn't confess, he threatened to have my mother-in-law tortured; and because she was too old to stand the torture, I made a false confession. Then they took me to the execution ground to kill me. I made three vows before my death. First, I asked for a twelve-foot white silk streamer and swore that, if I was innocent, when the sword struck off my head no drop of my blood would stain the ground—it would all fly up to the streamer. Next I vowed that, though it was midsummer, Heaven would send down three feet of snow to cover my body. Last, I vowed that this district would suffer three years' drought. All these vows have come true, because of the crime against me.

I complained not to any official but to Heaven,
For I could not express the injustice that was done me;
And to save my mother from torture
I confessed to a crime of which I was innocent.
Three feet of snow fell on my corpse;
My hot blood gushed to the white silk streamer;
And Tsou Yen was no longer alone in calling down frost.
All these miracles were to show the injustice done me.
Look at the documents drawn up in this case:
How could I endure such a wrong?
For resisting seduction I was executed!
I would not disgrace my clan; so I lost my life!
And today my spirit comes as a mournful suppliant
To beg you, father, to see that justice is done!
You are sent by the emperor to investigate trials;
Consider this case and this man's wickedness;
Though you cut him in pieces, I shall not be satisfied!

Tou (*Weeping*): Ah, my wrongly slain daughter, how this wrings my heart! Let me ask you this: Is it because of you that this district has suffered for three years from drought?

Tou Ngo: It is.

Tou: Very well.

Tomorrow I shall avenge you.
I bow my white head in sorrow
Over the innocent girl who was wrongly slain.
Now dawn is breaking, you had better leave me;
Tomorrow I shall set right this miscarriage of justice.

(*Exit Tou Ngo's spirit.*)

Tou: It is dawn already. Boy! Yesterday when I was studying the file, a ghost came in to plead her case. I called you several times, but you did not answer. How soundly you must sleep!

Servant: I didn't close my nose all night, Your Excellency. But I didn't hear a woman ghost pleading her case, nor did I hear you call.

Tou: Enough. I shall hold court now. Summon the court.

(*The servant calls out to summon the court.*)

Servant: Here is the prefect to pay his respects.

(*The prefect enters and bows to Tou.*)

Servant: Here is the secretary to pay his respects.

(*Enter the secretary.*)

Tou: Why has your district suffered three years from drought?

Prefect: The weather has been unusually dry. This is a grave misfortune for the local people but no fault of ours, Your Excellency.

Tou (*Angrily*): Don't you know your guilt? In Shanyang County there lived a girl called Tou Ngo, who was accused of poisoning her father-in-law; and just before she was killed she vowed that this district would suffer three years from drought, so that no grass would grow. Is this true?

Prefect: That case was dealt with by my predecessor, who has since been promoted. The documents of the case are here.

Tou: What! We let such a dolt be promoted! You are his successor. In these three years have you sacrificed to this girl so unjustly killed?

Prefect: She was guilty of the most heinous crime, and there was no shrine erected to her; hence we did not institute any sacrifice.

Tou: In the Han Dynasty there was a virtuous widow whose mother-in-law hanged herself, and whose sister-in-law accused her of murdering the old woman. The governor of Tunghai had her executed, but because of her unjust death there was no rain in that district for three years. When Lord Yu came to investigate, he saw the dead woman's ghost carrying a plea and weeping before the hall; and after he changed the verdict and sacrificed at her grave there was a great downpour of rain. Now your district is suffering from a serious drought; isn't this a parallel case? Boy, tell runners to go to Shanyang County to fetch Donkey Chang, Doctor Lu and Mistress Tsai here at once, without a moment's delay!

Servant: Yes, Your Excellency! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter a runner with Donkey Chang, Mistress Tsai and the servant.*)

Runner: The culprits from Shanyang are here, Your Excellency!

Tou: Donkey Chang!

Donkey: Here, Your Excellency!

Tou: Mistress Tsai!

Mrs. Tsai: Here, Your Excellency!

Tou: Doctor Lu is an important accessory in this case. Why is he not here?

Runner: Doctor Lu ran away three years ago. We have sent men to search for him, and when he is caught, he'll be brought over.

Tou: Donkey Chang, is this Mistress Tsai your step-mother?

Donkey: Would I call her my mother if she wasn't? Of course she is.

Tou: I don't see from the records who procured the poison. Where did it come from?

Donkey: Tou Ngo made it herself.

Tou: It must have been bought from some drug shop. How could a young widow like Tou Ngo have procured it? Did *you* buy the poison, Donkey?

Donkey: Would I buy poison to poison my own father?

Tou: Ah, my wronged daughter, this is the crux of the matter! Without your evidence, we can never clear up this point. Where is your spirit now?

(*Enter Tou Ngo's spirit.*)

Tou Ngo: Who else bought the poison, Donkey, if not you?

Donkey: A ghost! A ghost! Heaven preserve us! Protect me from evil spirits!

Tou Ngo: You poisoned the soup that day, Donkey, meaning to murder my mother-in-law and force me to marry you. You never thought my mother-in-law would give the soup to your father, and he would die in her place. Can you deny it now?

Face to face with this scoundrel,
I demand where the poison came from.
This was your wicked plot
To force me to marry you.
You murdered your own father by mistake;
But you cannot put the blame on me!

(*Tou Ngo's spirit beats Donkey.*)

Donkey (*Warding her off*): Heaven preserve us! Protect me from evil spirits! Your Excellency said the poison must have been bought from some drug shop. If you can produce the apothecary, I'll have nothing more to say.

(*Enter a runner leading Doctor Lu.*)

Runner: Shanyang County sends you Doctor Lu.

Servant: Step forward.

Tou: Three years ago you tried to strangle Mistress Tsai to avoid repaying your debt. What have you to say to that?

Doctor (*Kowtowing*): It is true that I tried to avoid repaying the debt; but Mistress Tsai was rescued by two men. She did not die.

Tou: Do you know the two men's names?

Doctor: I could recognize the men; but in a predicament like that, I didn't stop to ask for their names.

Tou: There is a man over there. Go and see if you recognize him.

Doctor (*Looking at Mistress Tsai*): This is Mistress Tsai. (*Pointing at Donkey.*) I suppose your poisoning has been discovered! (*He turns*

to Tou.) He is one of them, Your Excellency. The day that I tried to strangle Mistress Tsai, he passed by with another man and rescued her. A few days later he came to my shop to buy poison. I'm a pious man, Your Excellency. I chant Buddhist sutras, observe the fasts and shrink from any wrong-doing; so I told him I stocked lawful drugs only, not poison. Then he glared at me. "The other day you tried to strangle Mistress Tsai outside the town," he said. "I'll take you to the court!" Since I've always been nervous of officials, I had to give him some poison. But he looked such a bad character, I felt sure he must be going to poison someone; and I was afraid that when the murder was discovered, I should be involved as well. So I ran away to Chuochow to sell rat poison. I have poisoned quite a few rats, but not a single man.

Tou Ngo:

By trying to evade your debt you caused much greater trouble;
So it was you, Doctor Lu, who sold him the poison!
For no fault of my own I was blamed for this.
That prefect has gone, but justice remains!

Tou: Bring Mistress Tsai here. I see you are over sixty and have money of your own. Why should you marry Old Chang and cause all this trouble?

Mrs. Tsai: Because they saved my life I boarded and fed them. That fellow Donkey wanted his father to marry me; but I never agreed to it.

Tou: In that case, your daughter-in-law should never have been accused of murdering her father-in-law.

Tou Ngo: The prefect threatened to beat my mother-in-law; and because I feared she was too old to stand torture, I told a lie and said I had murdered Old Chang.

I should never have signed a false statement;
But I did it in filial piety,
And thereby caused my own ruin.
I thought the officials would try the case again;
But instead they had me beheaded on the street.
First I vowed that my blood would sprinkle the white silk streamer,
Then I vowed that three feet of snow would cover my body,
And that angry Heaven would send three years of drought;
These were my solemn vows.
Ah, government offices always face the south;
There have always been miscarriages of justice;
And I, a poor, weak woman,
Have spent three years immured in the nether regions,
My sorrow flowing eternal like a river!

Tou: My child, I know all your wrongs now; you may go. I shall pass new sentences on all involved and on the former officials here; then perform a great sacrifice to pray that your spirit may ascend to heaven.

Tou Ngo (*Bowing*):

With your sword of authority and badge of gold,
You will pass fresh judgment and kill all corrupt officials,
To serve your sovereign and relieve the people!

There's one thing I nearly forgot, father. My mother-in-law is old now, and has no one to look after her. If you will keep her in your house and care for her for me, then under the earth I shall rest content.

Tou: This is dutiful, my child.

Tou Ngo:

I ask my father to care for my mother-in-law,
For she has no son nor daughter to wait on her,
And she is growing old. My father now
Will reopen my case and change the unjust verdict. (*Exit.*)

Tou: Call Mistress Tsai forward. Do you recognize me, ma'am?

Mrs. Tsai: My eyes are dim. I can't see who you are.

Tou: I am Tou Tien-chang, and the ghost that appeared just now was my wrongly slain daughter Tuan-yun. Listen, all of you, to the verdict! Donkey Chang murdered his father and tried to seduce a widow. He shall be sliced to pieces. Let him be taken to the market-place, nailed to a stake and sliced in one hundred and twenty pieces till he is dead. The last prefect and his secretary passed a wrong sentence. They will be given one hundred strokes apiece and have their names struck off the official list. Doctor Lu is guilty of refusing to pay his debt, attempting to strangle the widow, and selling poison which cost a man his life. Let him be exiled to a frontier post till he dies. Mistress Tsai will be lodged in my house. The wrong sentence passed on Tou Ngo will be rescinded.

It is not that I want to excuse my dead daughter's guilt,
I am taking these steps to stop the three years' drought.
When Lord Yu paid homage to the good widow of Tunghai,
Heaven was moved to send rain.
We cannot say that each generation is doomed,
For human desires will often move high Heaven.
Thus I have had these verdicts rectified,
To show that the court will not countenance injustice.

(*Exeunt.*)

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

Rescued by a Coquette

CHARACTERS

Chou Sheh, *a profligate*

Mistress Sung, *a widow*

Sung Yin-chang, *her daughter, a singsong girl*

An Hsiu-shih, *a scholar*

Chao Pan-erh, *a singsong girl*

Waiter

Chang, *an errand boy*

Li Kung-pi, *prefect of Chengchow*

Attendants

SCENE I

(*Enter Chou Sheh.*)

Chou:

Thirty years I've been a glutton,
Twenty years I've been lucky with girls.
I never know the price of rice or firewood,
*For all my money goes on wine and women.**

I am Chou Sheh, son of a sub-prefect and a native of Chengchow. Since boyhood I've haunted bawdy-houses. Now here in Pienliang is a sing-song girl called Sung Yin-chang. We want to marry each other, but her mother won't give her consent. I'm just back from a business trip; so I'm going to their house to propose this match to Mistress Sung.

(*Enter Mistress Sung and her daughter.*)

Mrs. Sung: I am a native of Pienliang. My family name is Li, but I married a man named Sung. My husband died early and I have only this daughter Yin-chang. She's clever at jokes and puns and a good hand at quips and pranks. Chou Sheh of Chengchow has been her admirer for several years, and they want to marry each other; but I keep putting it off and won't give my consent. It's not that I'm so hard to please, my girl, I'm just afraid you'll suffer for it later.

Yin-chang: Don't worry about that, mother. I've set my heart on having him.

Mrs. Sung: Have it your own way then.

(*Enter Chou Sheh.*)

Chou: Here comes Chou Sheh. This is their house. I'll go in. (*He greets Yin-chang.*)

Yin-chang: So it's you, Chou Sheh.

Chou: I have come about our marriage. What does your mother say?

Yin-chang: Mother is willing.

Chou: Then let me speak to her. (*He greets Mistress Sung.*) I have come about this marriage, ma'am.

Mrs. Sung: Today is a lucky day: I give my consent. But mind you don't ill-treat my child.

Chou: How dare I ill-treat her? Invite all our friends, ma'am, and I'll make myself ready and come.

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* The lines in italics are declaimed or sung.

Mrs. Sung: Keep an eye on the house, child, while I go to invite my old friends.

Chou:

I've courted her all these years,
And at last her mother's consented!

Yin-chang:

All that takes place is predestined.

Mrs. Sung:

Still, we must be prepared for the unexpected too.

(*Exeunt.*)

(*Enter the scholar An Hsiu-shih.*)

An:

Till he died, Liu Fen grieved that he failed the examinations;*
*All his life, poor Fan Tan** remained steadfast in his aim.*
If Heaven sees and judges men below,
It surely will not fail a hard-working scholar.

I am An Hsiu-shih, a native of Loyang. Since childhood I have studied the Confucian classics, till now I have a bellyful of learning. Still I can't resist enjoying women and wine. Here in Pienliang is a singsong girl called Sung Yin-chang, who is my sweetheart. She promised to marry me, but now she is marrying Chou Sheh. She has a sworn sister, Chao Pan-erh. And I'm on my way to ask Pan-erh for help. Are you at home, sister?

(*Enter Pan-erh.*)

Pan-erh: I am Chao Pan-erh. I hear someone calling. Let me open the door and see who it is. (*She greets An.*) I was wondering who it was. So it's my sister's betrothed. Where have you come from?

An: I have come to ask you a favour. Your sister Yin-chang promised to marry me, but now she's agreed to marry Chou Sheh instead. I want you to speak to her!

Pan-erh: So she promised to marry you, but now she wants to marry someone else. Really, getting married is a difficult business!

Though we singsong girls make money by pleasing men,
We can find no devoted admirers in the end.
No match should be made by force,
Or hurried through before the time is ripe.
If two people marry as soon as they fall in love,
A day will come when they repent their rashness.
The future is dark as the never-fathomed ocean;

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* A scholar of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.). Since he asked the emperor to punish his evil eunuchs, the examiners dared not pass him when he took the civil service examinations, for the eunuchs had great power.

** Disapproving of the corruption of official life during the Later Han Dynasty (25-220 A.D.), Fan Tan resigned from his post and lived in great poverty as a fortune-teller.

Men's hearts are a riddle; Heaven alone is not deceived.
To marry, you need a couple,
And each one hopes to find a perfect mate;
We make our choice a hundred, thousand times,
Seeking an honest man—but can we find one?
Seeking a clever fellow—but will he prove constant?
As it is, we are thrown away on curs and swine;
But once we marry our fate will be even worse,
And we'll wake up to find we have only ourselves to blame.
I have known young brides in my time,
But a few days of harsh treatment
Make haggard ghosts of them;
Yet they cannot express their despair,
And shed tears in vain.
I have seen some pretty, ambitious girls as well,
Who have gone through hell with men as hard as iron.
Ah, no! A thousand times no!
I would rather sleep alone the whole of my life!

Brother, I am going to get married myself, so I know what these would-be brides are like.

An: What are they like?

Pan-erh:

They want to be honest and learn the wifely virtues,
But all singsong girls are considered light and giddy,
So what way out is there for them?
Though I live in luxury, what good does it do me?
I'm not claiming crab-apples are apples;
But men chisel us to get their money's worth
In wicked, unnatural ways.

If a fellow comes two or three times and we don't ask him for money. the wretch says we have designs on him.

If we don't seem sharp,
He claims we are scheming to cheat him.
Some women envy singsong girls,
Some envy concubines;
But the girl who wants to marry
Will find herself in trouble;
While the girl who simply pretends to want to marry
Is hoping to marry money.
Though the girl who marries is bound to be deceived,
Others still tread in her steps,
Instead of learning a lesson from her despair.

Take a seat, brother, while I go to persuade her. Don't be too pleased if she takes my advice, and don't be too sad if she doesn't.

An: I won't stay, but go home to wait for your news. Please do your best for me, sister! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Yin-chang.*)

Pan-erh (*Walking towards Yin-chang's house she meets her*): Whom are you going to call on, sister?

Yin-chang: I'm not calling on anyone. I'm getting married.

Pan-erh: I've just come to propose a match to you.

Yin-chang: With whom?

Pan-erh: The scholar An.

Yin-chang: If I marry him, we'll have to go begging together.

Pan-erh: Well, whom do you mean to marry?

Yin-chang: I'm going to marry Chou Sheh.

Pan-erh: Aren't you too young to marry?

Yin-chang: Why? Singsong girl today, singsong girl tomorrow: this is a wretched life. If I marry some Chang or Li and become a respectable woman, I can hold my head up even when I'm a ghost.

Pan-erh:

You had better think again! You're still quite young;
Why not wait until I find you a good husband
With whom you can live in comfort all your life?
Your elder sister is telling you the truth:
You won't be able to stand a husband long.

Some good husbands make good lovers too, sister. But good lovers may not make good husbands.

Yin-chang: What do you mean?

Pan-erh:

Though some husbands make poor lovers,
The lovers are false, while the husbands at least are honest!

Yin-chang: But Chou Sheh looks so handsome in his fine clothes!

Pan-erh:

Though he decks himself out in fine feathers,
What does he know of how to treat a wife?

Why do you want to marry him, sister?

Yin-chang: Because he's so good to me.

Pan-erh: In what way is he good to you?

Yin-chang: He cares for me all the year round. In summer, when I take a nap he fans me. In winter, he warms the quilt for me. When I dress to go out, he helps me straighten my clothes. When I put on my trinkets, he helps me pin them on. It's because he's so good to me that I want to marry him.

Pan-erh: So that's the reason!

I can hardly keep from laughing!
In summer, you say, he fans you to sleep,
And warms your quilt at the brazier in winter
When the cold is enough to penetrate your clothes.

At table he takes his spoon
To remove the skin and gristle from your meat;
And when you go out he straightens the folds of dress,
Pins on your trinkets and places the combs in your hair.
All this is done to deceive you;
Yet you won't see through him, but fall in love with him!
You say that your lover's heart is as sweet as honey;
But once you marry him and go to his house
He'll glare and gnash his teeth,
Kick you and punch you until you burst into tears.
But by then, with the boat in mid-stream,
It will be too late for you to stop the leak,
And whom will you have to blame?
So look before you leap!
I know, if I can't convince you,
That some fine day I shall have to rescue you!

Don't come running to me when he starts ill-treating you, sister!

Yin-chang: Even if I'm condemned to death, I shan't ask for your help!

(*Enter Chou Sheh with porters.*)

Chou: Display the presents, men.

Pan-erh: So Chou Sheh is coming. If he says nothing, well and good. If he speaks, I shall give him a tongue-lashing!

Chou: Is that Sister Chao?

Pan-erh: It is.

Chou: Won't you have some tea and food with us?

Pan-erh: Are you asking me home to a meal? You serve hungry guests from an empty pan — what food can I expect from you?

Chou: I want you to act as voucher.

Pan-erh: As voucher for whom?

Chou: For Yin-chang here.

Pan-erh: So you want me to vouch for her? Who can vouch that she'll do all a housewife's work — sew, cook, embroider, make clothes and bear you children?

Chou: Oh, what a tongue you have! Well, since I've succeeded already, I can do without your help.

Pan-erh: I'll be going then. (*She walks out.*)

(*Enter An.*)

An: Well, sister, how did your talk with Yin-chang go?

Pan-erh: It made no impression at all.

An: In that case, I'd better go to the capital to sit for the examination.

Pan-erh: Don't go yet. I need you here.

An: Whatever you say. I'll stay on in the inn, and see what you can do for me. (*Exit.*)

Pan-erh:

She's a fox-fairy, witch, a vampire who sucks men's blood,

With no human legs in her trousers!
Though you spit out blood for her, An, she thinks nothing of it!
You must sow no more wild oats,
For it's easy to make her jealous,
But must stick to her side to please her.

Look out, An Hsiu-shih, I warn you!
You have made ready wedding robes and a gold tiara.
You think you have won a wife.
But she's marrying another man for the sake of his money! (*Exit.*)

Chou: When you've said goodbye to your mother, my dear, get in the sedan-chair and we'll set off to Chengchow.
Come, leave your bawdy-house,
To be a good man's wife!

Yin-chang:
I only fear my good man may let me down,
And I'll long to be a singsong girl again.
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II

(*Enter Chou Sheh and Yin-chang.*)

Chou: I am Chou Sheh. After riding horses all my life, I've ended up on a donkey. I practically wore out my tongue to get this woman, and managed at last to mount her in a sedan and ride out of Pienliang with her towards Chengchow. I let her travel by chair so that people wouldn't laugh at me for marrying a singsong girl. But when I saw the chair tossing up and down, I rode across to beat the chair-bearers. "How dare you make fun of me like this?" I asked. And I raised my whip to beat them. "Just carry the chair," I said. "Why toss it up and down?" "It's not us," said the bearers. "It's the lady inside." When I lifted the curtain, what do you think I saw? She had stripped herself naked and was turning somersaults! When we got home I told her to sew me a quilt; but when I went in, there was the quilt standing up as high as the bedposts. "Yin-chang! Where are you?" I shouted. "I'm in here, Chou Sheh!" she called from inside the quilt. "What are you doing in there?" "When I put in the cotton, I sewed myself in by mistake." I took up a stick to beat her. "You can beat me, Chou Sheh," she said. "But mind you don't beat our neighbour, Mrs. Wang." "A fine thing!" said I. "So you've sewn up the neighbour too!"

Yin-chang: I never did any such things!

Chou: I won't argue with you, you slut. I may beat you or kill you, but I won't sell you or let you go. I'm going out now for a drink. When I come back, I'll give you a proper hiding. (*Exit.*)

Yin-chang: Ignore good advice, and you're bound to get into trouble! When Pan-erh warned me against him, I wouldn't listen to her. But the moment I crossed his threshold he gave me fifty strokes to be going on with; since when he's been beating and cursing me day and night. Sooner or later he'll kill me at this rate. There's a pedlar in this neighbourhood named Wang, who is going to Pienliang on business. I'll ask him to take a note to my mother, so that she and Pan-erh can rescue me. If they don't come soon, they'll find me dead. Heaven knows, I'm likely to be beaten to death! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Mistress Sung, crying.*)

Mrs. Sung: I'm the mother of Yin-chang who married Chou Sheh. Yesterday Pedlar Wang brought me a letter from her in which she said: "The moment I crossed Chou's threshold he gave me fifty strokes to be going on with; since when he's been beating and cursing me day and night. At this rate I shall soon be dead. Please ask Pan-erh to come at once to save me." I'm taking this letter now to show Pan-erh, to ask her how we can rescue my unfortunate daughter. Ah, child, you'll be the death of your poor mother! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Pan-erh.*)

Pan-erh: I am Chao Pan-erh. When shall I be able to leave this wretched profession, I wonder?

For years I've been longing to marry;
But I've never heard of a man,
Willing to clear a singsong girl's debts and redeem her.
All they do is to fawn on the rich in their splendid mansions,
Not caring if they ruin the courtesans' quarters,
Floundering like fish escaping from a net,
Or flapping, if something goes wrong, like wounded pigeons.
We girls are roadside willows,
And good families will not take in courtesans;
Our lovers seem sincere to start with,
But as they grow old they forget their former sweethearts.
They take pleasure for a time,
Then swiftly go their way,
Leaving us all too quickly,
Like foam on the waves.
For them we offend our master and our mistress
Till we are as far apart as sun and moon,
Yet we let ourselves be taken in
By their ardent looks and ten thousand vows of love.
How soon all these are forgotten!

(*Enter Mistress Sung.*)

Mrs. Sung: This is her door. Let me go in. (*Greeting her.*) Pan-erh, I am so worried!

Pan-erh: Why are you crying so bitterly, mother?

Mrs. Sung: Let me tell you. Though you warned her against him, Yin-chang would marry Chou Sheh; but the moment she crossed his threshold he gave her fifty strokes to be going on with. And now he is beating her so cruelly he'll soon kill her. What shall I do, Pan-erh?

Pan-erh: Oh, Yin-chang, have you been beaten?

I remember how you arranged your marriage in secret,
And feared all might not go well.
Now my warnings have come true!
You left here never to return,
Declaring that the heartless creature loved you,
And prepared the bridal bed
In the hope that his love for you would last for ever;
But as soon as you crossed his threshold it was over!
He is beating you every day, and you want to escape;
So if I do not save you,
I shall be ashamed when I think of our former friendship.

Ah, why did she marry a man like this?

Mrs. Sung: Chou Sheh swore he would be true, Pan-erh.

Pan-erh:

All of them swear they will die before they stop loving;
All of them break their word.
You were too simple, mother,
To believe a young man who was courting a girl.

Chou Sheh is not the only liar, mother.

All of them point to heaven and swear great oaths,
But like wind that brushes your ear their vows are lost.

Mrs. Sung: But tell me, Pan-erh, how can I rescue my child?

Pan-erh: I have two silver ingots I've saved, mother. Let's use them to buy her back.

Mrs. Sung: He said he would beat her to death, but never sell her.

(Pan-erh reflects, then whispers something to Mistress Sung.)

Pan-erh: This is the only way.

Mrs. Sung: But will it work?

Pan-erh: Don't worry. May I see her letter?

(Mistress Sung passes her the note, and Pan-erh reads it.)

Pan-erh: "Yin-chang greets her sister Pan-erh and her mother. Because I wouldn't listen to good advice, I am having a terrible time. The moment I crossed his threshold he gave me fifty strokes to be going on with; since when he's been beating and cursing me day and night. I shan't be able to stand it much longer. If you come soon, you will still be able to see me; but if you don't come soon, you'll find me dead."

Ah, sister! Who told you to do such a foolish thing?

We used to share all our troubles;
Now she says she may die and become a homeless ghost,
While I do nothing to help her.

Ah, sister, didn't you say, "What's the good of being a singsong girl all my life? I'd rather marry some Chang or Li. Once I'm a proper wife, I shall die content." Mother, has the messenger left?

Mrs. Sung: Not yet.

Pan-erh: I'll write a letter to her. (*She writes.*)

I am writing this letter myself
To bid her keep my plan secret,
And to send my greetings to the rash, foolish creature —
Poor girl, she must be aching all over now!

But didn't I warn you, Yin-chang?

You needn't have suffered all this senseless beating.
Under his savage rods your red blood flows;
And he treats you like a criminal,
Till your very life is in danger.
So far from home in Chengchow,
Who is there to look after you?
You have to put up with this for no fault of your own.

Mrs. Sung (*Crying*): How can my girl stand it? Can't you think of a way to save her, Pan-erh?

Pan-erh: Don't worry, mother.

I know how painful this must be for you;
But I'm going to outwit the fellow.
I'll comb my hair,
And wear an embroidered silk gown,
With coral clasps and hibiscus knots
To bring out my slender charm;
And so with a powdered face I'll rescue her!
I've made up my mind, and mean to go through with it;
He can curse me as much as he likes when the thing is done!
This is no idle boast:
I shan't let the scoundrel slip through my delicate fingers!

Mrs. Sung: Be careful, Pan-erh, when you get there. (*She cries.*) Ah, child, you are worrying me to death!

Pan-erh:

Set your heart at rest, mother,
And smooth that wrinkled forehead;
I promise to bring her home to you safe and sound.
That dangler after women
Is like a dog or donkey;
I know he'll be up to all his tricks to please me.

When I reach Chengchow, I shall speak to him. If he's willing to divorce her, well and good. If not, I'll pinch him and stroke him, hug him and cuddle him, till he's completely distracted. I'll put sugar under his nose that he can't lick and can't eat until he divorces Yin-

chang. But when she has her divorce paper and leaves him, I'll walk out on him too!

I'll charm him into losing both of us!

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE III

(*Enter Chou Sheh and a waiter.*)

Chou:

If all that happens is fated,
Why should men toil and moil?
Yet because of wine and women
My heart is never at peace.

It wasn't to make money that I let you open this inn, waiter. But if any attractive girls come here — I don't mind whether they're prostitutes or light women — call me over at once.

Waiter: All right. But you gad about so much, how am I to find you?

Chou: Look for me in the courtesans' quarters.

Waiter: And if I can't find you there?

Chou: Then look for me in the gambling dens.

Waiter: And if I can't find you there?

Chou: Then look for me in gaol. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Chang, the errand boy, carrying cases.*)

Chang:

Nailed boots and umbrella:
My job is to deliver billets-doux.
I've seldom a moment to myself,
And even when I have, I can't enjoy it.

I'm Chang the errand boy. My job is to run errands for the singsong girls. I deliver their chits and bring back messages for them. Now Chao Pan-erh wants me to rope two chests of clothes and bedding to take to Chengchow. They're all ready, sister. Please mount your horse.

Pan-erh: Boy, am I well enough tricked out to make that fellow fall for me?

(*Chang falls to the ground.*)

Pan-erh: What are you doing?

Chang: Don't talk about *him* falling for you. I've just fallen badly myself.

Pan-erh:

Yin-chang is in such a tight corner,
She doesn't know what to do.
The silly child acted so rashly
That I shall have to use all my charms to save her.

I must wheedle that donkey and coax him,
Till he leaves his stable to trot after me,
While I act as if there's no better man in the world.
This may sound easy, but it takes an effort,
And several times I've felt like giving up;
But I pity her poor, helpless mother,
And because I've no home of my own I can sympathize with others,
Just as a drinker sympathizes with drunkards.
So I mean to spare no pains.

While I've been talking we've arrived at Chengchow. Take the horse, boy. We'll rest for a while in the willow's shade.

Chang: Very good.

Pan-erh: You know, boy, people from good families have good manners, and people from bad families bad manners.

Chang: What do you mean, sister?

Pan-erh:

A lady is always a lady,
A singsong girl is always a singsong girl.
I may mince along in my husband's house,
But I'll find it hard to keep all the household rules.
Young ladies simply dust their faces with powder,
They don't plaster it on the way we do.
Young ladies comb their hair slowly and modestly,
They don't loosen their clothes like us, and half choke themselves.
Young ladies know how to act in a seemly way,
Not like us, who run wild like monkeys locked in a room.
So in spite of my tricks and wiles,
In spite of all my fine talk,
I can't hide the fact that I'm a singsong girl.

Chang: Here's an inn, sister. Let's put up here.

Pan-erh: Call the waiter.

(*The waiter greets her.*)

Pan-erh: Clean out a room for me, boy, and put our luggage there; then go to ask Chou Sheh over. Tell him I've been waiting for him a long time.

Waiter: All right. (*He walks out and calls.*) Master Chou, where are you?

(*Enter Chou Sheh.*)

Chou: Why are you calling me, boy?

Waiter: There's a beautiful girl in the inn, who is asking for you.

Chou: Let's go! (*He greets Pan-erh.*) She certainly is a fine-looking singsong girl!

Pan-erh: So, Chou Sheh, you've come!

How clever my sister is and how lucky,
To marry the handsomest man I've ever seen,

And such a young man too!

Chou: Haven't I seen you before? Was it in that inn where you were playing a harp, and I gave you a length of brown silk?

Pan-erh: Did you see that silk, boy?

Chang: No, I never saw any brown silk.

Chou: I have it! When I left Hangchow for Shensi and was drinking in an inn, didn't I invite you to a meal?

Pan-erh: Did you see that, boy?

Chang: No, I never saw that.

Pan-erh:

You're so forgetful you don't recognize me,
Just like the man in the story.
We met by Peach Blossom Stream,
But today, when we meet again, you pretend not to know me,
While I have been thinking so fondly of you all this time!

Chou: Ah, I remember now. Aren't you Chao Pan-erh?

Pan-erh: That's right!

Chou: So you're Pan-erh! Well, well. You were the one who tried to break up my marriage. Here, waiter! Close the gate, and beat up that boy!

Chang: Don't beat me! My sister has come with silk dresses and bedding to marry you. Why should you want to beat me?

Pan-erh: Sit down, Chou Sheh, and listen to me. When you were in the southern capital, I heard everyone talk of you, but never met you. Later, after meeting you, I couldn't take a bite or sup for thinking of you. So when I heard you were going to marry Yin-chang, how could I help being angry? I wanted to marry you, Chou Sheh, yet you asked me to vouch for her!

As an elder sister, I had to pretend to be pleased,
Though I was jealous and wanted to break up your match;
You look intelligent, but you must be stupid,
If you think, because you're married, I'll give you up!

I come with carriage and horses and dowry to find you; yet for no reason at all you curse and beat us! Boy, turn the carriage round. We're going home.

Chou: If I'd known you had come to marry me, of course I wouldn't have beaten your boy.

Pan-erh: Do you mean it? Well, if you really didn't know, don't leave this inn but stay a few days with me.

Chou: I'm willing to stay a couple of years here with you, not just a few days.

(*Enter Yin-chang.*)

Yin-chang: Chou Sheh hasn't been home for several days, and now I've traced him to this inn. Let me have a look. Why, there he is, sitting with Sister Chao! You shameless lecher, you! I've followed you all

the way here. Don't try to come home, Chou Sheh! If you do, I'll take a knife and you can take a knife, and we'll fight it out between us! (*Exit.*)

Chou (*Seizing a stick*): I'll deal with you presently. If not for this lady's presence, I'd beat you to death!

Pan-erh:

I never forget a grudge either;
But instead of losing my temper
I keep my feelings to myself.
Why should you beat her here?
One night of love is worth a hundred of friendship,
So stop your angry fuming;
And if you must be rough, be rough in private.
In front of me you ought to be more careful —
What lover will beat a pretty girl to death?
He's still glaring and brandishing his cruel stick;
Other hot-tempered men don't behave like this.

That's a big stick you're holding. What will happen if you beat her to death?

Chou: If a husband kills his wife, he need not pay with his life.

Pan-erh: If you talk like that, who will dare to marry you?

I pretend not to understand, and play the coquette,
So that soon he'll have no home left,
In this way, with my charms I can rescue poor Yin-chang.

A fine friend you are, Chou Sheh! Sitting here, and sending for your wife to come and abuse me! Boy, turn the carriage round. We're going home.

Chou: Please sit down, ma'am I didn't know she was coming. May I die if I knew of it!

Pan-erh: Are you sure? That woman is no good. If you'll get rid of her at once, I'll marry you.

Chou: I'll divorce her as soon as I get home. (*Aside.*) Wait a bit, though! I've scared Yin-chang by beating her every day. If I give her a divorce, she'll dash off like a streak of smoke. And then suppose Pan-erh backs out? Won't I be losing at both ends? I mustn't do anything rash, but get Pan-erh to promise to marry me. (*To Pan-erh.*) Excuse me, ma'am, I'm as stupid as a donkey or a horse. If I go home today and divorce my wife, suppose you let me down, won't I be losing at both ends? Will you make an oath, ma'am?

Pan-erh: So you want me to make an oath? Very well, if you divorce your wife and I refuse you, may I be trampled to death by a horse in the hall, or have my legs crushed by a lampwick. See what fearful oaths I've sworn for you!

Chou: Boy, bring wine!

Pan-erh: There's no need to buy wine. I've ten bottles in my carriage.

Chou: Then I'll buy a sheep.
Pan-erh: There's no need. I have one cooked already.
Chou: That's fine. At least let me buy the red silk.
Pan-erh: There's no need. I have two lengths of red silk in my chest. What difference does it make? What's yours is mine, and what's mine is yours.

Near and dear will always be near and dear.
I give you my body as lovely as a flower,
And my youth like a tender shoot,
In order to share your distinguished career in future.
I bring a dowry too,
I don't mind risking coarse food,
And I don't ask how many other wives you have;
For I'm willing to suffer hardships,
And put up with anything to marry you.
If you go hungry, I'll share your poverty;
If you grow rich, don't discard me as a wanton!
I want you because you please me.
I want you to divorce your present wife,
But not to spend single cent on me;
I have come to you myself,
Making over my estate to your family,
Making over my good horses and furs to you,
And paying for the wedding into the bargain!

After our marriage you won't find me like Sung Yin-chang, who has no idea of wifely duties, and knows nothing about cooking, embroidery or sewing.

I'll see that you don't lose out if you divorce her!
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE IV

(*Enter Yin-chang.*)
Yin-chang: Chou Sheh may be back any time now. (*Enter Chou Sheh.*) Do you want anything to eat or drink?
Chou (*Angrily*): A fine wife you are! Here, bring me paper and brush, and I'll write you out a divorce paper. There! Now be off with you.
Yin-chang (*Takes the paper, then hesitates*): What have I done wrong that you should divorce me?
Chou: Are you still here? Get out!
Yin-chang: So you're really divorcing me! How well you talked when you wanted to marry me. You heartless brute! If you want me to go, I won't! (*Chou pushes her out.*) At last I've escaped from his clutches. Ah, Chou Sheh, what a fool you are! And Pan-erh, how

clever you are! I shall take this paper straight to the inn to my sister. (*Exit.*)

Chou: Now that slut has left; I shall go straight to the inn to marry Pan-erh. (*Walks to the inn.*) Boy, where is the girl who arrived not long ago?

Waiter: She left with her carriage just after you went out.

Chou: She must have been fooling me! Bring me the mare. I shall catch her up.

Waiter: The mare is foaling.

Chou: Bring me the mule.

Waiter: The mule needs to be shoed.

Chou: Then I'll go after her on foot.

Waiter: I'll go with you.

(*Exeunt.*)

(*Enter Pan-erh and Yin-chang.*)

Yin-chang: If not for you, sister, I could never have got away.

Pan-erh: Let's go.

I smile with pleasure now the divorce is granted.
Where is our crafty friend now?
He thinks the world of his charm and cleverness;
But he is no match for me.

Show me your divorce paper, Yin-chang. (*When Yin-chang shows her the paper Pan-erh substitutes another for it.*) When you want to marry again, this paper will be the only proof that you are free; so keep it carefully.

(*Yin-chang takes it.*)

(*Chou Sheh runs in.*)

Chou (*Shouting*): Stop, you slut! Sung Yin-chang, you are my wife! How dare you run away?

Yin-chang: You gave me a divorce paper, Chou Sheh, and drove me out.

Chou: There should be five finger-prints on the paper. How can one with four finger-prints be valid?

(*Yin-chang takes the paper out to examine it. Chou snatches it from her, stuffs it into his mouth, and chews it up.*)

Yin-chang: He's swallowing my certificate, sister!

(*Pan-erh comes back to help her.*)

Chou: You are my wife too.

Pan-erh: How can I be your wife?

Chou: You've drunk my wine.

Pan-erh: I had ten bottles of good wine in my carriage. It was none of yours.

Chou: Well, you accepted my sheep.

Pan-erh: I had my own cooked sheep. It was none of yours.

Chou: Well, you took my red silk.

Pan-erh: I had my own red silk. It was none of yours.

You can have the wine and the sheep from my carriage,
And the red silk that I brought;
But lust has made you mad
If you think you can win a wife by such a trick.

Chou: Well, you swore an oath to marry me.

Pan-erh:

That was simply to fool you.
We singsong girls live by such oaths.

If you don't believe me,

Ask all the other girls in the courtesans' quarters.
There's not one who will not take a solemn oath
Before the incense and candles,
Pointing to heaven and earth,
And swearing by god and devil.
If such oaths came true,
Why, all of us would have perished!

Yin-chang, you must go with him.

Yin-chang (*Frightened*): If I go with him, sister, he'll kill me.

Pan-erh: How could you be so thoughtless and so foolish?

Chou: I've destroyed the certificate. Can you refuse to go back with me?

(*Yin-chang looks terrified.*)

Pan-erh: Don't be afraid, sister. The one he chewed up was a forgery.

That was a copy I gave you
But here is the paper itself.

(*Chou tries to snatch it from her.*)

Even nine strong bulls couldn't get it away from me!

Chou (*Seizing the two girls*): We'll see what the law says. Come with me to the court!

(*Exeunt.*)

(*Enter the prefect of Chengchow with attendants.*)

Prefect:

My noble reputation has reached heaven;
At night no household needs to close its doors,
The peasants plough their fields after the rain,
And no dogs bark under the silver moon.

I am Li Kung-pi, prefect of Chengchow. Today I am holding a morning session to deal with certain cases. Attendants, summon the court!

Attendants: Yes, Your Honour!

(*Enter Chou Sheh with the two girls and Mistress Sung.*)

Chou (*Shouting*): Avenge my wrong, Your Honour!

Prefect: What is your complaint?

Chou: Your Honour, she has tricked me of my wife.

Prefect: Who has?

Chou: Chao Pan-erh played a trick to get my wife Sung Yin-chang away from me.

Prefect: What have you to say, woman?

Pan-erh: Sung Yin-chang was betrothed to another man, but Chou Sheh forced her to marry him. Yesterday he gave her a divorce certificate. How can he say I have tricked him of his wife?

A cunning scoundrel who counts on his wealth,
The false-hearted wretch won't tread the path of virtue.
Yin-chang was betrothed, but he forced her to be his wife!
Bold, wicked, lecherous man,
He does many lawless things wherever he goes.
But here is the deed of divorce. Please read it, Your Honour!

(*Enter An.*)

An: Just now Pan-erh sent word that Yin-chang has received a divorce certificate, and that I should appeal at once to the court to get her back. Here is the court. Let me cry out that I have been wronged.

Prefect: Who is making such a noise outside? Bring him here.

(*An attendant brings An in.*)

Attendant: Here is the plaintiff, Your Honour.

Prefect: Against whom have you brought a charge?

An: My name is An Hsiu-shih. I was engaged to Sung Yin-chang, but Chou Sheh of Chengchow forced her to be his wife. I beg Your Honour to pass judgment.

Prefect: Who was your guarantor?

An: Chao Pan-erh.

Prefect: Chao Pan-erh, who was Sung Yin-chang's betrothed?

Pan-erh: This scholar An.

He has studied the classics ever since his boyhood;
He's a very learned scholar;
And we were close neighbours, living in one village.
She accepted his gifts and trinkets,
And was properly pledged to him.

Prefect: Let me ask you: did you vouch for her?

Pan-erh: Yes, Your Honour.

I vouched for her, and can bear witness for her;
Yet this wife-snatcher here was up to all his tricks.
His was no true marriage but open dissipation.
Today we appeal to Your Honour,
To let Yin-chang go back to her rightful husband!

Prefect: Chou Sheh, Sung Yin-chang has her own husband. How could you claim she was your wife? If not for your father's sake, I would send you to gaol. Listen, all of you, to my verdict. Chou Sheh shall be given sixty strokes with the bastinado, and in future shall be liable to labour conscription like a common citizen. Sung Yin-chang shall

go back to marry the scholar An. Chao Pan-erh and the others may go home.

This trouble was caused by the mother's avarice;
Chao Pan-erh made all things clear;
Chou Sheh was convicted of gross impropriety;
But the scholar An and his wife are reunited.

(*They kowtow to thank the prefect.*)

Pan-erh:

Now all has been explained to His Honour,
And the ill-assorted couple part company;
Do not say that, once married, they should remain together;
But let the true love-birds come together again!

(*Exeunt.*)

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF ART AND LITERATURE IN THE BUILDING OF SOCIALISM

CHOU YANG

(Speech made on September 25, 1956 at the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China)

Our artists and writers have kept in close touch with the masses, and endeavoured to depict in their works the life and struggles of the labouring people in this new era. Remarkable progress has been made in art, literature and the cinema. The traditional forms of opera, music, dancing and painting, which have found great favour with the people, have been extensively developed and given new life. Mass amateur artistic and literary activities are being vigorously promoted throughout the country. New forces continue to emerge in art and literature. This popularization, or rather real democratization, of art and literature is unprecedented in the cultural history of our country.

It should be said in appreciation of our artists and writers that they have achieved a good deal in their creative work and won the praise of the people. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that our artistic and literary works of today fall far short of the people's demands. The masses are dissatisfied with mediocre, stereotyped and made-to-formula stuff and want our artists and writers to produce a greater number of really good works that can deeply move the readers' hearts.

As a result of the historic victory of our people's revolution and the rise of the Asian and African countries, the people of the whole world are paying increasing attention to the art and culture of China and the East with their venerable traditions. They entertain great expectations of our country's efforts in the cultural sphere, and hope that we shall contribute to the development of world culture by producing new works distinguished by our national characteristics.

So we must give all the positive factors in artistic and cultural circles full play, to arouse even greater enthusiasm for creative work among our artists and writers, and thereby usher in a new and prosperous era of Chinese art and culture.

The Party's Central Committee has put forward the policy of "letting flowers of many kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend." This

is to encourage free emulation in artistic and literary creation and in scientific research, to encourage artists and writers to give full play to their talents and special abilities to the end of jointly creating a new socialist culture.

This policy has met with a warm response in cultural and artistic circles throughout the country. They believe that it was necessary and put forward at an opportune time. They are of the opinion that, after being steeled and tempered in the series of revolutionary struggles waged since the liberation, and after taking part in the struggle against Hu Feng's counter-revolutionary clique in artistic and literary circles, the broad masses of artists and writers have now become more closely united on the basis of a common idea of serving the people, and this has created optimum conditions for carrying out the policy of "letting flowers of many kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend."

As Lenin pointed out, socialist literature is a literature which is really free. In our country, writers can publicly expose in their works the crimes committed by imperialism, capitalism and the enemies of peace; they can sing the praises of the greatness of national independence and the people's revolution, applaud the friendship of peoples of different countries, and propagate the lofty ideals of communism. They can also boldly subject to criticism all the backward things still found in the new society and say their say. They can visit factories, villages, the armed forces — in fact they can go anywhere they wish, and wherever they go, they are received with affection and respect by the masses. We shall never forget that under the Kuomintang reactionary regime our country's first group of writers of proletarian literature paid the price for this freedom with their blood. Even today, in certain capitalist countries of the so-called "free world," how many progressive writers and artists are still waging an arduous struggle for this freedom!

Our writers have of course also fully realized that it is only when they thoroughly understand their own era and the people's life, wishes and demands, only when their works can give a true picture of this era and can be understood and loved by the masses — only then can they make the fullest and most fruitful use of their freedom of creation. If a writer turns his back on reality and stands aloof from the people, then his "freedom of creation" is only a sort of subjective, illusory "freedom" which is extremely insignificant; we have no use at all for such "freedom." The great contribution made by Comrade Mao Tse-tung in his *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Art and Literature* lies in the fact that he has pointed out to artists and writers the only correct way for their creative work, and shown that artists and writers of the new era can find real freedom for developing their creative gifts only by merging with the masses of the people.

The socialist revolution has cleared the way for creative labour of every kind. But doctrinairism and sectarianism in art and literature,

as well as the summary and caustic way of dealing with artistic and literary work, which have often appeared in our ranks, have seriously restricted the creative freedom of artists and writers, and formed the chief obstacle to carrying out the policy of "letting flowers of many kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend."

Doctrinairism is the bane of originality in art. Only by breaking free from dogmas can art and literature achieve great vitality. The May Fourth Movement for a new culture overthrew the rule of the archaic literary language and of the old stereotyped literary works and old dogmas. A new situation, which was nothing less than a literary revolution, was created, and for the first time in our literary history a new democratic, socialist literature made its appearance. Carrying on the revolutionary tradition of the May Fourth Movement, the "Rectification Campaign" and the *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Art and Literature* in their turn destroyed the cult of foreign dogmas that appeared in artistic and literary circles after the May Fourth Movement. Thus, on the basis of the new concept of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers, our artistic and literary works could nourish themselves at the source of our fine national traditions and our rich folk art and literature, and become more closely integrated with the masses. This brought about a change in our art and literature.

Today, doctrinairism in our art and literature chiefly manifests itself in vulgarizing and over-simplifying the Marxist view of aesthetics, and putting fetters and constraints on artists and writers by laying down all sorts of rigid "taboos and commandments" for creative work. Doctrinairism, conspiring with sectarianism, has harmed the development of our art and literature.

Doctrinairism, sectarianism, or the summary and over-simplified treatment of artistic and literary productions, all have their historical and social roots. At the same time, they are also closely linked with certain views on some important questions in art and literature, such as the question of the subordination of art and literature to politics, the question of socialist realism, the question of inheriting and developing our traditions, etc. We must clear up mistaken views on these questions.

Our art and literature have developed in close connection with the people's revolutionary struggles. In the struggles of the past when the situation was tense, it was required that artistic and literary activity be co-ordinated with urgent tasks at a definite time and place, so as to produce an immediate political agitational effect among the masses. This requirement was absolutely correct, and credit should be given to the militant part art and literature played at that juncture. Art and literature should indeed serve the political struggle of the moment. Lu Hsun correctly pointed out: "The militant author who resists and struggles for the present is really working for the future as well as the present, for if he lets the present slip by, he also forfeits the future." Lu Hsun, however, never approved of literature written in the style of slogans,

because such literature has no political appeal. In a masterly manner, his own famous essays reflected the revolutionary struggles of his time and gave fresh impetus to such struggles; and at the same time, they are in themselves literature of permanent value. Lu Hsun found the subject-matter as well as the artistic form that suited him in serving the revolutionary struggle.

Today, to say that art and literature are at the service of politics means that they serve the cause of building socialism in our country and of safeguarding peace in the world. The field where art and literature can exert their influence is now much wider. To render service in this great age, writers and artists may make their choice from a variety of subject-matters and adopt various artistic forms.

The revolution in our country has opened up a limitless world for artistic and literary creation. Our life is incomparably rich. Art and literature should reflect it vividly and in diverse ways. Life itself demands this. Artistic and literary works should be rich in content and beautiful in form. Under the circumstances of the intense struggles of the past, as long as artistic works played a certain role in revolutionary propaganda, even though such works were rather simple in content and crude in form, people were not hypercritical. Today, however, the situation is different. People are demanding that artistic and literary works should be richer in content and more varied in form. It is the task of art and literature to portray real life by means of vivid images so as to help people know the world, and mould their character by appealing to their feelings and emotions. Our art and literature should aim at imbuing the people with the spirit of communism, fostering their fine sense of beauty and setting the aesthetic ideals of the new age. To require our art and literature to serve politics does not mean that we should lay down hard and fast rules as to what or how artists and writers should create. In the choice of subject-matter and form, they should be given an ample measure of freedom. Although it is wrong to emphasize form at the expense of content, neglect of stylistic beauty and variety may impoverish a work of art and make it monotonous. One should always strive to integrate the political content and the artistic quality of a work of art into a consistent whole.

We hold that socialist realism is the new direction for the development of the art of mankind. Soviet literature has exerted a profound revolutionary influence, and has moved the hearts and won the love of readers throughout the world. Its achievements have been universally acknowledged. Socialist realism is the most advanced creative method, and it is the method we advocate.

Writers and artists all over the world are uniting themselves for the common cause of safeguarding world peace and developing art. This is not simply a political co-operation, but also a kind of association for learning from each other and exchanging experience in creative activities.

Herald of Spring (30 cm. × 46.5 cm.) Woodcut by WU FAN

It is quite possible for us to assimilate what is useful from different trends of art in the world. We must respect the achievements that other people have made in their search for new methods of expression, and learn from their experience of success or failure. We should not indiscriminately dismiss all attention to form as formulism and condemn it. Correct creative methods greatly help writers to understand and present reality more profoundly. But such methods should be adopted by writers of their own accord and as a result of their own explorations and study; they must not by any means be forced on writers. It will do nothing but harm if socialist realism is regarded as a dogma or a cut-and-dried formula to be applied in season and out of season. Our new art and literature should include various styles and trends in the portrayal of life and countenance the co-existence of different methods of artistic creation. Socialist realists should make a point of uniting with all patriotic artists and writers in a common effort to create our country's art and literature. Sectarianism is incompatible with socialist realism. Only through free emulation among various styles and trends in artistic creations can socialist art and literature develop in a sound and healthy way.

Some people, in accepting realism, refuse to give romanticism its due. There is no reason for this. We love all great works of art, whether they are realist or romanticist. Many outstanding realistic works in the past are imbued with a spirit of fervent romanticism, while many outstanding romantic works often contain a rich vein of realism. A number of such examples can be found in the history of our own literature. In depicting life, our classical artists and writers seldom indulged in photographic, naturalistic representation of reality but devoted themselves to bringing out the essence and the inner spirit of things. Their works are full of bold fantasy and imagination. Socialist art and literature must be rich in ideals and must to a high degree combine truthfulness and revolutionary fervour. Revolutionary romanticism is what we need. But we have often ignored this kind of romanticism and, consequently, many works are particularly lacking in imagination, poetic feeling and fervour.

It is entirely correct to advocate the portrayal of the workers, peasants and soldiers and the creative depiction of types of the foremost people of today. But we also advocate variety of subject-matter. Writers have full freedom to choose whatever subject they like. Some writers have not fully grasped the life of the new era, and, in depicting workers and peasants, often indulge in generalities and abstractions without bringing out the infinite variety of individuality among the masses, or stop at mere description of their outward appearances without probing into their thoughts and emotions. Of course, it is no easy matter to portray characters of the new era, because this has never been attempted before. We should give writers the greatest possible encouragement in this respect. To portray people of the new socialist era in their individuality is one of the most important tasks in literary and artistic creation. Some people,

however, have taken an extreme position. They only want to permit writers to describe workers, peasants and soldiers, to deal with progressive persons and things, and furthermore, the progressive characters are often presented according to abstract moral concepts and not according to truth of life. Thus, the characters in many works have neither life nor individuality. The complex realities in the struggle between the old and the new become blurred. Contradictions, difficulties and defects in actual life are slurred over. Some writers have even lost the courage to criticize backward things. Such whitewashing and over-simplification in portraying real life has robbed literary and artistic works of their truthfulness, and readers have no faith in such works.

Socialist artists and writers should be good at praising and bold in criticizing.

Socialist art and literature must have their own national form; and they have indeed developed on the basis of their own national tradition. The policy summed up in the words "let flowers of many kinds bloom side by side, weed through the old to let the new emerge" applies not only to the theatre but to all branches of art and literature.

We must accept the inheritance of our fine national tradition in art and literature. At the same time, for the sake of our own artistic and literary creation and development, we must assimilate what is progressive and useful in the art and literature of other countries. It is as wrong to reject national tradition as to refuse to learn from foreign countries. But whether in succeeding to our tradition or in learning from foreign countries, we must adopt a critical attitude. As Comrade Mao Tse-tung has pointed out: "In art and literature, uncritical appropriation and imitation of the ancients and of foreigners represents the most sterile and harmful artistic and literary doctrinairism." These remarks are still of great significance to us today.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, we have done a good deal and achieved not a little in preserving and promoting national culture, in editing and publishing works of classical art and literature, in assessing and making a careful study of folk art and literature, in popularizing the art of the national minorities, and particularly in reforming and developing various kinds of traditional opera.

But our work in this field has only just begun. The tendency to belittle, reject or deal roughly with our national tradition remains the chief error in artistic and literary circles today.

In the heads of some comrades there is only room for Western culture but no room for our national culture. This springs partly from a blind worship of foreign countries and partly from a lack of knowledge and understanding of their own national heritage, which leads to indifference and disrespect towards it. My own understanding of our national heritage has gradually deepened only with the passage of time. In the eyes of the above-mentioned comrades, our traditional art has become obsolete

and cannot meet today's needs. They either reject the old tradition root and branch and feel no interest in learning from our national heritage, or drag in discordant foreign elements when they are adopting and rejuvenating national artistic forms. In their creative work they do not introduce foreign experience by assimilation or unite what is foreign with what is Chinese into a natural organic whole, but imitate without mature judgment and patch things together in an incoherent way. They do not use the technique learned from foreign countries to rejuvenate and enrich the characteristics and styles of our own art, but try to replace Chinese characteristics and styles with exotic ones. Obviously, this is not only opposed to the habits of artistic appreciation of the masses, but is detrimental to the cause of our art and literature.

To accept a tradition does not mean, of course, to keep it absolutely intact, or to follow it uncritically. Conservatism and the tendency to shut ourselves in can only make tradition stagnate and decline. We can become the true heirs of tradition only by creatively developing it. But this development should be gradual and follow its own laws. To introduce reforms is emphatically not to disrupt history. On questions of art and culture, impetuosity and roughness have the most baneful effects.

In the reform of traditional opera, it is absolutely necessary and correct to adapt and re-edit old plays from the new point of view, and introduce appropriate innovations in stagecraft. Our traditional opera is a living legacy among the people, with a flavour that is both classical and popular. It has a strong kinship with the people; its original and exquisite acting has evoked the wonder of the world. Thanks to skilful adaptation and polishing, it has cast off its feudal, backward traits, and now reveals more clearly and vividly its original popular and artistic character. The recent success of the *kunchu* opera *Fifteen Strings of Cash* can be taken as an example. This play faithfully reflects historical conditions and has an actual educational significance, while its production preserves the original superb technique. But some people, in adapting and re-editing old libretti, depart from historical reality, and modernize the ancients by clumsily introducing present-day political concepts and terms into the speeches of historical personages. This is an anti-historical tendency. We have already severely criticized this wrong tendency. In making innovations in stagecraft, some people have mechanically imposed the styles and formulas of Western opera and modern theatre on our traditional opera much to the detriment of the latter's characteristic style. This is also a questionable practice.

In the course of their long historical development, the art and literature of our country have formed their own independent styles and characteristics; they have also conformed to their own laws of development. Some of our comrades have the mistaken notion that only foreign artistic techniques are scientific, whereas the Chinese techniques are "unscientific." The co-ordination of singing, dancing and acting is a distinguishing feature

of our opera, but it has been regarded as "backward" because it departs from the prevailing practice of Western opera; the symbolic acting on the traditional stage has also been despised as unrealistic. Again, the brush and ink technique in Chinese painting is dismissed as "unscientific," because it is different from the technique of Western pictorial art. We value science, and we value the modern cultural achievements of the West, but we must not blankly consider all things Chinese unscientific, nor should we mechanically borrow from the ready store of artistic experience of foreign countries. We should scientifically study the experience of our own country in artistic creation and find out the laws and methods peculiar to it. To give a scientific and systematic account of the rich store of experience in our artistic creation is a responsibility not to be evaded by our writers and artists. In order to sort out and study our national legacy in a planned way, we need to adopt a number of essential practical measures. We haven't done nearly enough in this respect.

To develop our traditional artistic forms, it is also necessary to transplant new artistic forms from abroad. It is incorrect to regard the new art and literature produced since the May Fourth Movement as importations from abroad, not indigenous to Chinese soil, and to see them as opposed to our own tradition. As a matter of fact foreign forms, once they have struck root in our soil, gradually become our own. Our people have always been good at learning from foreign countries. Quite early in our history our civilization was influenced, to our advantage, by India and the Arabic countries. Later our people learned many things from Western countries. Russian and Soviet literature has left the deepest impression on our generation and conferred the greatest benefits on it. We should continue to make further efforts to learn from the advanced art and literature of the Soviet Union.

Answering the needs created by the new life in our country and as a result of the ever-growing cultural exchange between China and other countries, we shall assimilate the fine cultural achievements of the rest of the world with ever greater success and more abundantly. To study and learn from the cultural and artistic legacies of countries in the East is an especially important task.

Our translators have done a useful job in introducing the culture of other lands. From now on we should have still better plans to train translators with good mastery of foreign languages and high cultural attainment. It is wrong to belittle translation work.

Both inheriting what is our own and learning from what comes from abroad are intended to help the creation of our new art and literature. Comrade Mao Tse-tung once said: "Succeeding to a legacy and learning from examples should never take the place of our own original creative activity." The new realities of life require the creation of a great number of new artistic images and new artistic forms. We should contribute new artistic and literary creations distinguished by our national characteristics

to the cultural treasure-house of the world. Only such art and literature are welcome to our own people and the people of the rest of the world.

Before I close, I wish to say a few words on the Party's leadership in artistic and literary activities.

It is wrong to lay such an excessive stress on the special nature of art and literature as to regard their development as an entirely spontaneous process, which must not be placed under the leadership of the Communist Party and the People's Government. This approach, based upon ignorance of the popular character of our Party and our state, will only lead art and literature to cut themselves adrift from the people and even become antagonistic to the people.

But it must be pointed out that there are defects and mistakes in the method and working style of our leadership in art and literature. We have often exercised leadership here by simply issuing orders or imperiously interfered where we ought not to. This is particularly so in some places where the production of local operas has been interfered with in an unscrupulous manner. Some of our comrades have even gone so far as to replace policy by personal caprice, accepting or rejecting works of art and literature according to their personal likes or dislikes. This sort of thing puts obstacles in the way of the development of art and literature.

The Party's guidance aims, first and foremost, at helping artists and writers to realize their responsibility to their country and people, to live always among the masses, to take a firm stand of serving the people, to equip themselves with progressive ideas and the Marxist-Leninist world outlook, and to struggle against the various tendencies in art and literature which are against the people and against socialism.

In order to further strengthen unity in artistic and literary circles, we must overcome all forms of sectarianism. Some artists and writers of the new trends despise artists who are working along the traditional lines or those specializing in folk art, and some artists and writers who are Party members have no respect for their non-Party colleagues. This is a manifestation of the most harmful sectarianism today, and must be overcome in the very first place. Artists and writers in our Party should be modest and willing to learn from those outside the Party. Modesty and studiousness should always be our watchwords.

Artists' and writers' unions should become organizations which unite and include all artists and writers who take the stand of the people, should make efforts to extend the ranks of art and literature, should pay attention to bringing up fresh forces, and should train artists and writers from among the people of the national minorities. Journals of art and literature should publish works of different styles and hold free discussions of different views. No organization or publication should become a tool by which a few people can exercise exclusive control.

Questions in art and literature should be settled chiefly by the artists and writers through their own creative work and their own discussions.

We must develop sound and correct literary criticism and ensure that artists and writers have sufficient time and the necessary conditions for their artistic activity. We should take various concrete steps, including the provision of the necessary material conditions, to enable artistic creation to prosper and flourish, to thoroughly implement the policy of "letting flowers of many kinds blossom," so that artists and writers can develop all their latent creative abilities and achieve more splendid successes. Our artists and writers, I am confident, can meet the demands of this great age and will not belie the expectations of the Party and the people.

Chronicle *

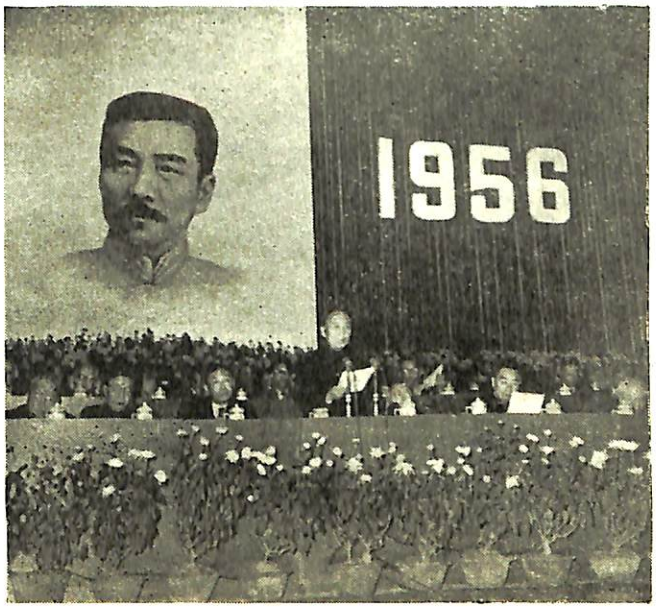
The Twentieth Anniversary of the Death of Lu Hsun

October 19, 1956 was the 20th anniversary of the death of Lu Hsun. When the great writer passed away in 1936, the Chinese people wished to honour him by giving him a state burial, but at that time, under the rule of the reactionaries, their wish could not be fulfilled. Instead, Lu Hsun's funeral procession passed under the hostile eyes of police with fixed bayonets.

Today, the revolution for which Lu Hsun laboured all his life has triumphed. In memory of his great contribution to the revolution, the Chinese people removed his remains to a new burial place in Hongkew Park, Shanghai, a place where he was wont to go for a stroll. There an immense memorial, inscribed in Chairman Mao Tse-tung's calligraphy: "The Tomb of Lu Hsun," has been erected in the middle of a granite enclosure.

On this day, memorial meetings were held in many public institutions, colleges and high schools in all the big cities throughout the country, where writers, professors and teachers, and leading figures in propaganda work spoke on Lu Hsun's writings and what to learn from him. All the periodicals and newspapers issued special numbers or had special pages devoted to articles and pictures describing his life and work.

In Peking, about 1,500 writers, artists, critics and representatives of the people of all walks of life in the capital, and friends from abroad, gathered together in solemn commemoration. Banks of chrysanthemums



(Lu Hsun's favourites) in perfect flower decorated the platform where Premier Chou En-lai sat with members of the presidium and more than thirty foreign writers from 18 countries who had come to commemorate Lu Hsun with the Chinese people. Behind hung a large portrait of Lu Hsun.

In his opening speech, Kuo Mo-jo, Chairman of the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists and President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, compared the accomplishments of this great thinker, revolutionary and writer to the great figures of Europe's literary renaissance. Lu Hsun, he said, was the pioneer and founder of China's new revolutionary literature and made a great original contribution to our national culture. He was a truth-seeking historian, a teacher who practised what he preached, an internationalist who hoped for the liberation of all mankind. All Chinese cultural workers, he said, must take him as their model and emulate his selfless and creative spirit in everything they do.

Mao Tun, Vice-Chairman of the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists and Chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers, speaking on the theme "Lu Hsun—From Revolutionary Democracy to Communism," dealt with the changes in Lu Hsun's thinking during the different periods of his life, and with his writings, his study of national culture and his great contribution to the development of thought and literature in China.

Lu Ting-yi, head of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, also spoke. He said that revolutionary writers and artists must learn from Lu Hsun how to take by storm the enemies' positions and break up their ranks; they must also learn from him how to unite with comrades and friends. He said, "We hope that all old and new writers and artists in China will unite together under the watchword 'Patriotism!' We should unite with the writers and artists of all Asia, Africa and Latin America under the watchword 'Oppose colonialism!' We should unite with writers and artists of all countries in the world under the watchword 'Preserve peace!' "

Foreign guests also spoke at the meeting on the fame of Lu Hsun's writings among their peoples. They were Boris Polevoy from the U.S.S.R., U Thien Pe Myint from

Interior of the Lu Hsun Memorial Hall, Peking

Burma, Ivo Andric from Yugoslavia, Ahmed Ali from Pakistan, Pramoedua Ananta Toer from Indonesia, Stelio Stasse from Albania, Olgreid Wojtesiewicz from Poland, John Sommerfield from Britain, Yoshiro Nagayo from Japan, Nikola Marinov from Bulgaria, Han Sul Yak from Korea, Aurel Mihale from Rumania, Phan Khoi from Viet-Nam, Dymphna Cusack from Australia, Malaparte from Italy, Choitilpavya Lkhamsuren from Mongolia, Somlyo George from Hungary and Zary Stefan from Czechoslovakia.

The tributes paid by these speakers from so many different countries bring home the fact that Lu Hsun does not belong only to China, but is one of the great men who belong to the whole world.

Commemoration meetings went on for the next two days in Peking. Writers Pa Jen and Tang Tao, the critic Chen Yung, the poet Tsang Ke-chia and Professors Wang Yao, Li Chang-chih and Jen Chi-yu delivered lectures on Lu Hsun and his contribution in carrying forward our national cultural tradition and in forming the new literary movement. The Czechoslovak authoress Berta Krebsova gave a lecture entitled, "Lu Hsun and His *Wild Grass*"; and the Korean writer Han Sul Yak spoke on Lu Hsun's influence on Korean literature.

In Peking, Shanghai and his birthplace, Shaohsing, in Chekiang, the newly-repaired Lu Hsun memorial halls were opened, and Lu Hsun's manuscripts, first editions, books, photographs, personal belongings and other exhibits of his life were on display, and also translations of his works in various foreign languages. Visitors to the memorial hall in his birthplace found mementoes of the life of the writer in his childhood. Tens of thousands of his admirers visited these places and were helped to understand better the greatness and militancy of his life, and with that understanding, the stimulus to emulate his fighting spirit.

Such contents are a reflection of the wealth of cultural thought left us by Lu Hsun. Chinese academic circles have gone ahead with the arrangement and study of this wealth consistently, even under persecution by reactionary rulers. Many experts and scholars have spent their energies and produced valuable treatises and papers. Since the founding of New China, these studies have been even more profoundly carried out.

The People's Literature Publishing House has set up a special editorial board headed by Feng Hsueh-feng, Lu Hsun s comrade-in-arms, to go over all the original manuscripts, first editions, etc., for the authoritative new ten-volume edition of Lu Hsun's complete works. The board is now working on a full biography of Lu Hsun with a table of chronological events.

The Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences also attaches great importance to the study of Lu Hsun and his works. Ho Chi-fang, Vice-Director of the Institute, and Chen Yung, literary critic and a research member of the Institute, have both written treatises on Lu Hsun and his work. They are now engaged in a study of his literary thoughts and the realism, national form and artistic approach that characterize his essays and stories.

Lu Hsun left us 20 years ago but he is not dead; he lives for ever in the hearts of the Chinese people and in the hearts of all progressive mankind. His spirit will for ever encourage the Chinese people to march victoriously forward on the road of socialist construction. His spirit will inspire the people of colonial countries to even more victorious advances in their struggle for national independence and world peace.

Exhibition of Traditional Painting

At the gallery of the Union of Chinese Artists, which is located close to Peking's busy Wang Fu Ching Street, the Second National Exhibition of Traditional Chinese Painting came to a successful end on July 23 of last year. From the day of its opening on July 11, it had attracted many visitors including foreign residents.

The halls of the gallery showed a rich display of some 260 works which had been carefully chosen out of nearly one thousand paintings by a committee of well-known artists. Space did not permit the whole lot to be shown, but the pictures selected as representative gave proof of the progress made since the first national exhibition of art in the traditional style was held in 1949. Through the medium of ink and water colours the artists are able to give realistic and charming portrayals of the new life and new people in our country; but they also create beautiful landscapes, they paint flowers and animals, they give us visualizations of an-

cient folk tales. In the scope of themes and variety of individual technique this exhibition was without parallel. What called for special attention was how competently these paintings in the traditional manner were mirroring the life of our times.

Old man Chi Pai-shih exhibited peonies that in their different shades of black ink were even prettier than if they had been in bright colours. Yu Fei-an had a tree of white Chinese magnolias on a background of dark green which made the flowers stand out very well. There were several other paintings of magnolias in the exhibition, on white or grey background, with varying effect. On Ho Fang-hua's "Two Chickens," shown in the last issue of this magazine, the artist did not paint in any earth. But the chickens seem to be exerting themselves so much in scratching around that our imagination supplies the earth quite readily. "Mountains in the Clouds" by Wu Hu-fan brings the grandeur and beauty of the mountains of South China close to the viewer: the mountains standing green in the distance, clouds gathering around them half-way up, the peaks veiled in mist, and a waterfall rushing down into the valley.

In recent years, besides adapting the traditional style for descriptions of the new China, Chinese painters have scored an important advance by seeing life at close range and by getting away from the habit of slavish imitation of the ancient painters. They have shown how erroneous the saying was that made Chinese painting suitable only for landscapes, flowers and birds, but not for the portrayal of real life. Many painters have searched deeply into the new events of New China and then portrayed this rich life through the medium of traditional artistry.

Li Hsiung-tsai's "Flood Prevention at Wuhan" is a concrete example. It describes the heroism with which, in 1954, hundreds of thousands of people in Wuhan threw themselves into the struggle of fighting back the surging flood of the Yangtse River. The painter participated personally in the struggle and was thus able to collect a great deal of material; then, in one and a half year's work, he put down this epic on a scroll nearly eighty feet long.

"No Matter How, I Want to Join the Co-op!" is a successful attempt by Tang Wen-hsuan to convey through the traditional technique the feelings of peasants working individually who finally see the advantages of co-operation.

The exhibition also showed that many artists who used to work in other genres have joined the ranks of those painting in the traditional style. They have developed great feeling for this medium and are beginning to show a good grasp of it. While they bring new ideas to it, they are, in turn, enriched by it. There was an interesting use of water colours and ink by painters who usually paint oils, like Wu Tso-jen in his "Herding Camels," and "Portrait" by Li Hu.

Some young artists who had hitherto expressed themselves in sketches are now joining the ranks of the traditional painters. They have already produced some rather promising works. Outstanding among these lively young people is Fang Tseng-hsien with his "Every Grain Means Hard Work."

Although in variety of subject-matter and style this exhibition was far above the works displayed at the First National Exhibition of Traditional Painting and the traditional paintings shown at the Second National Exhibition of Fine Arts, its weak point was shown to be painting the human figure, in which respect nothing at the exhibition was equal to the excellent landscapes, flowers and birds.

After Peking, the exhibition is being put on in Shanghai where a hall big enough to display all of the one thousand paintings mentioned above is available.

Controversy over a Poet

For over a year now—since August 1955, in fact—there has been a long-drawn out argument over the work of a poet who lived in the time of the Five Dynasties (907-960 A.D.). The literary supplement of Peking *Kwangming Daily* started it, and the *People's Daily* and various literary magazines joined in. Those taking part ranged from research workers and literary critics to the ordinary reader. The argument still continues, and as yet there is no sign of general agreement. It is an interesting indication of the degree of interest shown in our literary heritage by the Chinese intellectuals.

The poet under discussion is Li Yu, the last emperor of a small feudal kingdom, the Southern Tang. He is generally known by his title, Li Hou Chu—"Li, the Last Emperor." In 974, when he was thirty-eight, his country was overrun and conquered by the emperor of the Sung Dynasty. Li Yu was taken prisoner, and lingered in prison under degrading conditions for four years, until finally the reigning emperor had him poisoned.

Not much of his work has survived. About sixty poems are extant, of which some forty odd are in *tzu* form. He excelled in his use of the *tzu* verse form — a kind of formal lyric with lines of varying length which lends itself to musical settings. Less rigid than Tang Dynasty verse the *tzu* was the most popular verse form in Sung times.

Most of Li Yu's poems deal with the life of the imperial court, love—particularly as it affected women, and his sorrows caused by the loss of his kingdom. The different vein, and the variation in style of the verses written after his imprisonment, as compared with those written before, reflects his experience, first as an emperor and then as a prisoner.

The questions raised in the discussion were very interesting. "How far can his love poems, in his early works, be looked upon as expressions of true love?" All the way, say some. Not at all, say others.

> You understand me,
> Your pity moves me,
> Only Heaven can tell how much
> adore you.

This, surely, is genuine emotion. And as surely his poems on the death of his empress are an avowal of most moving grief. But the dissidents claim that this loose-living dissolute emperor could not possibly have known what true love was, adducing in evidence those lines of his which glorify empty coquettishness. Love and lust cannot exist together, they say. Others say that Li Yu was certainly a rake, but can rakes have no genuine feelings? Surely one can tell which of his poems were passing fancies and which mirrored deeper emotion. As far as his attitude to women was concerned, this group maintains, we must also remember the general atmosphere and manners of his time, when polygamy was normal for the ruling class, and Li Yu would naturally have taken the convention for granted. Must that preclude a feeling of real love?

Another point of argument is about the validity of his patriotic sentiments. Some say that he showed a great love for his country, and quote such examples as:

> In this bright moonlight
> I cannot bear to look back on my
> ruined motherland.

And

> O mountains and rivers of my land!
> So quickly lost, and now how hard to
> regain.

Surely, in these poems, Li Yu broke away from the normal attitude of a feudal ruler and expressed the feelings of the people.

But others say that a different interpretation can be put on such phrases as "motherland" and "my land." They see them as mere catchwords, as words which mask only his desire to return to his licentious life as an emperor. When he had power, did he show any regard for his country or his people? How could his basic attitude change, by the chance of his being a prisoner?

Yet, runs the argument, if these works are not the expression of patriotism, how does it come about that they won the hearts of the people throughout the centuries? How can one account for the fact that during the Japanese occupation of North China young people found patriotic inspiration in reading these poems? Some give the consummate craftsmanship that is in them as an answer. That attracts the reader. But can art in itself, however perfect, arouse such feelings as patriotism in a people?

There is another explanation given. Perhaps Li Yu's popularity is to be explained by the universality of the sorrow and misery that he expresses. Such feelings were roused in him by quite different circumstances from those of the ordinary person but they can be applied by anyone to the misery of life in the old days. Li Yu sorrows over having lost his throne and the material comforts which went with it. That would not be the cause of the ordinary reader's sorrow, but he could ignore the motive of the writer and apply the poems to his own life. The "sorrows that sweep eastward like spring floods" can be the sorrows of a king who has lost his kingdom, or the sorrows of a peasant mourning the loss of a lamb. Similarly, the "sculptured pillars and jade columns" could be either literally about a king's palace or taken to mean anything of beauty in the reader's own experience. Taken in this way, it may be that the universality of the emotions expressed by Li Yu can be appreciated by the reader without having to refer them to the actual circumstances which aroused them in the author.

In the early stages of the discussion, the critics tended to overstress the importance of the political career of Li Yu and his ancestors. Some listed a few things he did which seemed beneficial to the people and attempted to conclude from these that his verse was patriotic. The contrary side maintained that other historical facts showed that he had no patriotic sentiments at all. But as the discussion went on, it was more and more realized that study of an author's life, however interesting and rewarding, can never fully explain, nor take the place of, a study of his actual work.

Discussion also took place on Li Yu as a craftsman of poetry, especially at the *tzu* form. In general there was complete agreement on his consummate skill in typifying the moving features of human life, and his ability to appreciate and express the complex, swiftly-changing moods of the human heart. The language he uses is polished and subtle, yet the ordinary reader can easily understand it. But the range of sentiment expressed is narrow, and the subject-matter limited. His earlier verses treat almost entirely of courtesans and the imperial household. His later poems, though dealing with a slightly larger range, again tend to be limited in expression. The readers find many "dreams," "sorrows," "tears," and so forth in his tragic lines but are unable to see in them the depths that one expects to find in a poet's inner life.

Li Yu is a complex figure, in fact, and the problems involved in assessing his verse and his place in Chinese literature cannot be easily solved. Many basic problems are involved here—for example, the place of such works and other classics in the light of Marxism-Leninism.

This particular discussion, which is far from ended, is only the beginning of many such; and as the discussions develop, they will undoubtedly help the reader to better understand and appreciate the works of Li Yu and other classics.

The First National Music Festival

On the evening of September 1, 1956, the Concert Hall in Chungshan Park, Peking, had an air of festive anticipation. Three thousand musicians from all parts of the country had gathered there to launch the first national music festival in China's history. On the first night the programme —vocal and orchestral—was richly varied and proved to be a very pleasing application of the principle: "Let flowers of many kinds blossom!"

The festival went on for twenty-four days during which time seven hundred musical items were presented at nearly a hundred concerts.

The strength of the long-standing musical tradition of the Chinese nation and Chinese folk music made a great impact on the minds of the audience. When grey-haired Kuan Ping-hu came on and started playing an ancient instrument, the seven-string *kuchin*, the audience was breathless with excitement. The *kuchin* he used is a very old one—it dates from the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.). He played a long-lost composition of forty-five parts—a story of revenge from the time of the Warring States—which, with its complicated structure and rich melodies, held the audience spellbound. Some amateur *kuchin* players who have formed their own association in Peking performed Buddhist chants accompanied by cymbals and bells. Famous string musicians of the traditional style, such as Wei Chung-lo and Chiang Feng-chih, the *pipa* (a lute) and *erhu* (a fiddle) players, respectively, also won warm applause. Nowadays, our many ancient melodies that were formerly only enjoyed by a few specialists are recorded on tape or disc and can be heard by a larger audience. All this shows what serious attention is being paid to the study of our musical heritage.

Singers from among China's many nationalities and regions regaled the audience with their best folk songs. Folk songs, says Ho Lu-ting, the famous composer who is now Vice-Chairman of the Union of Chinese Musicians, are as precious and numerous as pearls in the ocean. The *Boatmen's Song* of Szechuan and the *Foresters' Song* of Heilungkiang are magnificent work-songs. Songs of the Mongolian, Korean and other national minorities, of Chekiang, Hupeh and Yunnan Provinces, are all rich in local colour. Some are beautifully gay, some are excitingly passionate. Like a string of jewels, these songs ran glitteringly through the whole course of the festival.

Other folk music, long treasured by the working people, proved as attractive as the work-songs. For instance, the flowing and

richly varied melodies of Kwangtung, or the hearty gongs and drums of Chaochow, or the boisterous *sona* (a bugle) of Hopei, have each their own lovable contribution to make. The virtuosity of two young performers, Chao Sung-ting, bamboo flute player, and Chao Yu-chai, on the *cheng* (a harpsicord), enriched the force of expression of these ancient folk instruments.

The new music that was born with the May Fourth Movement for a new culture has played a great role in the Chinese revolution. This, too, had its place in the festival. The inspiring songs of the anti-Japanese struggle, like the *Song of Resistance, The Flag Is Flying, Song of Flood, March of the Sword, Fighting Back Home* and others which were re-heard at the festival, took the audience back to those stirring times. Equally moving was the performance of *erhu* melodies composed by the late Liu Tien-hua, such as *March to Light*, which is reminiscent of the intellectuals' aspirations some thirty years ago.

Perhaps first among our modern classics were Nieh Erh's *March of the Volunteers* (New China's national anthem) and Hsien Hsing-hai's famous *Yellow River Cantata*. Their call upon the enslaved to arise and take the nation's destiny into their own hands continues to spur on our new generation. These two musicians, now both dead, have already taken their proud places in our national tradition.

The festival was also a survey of the works of contemporary composers. Ma Sze-tsung (Sitson Ma) needed no introduction; his new symphony, *Song of the Forest*, and the *Huai River Cantata* which breathes the hopes and achievements of the harnessers of the savage Huai, were greatly applauded, as were Ho Lu-ting's orchestral *Evening Party* and *Shepherd's Flute*, Ting Shan-teh's piano music for children, music for the "modernized" opera *The Marriage of Hsiao Erh-hei* by Ma Keh and an orchestral work *Spring Festival* by Li Huan-chih. China's contemporary woman composer Chu Hsi-hsien's latest song, *Red Base*, seemed to be rivalling her earlier *Hearts of the World's People Beat as One;* and the longer, more ambitious *Long March Cantata* by Shih Lo-meng, again, like the stirring agitational songs dating from the anti-Japanese war, took the listeners back.

There were other, up to now less well-known, composers represented, such as Cheng Chen-yu, a young Korean, with his *Song of Changpai*, Liu Shih-jen, whose song *In Praise of the Motherland* was performed, and Shih Erh-kang with his work for orchestra, *The Yellow Crane*. These new talents are making good use of our rich national legacy and folk music and it is clear that the world will hear more from them.

The local opera forms vied with each other in demonstrating their traditional charms. Hung Hsien-nu, who is well-known for her Canton opera part, delighted the audience with her gifted combination of high coloratura notes with a "normal" soprano register. An example of the fine musical tradition of the Peking opera was given by Lou Chen-kuei, a famous bass.

Western trained singers like Chou Hsiao-yen, a coloratura soprano, Li Chih-shu, a bass, Yu Yi-hsuan, soprano, and young popular singers like Kuo Lan-ying, dramatic soprano, Huang Hung, lyrical soprano, Fan Yu-lun, baritone, and many others were all warmly acclaimed.

The audience warmly greeted Fu Tsung, the 22-year-old pianist and prize-winner at the Fifth World Festival of Youth and Students at Warsaw.

The festival shows that Chinese musicians, encouraged by the policy of "Letting flowers of many kinds blossom," are doing everything—by drawing out the best from our traditional music and fostering our folk music—to forward our musical culture.

Foreign Art Exhibitions in Peking

The last six months of 1956 saw more than the usual number of foreign art exhibitions in Peking. There were exhibitions of works by six Italian artists who were visiting China, of Mexican, Greek and Viet-Namese art, and the showing of the "Hiroshima Panels."

These art shows, each with their own marked characteristics and style, made a deep impression upon all who saw them, both artists and laymen. It was not simply that they brought us the art of other lands, for other exhibitions of foreign art have been shown in Peking. It was that each of these shows contained something new, something entirely different from anything we had seen before.

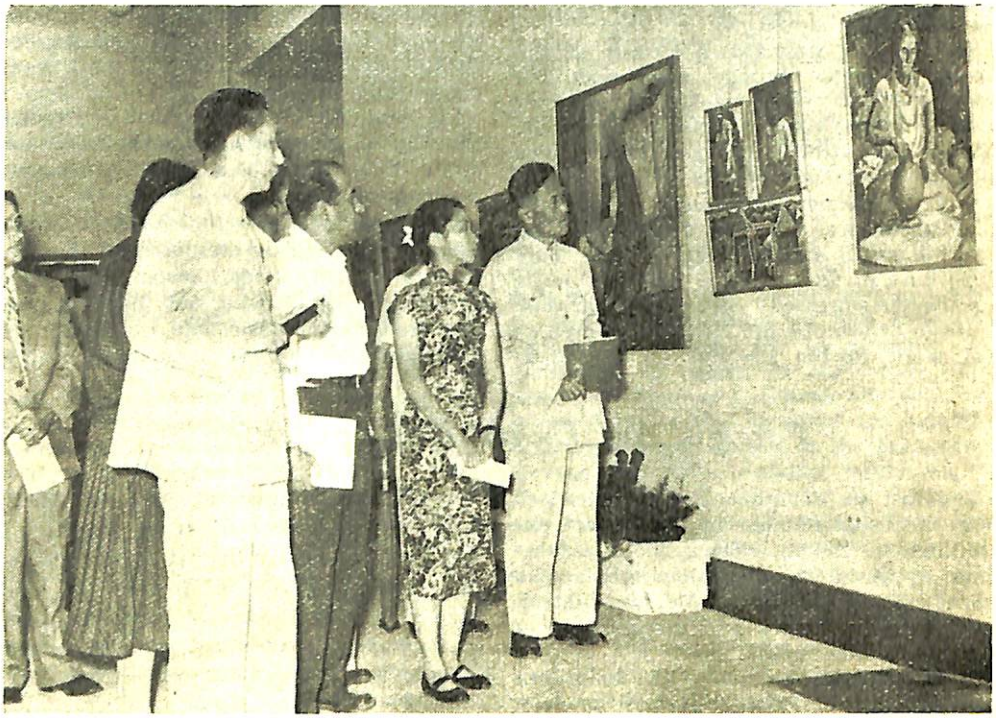
The Italian paintings were exhibited in the gallery of the Union of Chinese Artist. These paintings, with their distinctive national flavour, were at the same time very much the work of the individual artist. Collectively, they were held together by certain common characteristics—a constantly fresh approach to the subject, original style, rich imaginative power and a bold attack. In the meditating figure of Ampelio Tettamanti's "Woman," a pencil drawing; in Aligi Sassu's riders on their galloping horses in his "Chestnut Horse," a lithograph, his "Brown Horse," a gouache, and his "White Horse," an oil painting; and in Agenore Fabbri's pencil drawings, "Struggle" and "The Cavalier's Fight"; in all these we see the artists' supreme mastery over the intricacies of the subject. The figures under the light in Aligi Sassu's oil painting "A Coffee House," the stooping figure of the peasant woman in Tono Zancanaro's pencil drawing "Woman in a Rice Field," and the off-duty workers in Ampelio Tettamanti's "The Factory," a gouache, and "Going Home After Work," a pencil drawing, vividly reflect the everyday life of the Italian people. In some of these works, as in Ampelio Tettamanti's pencil drawings, "Portrait" and "Guerilla Fighter's Mother," the artist reduces his line to a minimum, and through the use of simple contour and the play of tone, throws his figures into strong relief, conveying a spirit of indignation and the will to struggle.

In several works, a momentary event of real life becomes the vehicle for commentary on wider issues, as in Guilio Turcato's pencil study, "The Ruins of War," and his water colour, "May Day." The first is a cry of condemnation on the hideousness of wars in general, and the second, a song of praise for the militancy of the working class. His workers, holding aloft their fluttering red flags, are people who will build a happy, ordered and prosperous life.

All these paintings have refreshing new content and distinctive form.

The exhibition of Mexican paintings and engravings was held in the Peking Working People's Palace of Culture. It contained six hundred pictures and was the second exhibition of Mexican art to be shown in China. Those who saw the first will remember the paintings for their deep ideological content and artistic form. This time, the collection included mural paintings in addition to oils and engravings.

Mexican paintings and engravings on exhibit



The works of Leopold Mendez, 1952 winner of the international peace prize awarded by the World Peace Council, again attracted a great number of visitors. Other interesting paintings exhibited are Diego Rivera's "The Glorious Victory," a sharp satire on the United States' plunder of the Mexican people, David Alfaro Siqueiros' "Our Face Today," and Dr. Artur's "Paracutin Volcano"; these three are critical commentaries on the situation in Mexico today which have won wide acclaim in their own country.

Included in this exhibition were also more than two hundred woodcuts and engravings covering the period from the 16th century to modern times. Most of the works of the 20th century draw their theme from the life and struggles of the people, as in the woodcut "Execution," in which a revolutionary faces death with unshakable courage, and "Peasant and Land" depicting a toil-worn peasant holding a handful of earth.

Ninety photographs of mural paintings gave Chinese viewers their first glimpse of an art which enjoys wide popularity in Mexico. Among these, the murals of the National Palace of Mexico hold special interest for the Chinese people in that they reflect the life and revolutionary struggles of the Mexican people.

The contemporary art of Greece was shown in China for the first time when an exhibition of Makliz' paintings was held in Peihai Park, Peking. These works also reflect the resolute struggle of the people, the difficulties of their life. In these pictures, we saw the tragedy of Greece in the post-war years: patriots being flung into prison or concentration camp; people suffering hunger and want; homeless children wandering the streets; and closed-down factories. The distinctive style of the Greek artist is particularly apparent in his portraits, paintings of children, landscapes and illustrations for the poems of Paul Eluard, the late French poet.

In August 1956, on the eleventh anniversary of the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima, an exhibition of the "Hiroshima Panels" was held in the Peking Art Gallery. The painters of this work, Iri Maruki and his wife, Toshiko Akamatsu, both 1952 international peace prize winners, were in Peking during the showing of the exhibition. At the premiere on August 3, they showed visitors around and told them all about the paintings—how they had conceived the idea, how they had set about the work, and what lay behind the paintings.

A section of the fifth panel "Youth" from "Hiroshima Panels." Calamity falls on a group of students who happen to be moving on the day of the explosion

The first seven panels show Hiroshima during the actual explosion, when the city was blasted by a deafening roar and a violent flash never before witnessed by humanity. We see the people stunned by the sudden calamity; mutilated, they run here and there in panic. One man stands among the flames trying to help his dear one stand up, but as he stretches out his arm his hand falls away at the wrist. Among the dead bodies of children we see a little girl who has just regained consciousness. She wants to arouse her little brother, who is lying by her side. But the boy is covered with wounds, and no longer breathing. A young woman, no longer sane, is seen among the ruins clasping a toy dropped by one of her children. But where are the children? They are lost in the wind and rain without food or clothing. The dead lie here and there on the ground waiting to be claimed by family or kin. But all are mutilated

beyond recognition, so who can say which of them is a husband, wife or dear one? Hiroshima, once a bustling city, is turned into a hell on earth.

The panel "Youth" shows the blossoming lives of young boys and girls being suddenly snuffed out by the bomb. In "Water," we see an injured mother standing motionless in a pool clutching a dead child closely to her heart, and in "Wind," an infant still suckles the breast of his dead mother.

The last panel, "Collection of Signatures," shows the strength of the people. A people who have known the agony of Hiroshima and lost dear ones there know well the cruelty of war and the meaning of peace. A young woman, with a baby slung to her back, is putting down her name. Over 38,500,000 in Japan have signed the appeal against the use of atomic and hydrogen bombs; they demand the right to live and voice their opposition to war. Visitors left the exhibition filled with indignation and anger against those who dare to play with atomic weapons, and with deep compassion for the innocent victims of Hiroshima.

On another floor of the gallery, the two painters of the Hiroshima panels displayed over a hundred sketches they had made during their tour of China. In these pictures we saw molten steel, dazzling to the eye, pouring like a torrent in the Chungking Iron and Steel Works; magnificent gorges rising beside the Yangtse River; spring coming to the riverside and the fields beginning to show green. Here the people were engaged in peaceful labour; we saw dawn come to the beautiful West Lake and shroud the water and hills in light mist, behind which mothers and babies slumbered in peaceful dreams. All these pictures showed the artists' profound love for peace, the same love that impelled them to paint the panels.

They told visitors that the panels were still incomplete; they would continue to paint until the day atomic and hydrogen bombs were effectively banned—a true expression of the Japanese people's determination to oppose war and defend peace.

In September, an exhibition of Viet-Namese art was held in the magnificent Soviet Exhibition Hall. It was the first time Viet-Namese art had been shown abroad. The exhibits ranged from ancient sculpture to modern paintings. Among the many works displayed, the lacquer paintings attracted tremendous attention. This particular genre is indeed unique in the world of art. A thick coat of lacquer is laid on a finished painting and then polished smooth. Some of these lacquer paintings, like "Spinning and Weaving" by Nguyen-duc-Nung, "Peasants on Their Way to a Struggle Meeting" by Si-Ngoc, and "Afternoon in the Northwest" by Phan-ke-An, all true examples of Viet-Namese art, aroused great interest among art lovers.

There were also a large number of oil paintings. Outstanding among these are three works vividly expressing the joy of a peaceful life—"Em Tuy" by Tran-van-Can; and "Two Young Women and Babes" and "Looking at the Flowers" by To-ngoc-Van. The ink and water colour paintings are also very good. They seem to have drawn much from traditional Chinese painting while still retaining their national style. Hoang-van-Thuan's "Landscape in Vinh-moc Village, Quang-tri Province," for instance, is similar to traditional Chinese painting in its treatment of perspective, while preserving the Viet-Namese tradition of portraying various aspects of the fishermen's life today within one picture.

On the opening day of the exhibition, Ting Hsi-lin, China's Vice-Minister of Culture, chose the New Year picture "The Wedding of the Mice" to illustrate the close cultural relationship that has long existed between China and Viet-Nam. The theme of this picture is taken from a folk story that has long been popular among the Chinese people.

The exhibition has helped the Chinese people to know the people of Viet-Nam better. We have also learnt to appreciate the rich heritage of Viet-Namese art and to see how their people developed their art alongside of their struggles.

Museums in Building

Before liberation, China had not a single museum worthy of the name. The Palace Museum in Peking was famous, not because of its contents but as a magnificent piece of ancient architecture. According to Tang Lan, an archaeologist who now is its chief custodian, nobody used to bother how the items on hand could be shown to best advantage. The Hall of Supreme Harmony was the main exhibition hall, in

it were two enamel pagodas, two huge mirrors and several Buddha statues. The Palace Museum in those days was disappointing even to the most ardent sightseer. With hardly any funds at its disposal, admission tickets were rather expensive, with the result that most of the working people could not afford passing through its gate.

Apart from the Palace Museum in Peking, the country had only a few museums in coastal cities. Such regional museums fared even worse. The museum in Nanking, for instance, was under Kuomintang rule never open to the public. The Shanghai Museum was situated on the second floor of a three-storey building, sandwiched in between an opera school and a primary school! Practically no Shanghailander knew it even existed.

Today, there is an endless stream of visitors at the gate of the Peking Palace Museum, especially on Sundays and holidays. A large number of them are workers and peasants bringing their families. In 1954 and 1955 more people visited the museum than there had been in twenty-four years before liberation. Tickets now are cheap and easily obtainable. For a few cents, the visitor can spend a whole afternoon in the halls that show Chinese sculptures and *objets d'art*, paintings and porcelains; in the Hall of International Friendship they can view the gifts from over forty countries.

After the liberation, the museum in Nanking was enlarged and opened with an exhibition on the life of China's national minorities in the Southwest. The Shanghai Museum has moved to a grand building on People's Square in the centre of the city.

New museums are now being opened all over the country. Almost every province and region—including the Uighur Autonomous Region in Sinkiang and the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region—has its own museum to explain to people their topographical environment, the historical background and the present-day socialist construction going on in these areas. Most of these regional museums are quite new; the Anhwei Provincial Museum has a floor space of 15,000 square feet.

Not counting the Peking Palace Museum, the museums at Nanking and Shanghai, the country now has twelve special museums, the Historical Museum in Peking, the Marine Products Museum in Tsingtao, the Dairen Museum and the Porcelain Museum in Kiangsi among them. Peking will have two other museums in the near future: the Central Museum of Natural History and the Central Museum of Chinese Revolutionary History.

Museums showing the progress of the Chinese revolution have also been set up in Shanghai, where the Chinese Communist Party was born, and in Yenan and Juichin, former centres of the revolution. The houses where Dr. Sun Yat-sen, China's great revolutionary democrat, lived in Canton and Shanghai have been turned into memorial halls. So have Lu Hsun's homes in Shaohsing, Shanghai and Peking. A Lu Hsun Museum was opened in October 1956 in Peking beside the house in which the writer lived thirty years ago.*

The buildings in Nanking whence China's peasant revolutionaries, the Taipings, ruled their Heavenly Kingdom from 1851 to 1864, were discovered only in 1952 and have been built into a memorial of that important period.

Tu Fu,** the poet-patriot of the Tang Dynasty, had built himself a thatched cottage by a stream in Chengtu, the provincial capital of Szechuan in China's Southwest. This cottage was wrecked by the Kuomintang soldiery. The People's Government restored it in 1955 and put some of his works and mementoes on display in it. Similarly, the home of Pu Sungling,*** the author of *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, in Shantung Province, is now well kept; the house in Peking where the noted painter Hsu Pei-hung (known abroad as Ju Peon) lived until his death three years ago, is also taken care of by the People's Government as a memorial to the artist. Practically all the homes and mementoes of China's great—revolutionaries, writers, or artists—are now treasured and protected by the people. There are more and more memorial and exhibition halls with each passing year; more and more ancient buildings are coming under government protection.

There has been a great increase also in the number of items of historic interest displayed by our museums. By the end of 1955, they came to a total of 3,300,000, of which 1,290,000 had been found only during the past six years, most of them unearthed on capital construction sites.

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*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1956, p. 179.

**Ibid.*, No. 2, 1955, p. 123.

***Ibid.*, No. 1, 1956, p. 108.

New China's museums now are not only treasure troves of historic relics, but important centres of popular education and scientific research. All exhibitions are the result of careful study and calculated to disseminate useful information, at the same time as they enhance the people's love for their country. In recent years, the Peking Historical Museum has organized a series of exhibits on the development of Chinese society from the primitive commune down to the present day. These exhibits have helped the visitors to gain a systematic understanding of the growth of Chinese civilization. Since liberation, there are also guides in every museum to give well-put explanations to the visitors.

Even so, our museums still lag far behind the demands of a country with such immense territory, such rich resources and so long a history. At a national conference of museum workers, recently held in Peking, plans were drawn up for improvements in the work of our museums. More museums will be built and personnel will be specially trained, so that the research work done by museums can adequately meet the demands that ever larger groups of the population make upon them.

Commemorations

In response to the call of the World Peace Council to commemorate the great figures of world culture, the Chinese people warmly commemorated twelve foreign writers, painters, poets, dramatists and scientists in the past year.

A meeting was held in Peking on May 26, 1956 in commemoration of the Indian poet Kalidasa, the 100th anniversary of the death of the German poet Heine and the 75th anniversary of the Russian writer Dostoevski. Well over a thousand people participated in the meeting, including representatives and leaders of people's organizations in China, well-known Chinese and foreign workers for peace, poets, writers, dramatists, actors and foreign diplomats. Specially invited guests on the platform were Mr. P. K. Guha, the Press Attaché of the Indian Embassy, the German writers Mr. Ernst Schumacher and Mr. Hanns Cibulka, and the Soviet writers Mr. Sobko Vadim, Mme. Vera Ketlinskaya, and Mr. Sabit Mukanov. Mao Tun, Chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers, in his opening speech, spoke on the life and works of these three renowned figures.

Kalidasa is the best known of the ancient Indian poets to Chinese readers. His works were first introduced into China as long ago as the thirteenth century, when his famous lyrical poem, *The Cloud Messenger* (*Meghaduta*), appeared in a collection of Buddhist classical works entitled *Tanjur* in Tibetan. Su Man-shu (Rev. Mandju), the Buddhist poet, recommended Kalidasa and his famous drama *Shakuntala* in his preface to *Literature, Chinese and English*, which was published in 1907, and subsequently three modern Chinese translations of *Shakuntala* have been published. *The Cloud Messenger* and *The Cycle of the Seasons* (*Ritusamhara*) have also been translated. For the commemoration of this great poet, the People's Literature Publishing House in Peking has brought out a new edition of *Shakuntala*, translated by Chi Hsien-lin, professor in Sanskrit at Peking University, and *The Cloud Messenger* (in modern Chinese verse) translated by another professor of Sanskrit, Chin Ke-mu. Six poems from *The Cycle of the Seasons*, translated by Professor Wu Hsiao-ling, have appeared in the monthly *Peking Literature*. The similarity in the style of *Shakuntala* to Chinese opera and its warmth of humanity are specially appreciated by Chinese readers.

Heine (1797-1856) lived in a period filled with momentous historical upheavals, and his works reflect the complexity and conflicts of his age. His poetry and prose in translation are greatly loved by the Chinese people, especially Chinese youth, in the last decades. At the time of the May Fourth Movement, which was strongly influenced by the great October Revolution in 1919, the Chinese poet Kuo Mo-jo introduced his poems in translation to China, and said that Heine had a certain influence on his own poetry in his early years. The society of his day, which Heine satirized in *Germany, a Winter's Tale* (translated by Ai Sze-chi), had many features in common with old China, and during the long years of anguish and sorrow the Chinese people felt towards Heine, who died a hundred years ago, as a comrade and spokesman of their struggle. After the anti-Japanese war ended progressive writers attacked the Kuomintang reactionary government through subtle or

satirical writing, and at meetings and theatres satirical poems and plays played an important role. It was through this medium that Heine's political satires won a Chinese audience. The political barbs in many of his poems in the collection *Poems of the Time* were pointed directly at the very things which the Chinese people wanted to see wiped out. The image and personality of Heine have grown closer and more real to the Chinese people through this year's commemoration. As Lu Hsun said twenty years ago, "Heine will live for ever and his work shine ever brighter."

Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevski has long enjoyed a great reputation in China. In the *History of Russian Literature* by the late Chu Chiu-pai, one of China's revolutionary writers, Dostoevski was compared with Tolstoy. Following the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the Chinese youth became very fond of Russian literature and more and more of Dostoevski s works were translated. The first, *The Christmas Tree and the Wedding*, appeared in 1920 in *The Eastern Miscellany*. From then on, translations of his works were often printed in *The Short Story Magazine* and others. In 1925, Lu Hsun and some other progressive young writers in Peking formed a literary group, the Wei Ming Sheh, and translated and popularized a number of famous Russian and Soviet works. Dostoevski's *Poor Folk* and *Crime and Punishment* were brought out by this group. In 1926, Lu Hsun wrote a preface to the Chinese translation of *Poor Folk*. After China's liberation in 1949 further translations were published, including a nine-volume *Selection of Dostoevski's Works*. Recently, the People's Literature Publishing House has reprinted some more of his works, including *Poor Folk* and *The Insulted and the Injured*.

To commemorate Kalidasa, Heinrich Heine and Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevski the Peking Library, China's biggest library, held an exhibition of their works, illustrated with photographs.

On July 3, a meeting in honour of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Mozart was held in Peking, which was attended by 1,400 people from all walks of life, at which the modern Austrian composer, Professor Alfred Uhl of the State Academy of Music in Vienna, spoke. Ma Sze-tsung (Sitson Ma), Vice-Chairman of the Union of Chinese Musicians and himself a composer, spoke on Mozart's life and work. He said: "The rich legacy Mozart left to us is part of the common cultural treasure of the world. The Chinese people share with the people of all lands the great love and esteem for Mozart's music."

In this meeting famous Chinese singers Lin Chun-ching, Li Hsien and others sang some arias from Mozart's operas, including *The Magic Flute, Don Giovanni*, and *Il Rè Pastore*, and the Central Ensemble chorus and orchestra performed other works, including the overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* and the *Symphony No. 40 in G Minor*. Sheng Chung-kuo, a youngster of fifteen, played the *Violin Concerto in A Major*.

A meeting in the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in Peking to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the birth of the Dutch painter Rembrandt was followed by an exhibition in the Water Pavilion in Chungshan Park on July 20. Chiang Feng, Vice-Chairman of the Union of Chinese Artists and President of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, said at the meeting: "Rembrandt is a master of human characterization. His noble ideals and the priceless legacy he left will remain a spiritual force which will always inspire mankind in its advance towards peace and freedom. In China, as in other countries, his work exerts a profound and lasting influence. He is regarded by Chinese painters as a model to be studied."

Mr. Jacob Bruyn, the well-known Dutch painter, and a delegate from the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, was present at the meeting and at the opening of the exhibition. Professor Hsu Hsing-chih, head of the Art Theory Research Group of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, spoke of Rembrandt as "a painter who stands for creative freedom" and analysed his artistic attainments and his life. Mr. Jacob Bruyn in his speech said: "We are, indeed, deeply moved by your Government's decision to honour the memory of one of the greatest artists the world has known, the more so, since, with Holland, China can boast of the most gifted painters of all countries and continents." He discussed the life and work of Rembrandt and the characteristics of his paintings, drawings and etchings, and said that there were essential features in common between Rembrandt and Chinese paintings. The exhibition showed 185 reproductions and included paintings and prints brought by Mr. Jacob Bruyn.

July 27 was another great day for Peking cultural circles. A commemoration meeting of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the famous writer George Bernard Shaw and the 50th anniversary of the death of the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen took place. Shaw's barbed polemics and witty satirical comedies are greatly appreciated in China. Shaw himself visited China and was a friend of Lu Hsun. As early as the May Fourth Movement, the ideas and sentiments expressed in Ibsen's plays, that people should seek freedom and liberation, exercised a profound influence on the movement of new literature in China.

The platform at the commemoration meeting was graced by the presence of Mr. Lennox Robinson, D. Litt., Director of Ireland's National Theatre, Mme. Gerda Ring, the Director of the National Theatre. Oslo, Mr. R. J. Minney, British author and personal friend of George Bernard Shaw, and Mr. Gerhard Knoop, stage and radio director and representative of the Norwegian Theatre Union, Oslo. Tien Han, Chairman of the Union of Chinese Stage Artists, gave an address under the title of "Let Us Learn from the Great Masters of Realist Drama" and introduced the great artistic attainments of Shaw and Ibsen, the background of their time and their spiritual influence on the growth of the Chinese modern theatre. Mr. Lennox Robinson, Mr. R. J. Minney and Mme. Gerda Ring made valuable contributions on the backgrounds and gave an appreciation of their works.

The People's Literature Publishing House published de luxe editions of selections of plays by Bernard Shaw and Ibsen for the occasion. Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which had not appeared on the Peking stage for many years, was put on by the China Youth Art Theatre and played to packed houses. Mme. Gerda Ring, the Director of the National Theatre, Oslo, advised on the production.

Another great event in August was the commemoration of the 450th anniversary of the death of the famous Japanese painter Sesshu Toyo, who is well known to the Chinese public. He came to China, and indeed Peking, 480 years ago to visit his Chinese colleagues. While he was here he painted a magnificent fresco in the main hall of the Board of Rites.

The commemoration meeting took place on the evening of August 22 in the Peking Theatre. Mr. Momoo Kitagawa, the art critic, and Messrs. Hoshun Yamaguchi, Meiji Hashimoto and Iri Maruki and Miss Toshiko Akamatsu, painters, came specially

from Japan, and other Japanese friends who were visiting Peking attended the meeting. Chen Shu-tung, Vice-Chairman of the Chinese People's Committee for World Peace, said in his opening speech: "We feel Sesshu Toyo is close to us when we look at his immortal works or read the verses of those days written by our poets in bidding him farewell. In particular, Sesshu's landscape scrolls and his other works, based on his personal observation of the Chinese scenery and life of the people of those days, have promoted mutual understanding between the Chinese and the Japanese people." Mr. Hoshun Yamaguchi said in his speech: "The relationship of Chinese to Japanese art is a fraternal relationship, identical in blood but different in character. I think it can be said that Sesshu Toyo was the artist who best typifies this. He was an ambassador of cultural exchange between the two countries, and his work represents the common language that goes beyond the differences in our two countries and links up the hearts of our two peoples." Fu Pao-shih, a painter in the traditional Chinese style, and the Japanese art critic, Mr. Momoo Kitagawa, talked about Sesshu's life and artistic characteristics. "Sesshu's Paintings" and other films were presented at the end of the meeting.

Five days after the commemoration of the Japanese painting genius, more than nine hundred people from all walks of life in Peking met to commemorate the centenary of the birth of the great Ukrainian writer Ivan Yakovlevich Franko. Wu Yu-chang, Vice-Chairman of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association, said in the opening speech: "Ivan Franko was a very talented writer. His work embodies all kinds of literary forms, including translations of the classical literature of other countries. He was as well a propagandist with a particularly sharp pen and a linguistic scholar. In his works he revealed the bitterness of the working people's life and the eager hope of the oppressed for light and freedom." Ke Pao-chuan, Vice Secretary-General of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association and Executive Committee member of the Chinese Writers' Union, introduced his life and works. The Argentine writer, Sr. A. Varela of the Cultural Section of the Secretariat of the World Peace Council also spoke. Mr. Y. Zbanatsky, Hero of the Soviet Union, a member of the Executive Committee and of the Presidium of the Ukrainian Writers' Union, who had specially come from the Ukraine for the commemoration, talked on Franko's contribution to culture. Recitations were given of his poems "Hymn," "The Sun Is Shining Gently," "Vivere Memento!" "Let It Be Like That," and "Semper Idem!" The meeting ended with a coloured film, "The Ukraine Sings."

The commemoration meeting of two scientists among the great figures of world culture in 1956, Benjamin Franklin and the Curies, was sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Sciences in December. Many scientific workers in Peking took part in the meeting.

Music and Dancing from Abroad

In July and September last year, the residents of Peking were enchanted by five groups of brilliant singers and dancers from abroad. Their artistry made a deep impression on the audience.

On July 4 a splendid performance of folk music was rendered by a group of seven talented Hungarian gypsy musicians. In the lively rhythm and ringing melodies of their music we came to understand better the optimism, gallantry and intense love of freedom that characterize the Hungarian people. The musicians gave a brilliant performance of a Csardas. We heard at one moment the gay tempo of the violin, then the cymbalon and then the clarinet but always the orchestra followed close behind the whirling dance theme, like a chorus dancing round a soloist.

The soprano, Eva Kurthy's rendering of a Hungarian gypsy song, ably supported by the orchestra, reminded the audience of the tragic fate of the gypsy before Hungary was liberated, and yet in the melancholy strains of the song could be detected the light of hope for a brighter future. As the refrains of the song died away, the audience awoke to the fact that the sad days are gone for ever for the Hungarian gypsies, especially when the merry tunes of the quick Gypsy Csardas rang out, reflecting the happy life of the gypsy today. Never again would they have cause to lament their fate of the vagabond

as they sing, "Far, far away, as far as the earth from the stars. . . ."

On July 5, the "Dance of the Embroidery Girls," performed by the Ensemble of the Ukrainian Republic of the U.S.S.R., fascinated its audience completely. Young girls in embroidered silk blouses and skirts, with gay ribbons trailing round their waists, came out in pairs. As they wove about happily in a dance symbolizing embroidery on silk, the lengths of red ribbons in their hands slowly disappeared and a beautiful banner appeared, embroidered with the words "Long Live Sino-Soviet Friendship" in Chinese. They were greeted by stormy applause.

A few minutes later a joyful scene of high-school boys and girls dancing their way down to the riverside to greet the sunrise after their graduation appeared on the stage. In simple attire and exuberant with the vitality of youth, they bloomed like budding almond blossoms on a green Ukrainian plain. This "Dance of Spring" with its lively tunes and mischievous expressions presented a joyous and vivid lyrical picture.

On July 17, the Yugoslav artists introduced to the Chinese audience an amusing choral rendering of "The Frog's Wedding," with a background of croaking frogs. The audience was particularly delighted with their performance of a Chinghai folk song, "In a Far-away Place," which was charmingly sung in Chinese. Mica Glavacevic, coloratura soprano, sang Gilda's aria from "Rigoletto" and captivated her audience. Ana Lipsa Tofovic, mezzo soprano, in Blagoje Bersa's "Day of Ossering" vividly reflected the poignant grief of a mother mourning her dead son. In the solo, "Black and White," depicting the chirping crickets on an autumn night, the singer sang with characteristic national air and conveyed to the audience the mood of an autumn night and man's love of nature. The singing of the tenor, Aleksandar Marinkovic, was passionate and powerful and stirred the heartstrings. His rendering of the Love Duet from "Madame Butterfly" with Vilma Bukovec, soprano, greatly impressed the audience with their perfect technique.

On July 28, the curtain rose in the Tien Chiao Theatre on a scene of the ancient and gloomy palace of a Tartar Khan. In dim, sombre, blue light its huge white pillars cast long shadows and brought before the audience the impression of the bleakness and melancholy of an alien place. This was a scene from the "Fountain of Bakhchisarai" rendered by the Bulgarian Ballet Company. Here, enduring her tragic fate, Maria, the captive Polish princess, remembered her homeland, her youth and her lover and defied the Khan to the end. The audience was deeply stirred by her death. Lily Beron, as Maria, reproduced to perfection this moving story in the palace of a Tartar Khan and touched the hearts of the audience.

On September 24, the Balinese Art Troupe of Indonesia took Peking by storm. When the curtain rose, the background of tropical blue sky, coconut grove and pagoda to a gorgeous temple with a band of musicians grouped in front of it, caught the imagination of the audience. At the end of a short overture, dancers emerged from the temple and immediately became one with the music. The traditional eastern flavour in their dancing gave the audience a feeling of perfection and intimacy. Their fascinating movement of hands and quivering fingers portrayed the most delicate feelings and their staring eyes were reminiscent of Buddhist images. Red, gold and yellow were the dominant colours in their costumes which consisted of tight tunic skirts, leaving the shoulders and neck bare. One of their fascinating dances, "Radja Pala," tells how the hero, an ordinary human, saw four goddesses bathing in the lake and stole the robe of one of them, Ni Sulasih. Before he would give it back he demanded her love and finally won her. The audience smiled knowingly, because it reminded them of their own folk tale, "The Cowherd and the Weaving Maid."

Such glimpses of the music and dances of other lands are greatly appreciated and are a means of increasing understanding and friendship between the Chinese people and the people of other countries.

PEKING OPERA

Peking opera is one form of the traditional Chinese drama, with a distinctive style of its own and a history of more than a hundred years. It came into being in Peking, capital of the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911), where the best Peking opera companies and actors and the most appreciative audiences are now to be found. Peking opera, as we know it today, has incorporated some of the best features of other local operas, and these features have been enriched by its most brilliant exponents. Thus it has, in turn, influenced these local operas. It has now evolved a comprehensive set of conventions, and has innumerable traditional ties with local operas throughout the country. Loved by millions in China, its popularity is not restricted to one particular area. The visits of well-known Peking opera companies to Europe, Australia, Asia and South America over the last few years have given many theatre-goers abroad the chance to appreciate the unique charm of this type of drama.

The most distinctive feature of Peking opera is its combination of singing, acting, dancing, and acrobatics; and it is characterized by highly concentrated mode of expression and artistic exaggeration. Through strongly stylized gestures, a detailed and accurate picture is given of life. And dialogue—a regular feature of Chinese opera—supplements the singing and action to portray characters or unfold the plot.

Acting occupies a special position in Peking opera. It consists, in essence, of a series of stylized gestures peculiar to this form of act, which are concentrated, exaggerated expressions of actions from real life. This can be seen from the following examples: different movements of the long, wide sleeves express refusal of an offer, whispering, beckoning, bidding farewell, dusting, or crying. The despair of a defenceless girl may be conveyed by raising the sleeve to hide the face. Stepping over an imaginary threshold symbolizes entry into a room. By raising his hand between himself and the other performers, an actor can make an aside. A hand put to the ear conveys eavesdropping. To go up or down stairs, a woman holds up her skirt, while a man raises his robe with one hand and grasps his sleeve with the other. An actor, whip in hand, who raises his right leg is mounting a horse. When he gets on a table, he is climbing a height. A woman drowns herself in a well by jumping across a chair. Of course, the meaning of these symbolic gestures is often brought out with the aid of songs or dialogue.

A limited use is made of properties. For instance, there is a brush for writing, a cup for drinking, a bucket for fetching water, and a bow for shooting. But where properties cannot be used or are not needed, the actors use symbolic gestures, brandishing a whip to indicate a horse or paddling with an oar to indicate a boat. A considerable variety of properties of this kind exist. An actor followed by an attendant, who holds a length of cloth painted with a wheel on each side of him, is riding in a cart. A strip of coloured cloth, hung from two poles and bearing the words "Army Headquarters," is the camp of a general or marshal. An actor with black gauze over his head is dreaming. If he holds a wooden stick in the shape of a candle, he is in the dark although the footlights are blazing in front of him. A flag with green waves on it stands for foaming billows, the waving of a black silk streamer for a storm, and a wooden board painted with curved lines for clouds.

We now come to the make-up of Peking opera, and something should first be said about the painted-faces. Here again the method used is the selection of salient features and artistic exaggeration. The painted-faces are highly stylized and vividly depict the traits of each character, while harmonizing with the gestures used in that particular role. Good men are usually painted with simple designs, while the faces of villains or robbers bear more intricate ones. A red face suggests courage and loyalty; a black face, a hot temper; a blue face, cruelty; and a white face, cunning. Some of the designs have been adapted from ancient sculpture and paint-

ings, while others are works of pure fantasy.

It has long been the custom in Peking opera for men to impersonate women. Mei Lan-fang, for example, is an outstanding female impersonator. An actor (or actress) playing a woman's part has his forehead bound tightly with a switch of horsehair so that his eyes are strained apart to appear much larger and brighter. Two black bands, made to resemble hair, are affixed to the side of the cheeks to lengthen the face.

The beards and whiskers worn by actors in male roles vary. Hot-headed characters and outlaws wear red beards, while black, grey and white beards are worn according to a character's age.

The costumes worn in Peking opera are elaborated versions of the dress of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), regardless of the historical period of any particular opera. Long sleeves, wide robes exquisitely embroidered, the jade belts of officials, women's head-dresses, the high-soled boots which add to an imposing character's height, and the padded waistcoats worn by some of the men under their silk robes to give an impression of heroic proportions —these are some of the ingenious devices which enhance the effect of the make-up.

Like the Western drama in ancient days, Peking opera needs no director because the general outline of each play is subject to little change. It also needs no scenery or very simple scenery. Before the actors come on, the stage is empty; but as soon as they enter we see a definite time and place, which constantly change. The actor makes the scene. By brandishing a whip, he creates the illusion of riding down the street. When he bends to an oar, we know he is boating on the river. By making a detour of the stage, he passes from one street to another or even crosses mountains and rivers. The sounding of the watch announces the coming of night or the break of day. Since time and place change too rapidly with the development of the story to allow for scene-shifting, the use of scenery would impose considerable restrictions on the opera.

The same importance is attached to singing in Peking opera as to action, and there are different styles of singing for male, female, painted-face and clown roles. Male roles include bearded old men, young men, and warriors; while female roles include old women, young women in plain costumes who have primarily singing parts, and those in elaborate costumes who do more acting, as well as women warriors in tunics and those who fight on horseback. The painted-face roles represent hot-headed men, outlaws and strong-minded individuals. They differ in their chief functions: singing, fighting or acting. Some of the clowns are fighters or acrobats. Clowns in Peking opera have, in general, the same role as their Western counterparts: they crack jokes at the appropriate moment to relieve the suspense. Actors playing the male, painted-face and clown roles sing in their natural voice, while those playing young women's roles sing in falsetto. Young men also sing in falsetto to create an impression of youthfulness.

Three types of roles: An old woman, three young women in "plain costumes" and two male characters

Two characters from *The Lovers and the Wild Geese*. **Both are warriors in armour. The left is a man, the right a woman**

Anyone familiar with the tunes of Peking opera will agree that they are by no means simple and monotonous, but possess great variety. Even if two songs are set to the same tune, they are sung rather differently, with a variation of notes. The two main tunes of Peking opera are *hsi pi* and *erh huang*. It has also taken over a number of tunes, such as *kunchu, Yiyang* and *chui chiang,* from different local operas or from folk music. *Kunchu* tunes, in particular, are often used as part of the accompaniment in Peking opera.

Erh huang arose from *sze ping* music—a combination of tunes from Yiyang and Anhwei—blended with folk songs popular in the district of Huangchow, Hupeh. *Hsi pi* grew out of the *pang tse* music of the Northwest, through the intermediate stage of *Hsiangyang* tunes. Peking opera is also known as *pi huang,* that is, the combination of *hsi pi* and *erh huang*. In both tunes the beat is strictly observed. Many theatre-goers in Peking in the old days used to pay scant attention to the action on the stage, but went to the opera simply to listen to the music. In creating variations of one of the standard tunes, the singer must make sure that the beat is exactly right.

Percussion instruments play an important part in Peking opera orchestras, serving as an accompaniment to the action. Drums and gongs increase the atmosphere of excitement or suspense, and are beaten according to a set of strict rules. Wind

A clown (*left*) **and a "painted-face," whose chief function is singing**

and stringed instruments accompany the singing, first and foremost the *hu chin* (a two-stringed fiddle with a high pitch), and then the *yueh chin* (a two-stringed guitar) and *san hsien* (a three-stringed fiddle). During the last twenty years another two-stringed fiddle with a low pitch called *erh hu* has been introduced to accompany the singing of female roles.

Plays involving fights and acrobatics make up a considerable proportion of the repertoire of Peking opera. As a rule, there is one such play during each performance. Two types of warrior take part in these operas. One is the warrior in armour, most often a general. He has to move with grace and energy, impress by his dignity, and use his eyes expressively. He is not primarily an acrobat, but should have a powerful voice and be fairly tall. The heroes of *Yen Tang Mountain*, *The Fight with Wheel-barrows* and *The Battle of Chang Pan Slope*, which are well known to audiences abroad, provide examples of these warriors in armour.

Then there is the warrior dressed not in a long robe but in a tunic. An actor who plays this role must be an excellent acrobat, who starts his training as a boy while his limbs are still supple. Examples of this role are Jen Tang-hui, hero of *The Cross-roads* and Monkey, hero of *Revolt in Heaven*.

From the characteristics of Peking opera described above, it can be seen that the opera has developed a unique form, or distinctive conventions of its own. Since the liberation, particularly during the last few years, new life has been infused into the opera. Undesirable features left over from feudalism have been eliminated, while what is great and popular in the best sense has been preserved. At present, efforts are being made to do away with those conventions which have outlived their time or which are vulgar and in bad taste; to reject those portions which are irrational, repetitive and dull; and to enrich and perfect the operatic art with due consideration to the characteristics of China's traditional drama. This is the common goal of all actors and workers in Peking opera, who are guided by the policy of the Chinese Communist Party: "Let flowers of many kinds blossom side by side; weed through the old to let the new emerge."

Warriors begin their training young. The lad in this picture is learning how to use the hooked swords

NEW PUBLICATIONS

A new edition of *The Complete Works of Lu Hsun* is being put out by the People's Literature Publishing House for the twentieth anniversary of this great writer's death.

The *Complete Works* contains everything except his translations of foreign works and his revised Chinese classics, and has as many of his letters as it has been possible to collect. His translations and the Chinese classics edited by him, which are included in the old edition published in 1938, will appear separately. The texts have all been carefully collated, and each volume contains brief explanatory notes.

The *Complete Works* will be a ten-volume edition. Volumes I and II were out in September last, and the rest will appear within two years.

The contents of the volumes are as follows:

Vol. I Call to Arms, The Grave, Hot Air.
Vol. II Wandering, Wild Grass, Morning Blossoms Plucked at Dusk, Old Stories Retold.
Vol. III Bad Luck, Bad Luck (Second Series), And That's That.
Vol. IV Three Leisures, Two Hearts, Mixed Dialects.
Vol. V False Liberty, Pseudo-frivolous Talk, Embellishments.
Vol. VI Essays of Chieh-chieh-ting (First, Second and Third Series).
Vol. VII Additional Writings, More Additional Writings.
Vol. VIII Short History of Chinese Fiction, Outline History of Han Dynasty Literature.
Vol. IX Letters to Ching-sung, Letters.
Vol. X Letters, Chronological Table of Lu Hsun's Works and Translations.

The Tender Sprout, by Ku Yu, published by the China Youth Publishing House, is a collection of eight short stories. The author, whose enthusiasm for the new life of China shows clearly, puts before his readers many vivid images, new characters, and new aspects of China's countryside.

This young writer grew to maturity after liberation, and his books are widely read and popular. Some have been adapted for film scripts. *The Tender Sprout* is a selection from his published works to date.

Songs of a Tienshan Shepherd, published by the Writers' Publishing House, is a little volume of poems by Wen Chieh, a young poet. It contains four groups of poems—*By the Poszuteng Lake, Love Songs of Turfan,* Ballads of Kuotzu Gorge*, and the title poem, *Songs of a Tienshan Shepherd*—nine songs, among them *The Messenger from Halan Village*, and a long narrative poem, *A Kazakh Shepherd and His Steed*. Wen Chieh uses simple vernacular Chinese and modern verse form, and his work vividly reflects the life and surroundings of the Uighur, Kazakh and Mongolian peoples of Sinkiang.

On Poetry, published by the People's Literature Publishing House, is by Ai Ching, a veteran poet and writer. In this slim volume he has distilled the thoughts and experience of a long literary life. It includes the title essay *On Poetry*, *Poetry and Feeling*, *On Popularization and Classical Form*, and other essays dealing with poetic form.

Selected Poems from The Book of Odes, selected and edited by Professor Yu Kuan-ying, and published by the Writers' Publishing House. *The Book of Odes* is China's oldest collection of poems and songs, and a highly valued part of her literary heritage. It is in the language of its time, three thousand years ago, and because of this presents many language difficulties to the present-day reader.

Professor Yu Kuan-ying has rendered the eighty poems he has chosen into modern Chinese, and has provided explanatory notes.

Selected Poems of the Three Tsaos, selected and edited by Professor Yu

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*See *Chinese Literature*, No. 1, 1956.

Kuan-ying and with a preface by the selector, published by the Writers' Publishing House.

During the last reign of the Han Dynasty, in what is known in the history of Chinese literature as the Chienan Period (196-219 A.D.), the "Three Tsaos" —Tsao Tsao and his two sons—held a prominent place. Assimilating the language and form of the people of the day, they made a great contribution to the development of literature in China. This selection includes eight poems by Tsao Tsao, thirty by Tsao Pi and fifty-one by Tsao Chih. The book includes explanatory notes, and the preface gives an analytical account of their life, and the content and artistic craftsmanship of their work.

Stories to Awaken Men, with explanatory notes by Ku Hsueh-chi, and published by the Writers' Publishing House, is one of three famous collections of short stories in the vernacular, compiled by Feng Meng-lung (c.1574-1646) in the Ming Dynasty. The three together are traditionally known as *San Yen (Three Collections of Stories)*. The other two go under the titles of *Stories to Teach Men* and *Stories to Warn Men*.

Stories to Awaken Men was originally the last one of the collections, and consists of forty short stories, some of which date from the Sung and Yuan Dynasties but the majority are from the Ming Dynasty. In the main they are from folk legends, but a few are historical. *Stories to Awaken Men*, in full, runs to 864 pages. This edition is being published in two volumes.

Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, translated by Hsiao Chien, and published by the China Youth Publishing House. Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* needs no introduction to the reader of English. The publication of this translation has a dual purpose: first and foremost it is for the enjoyment and study of Chinese children of all ages, and secondly it is as an example of popularization of classical literature, for the benefit of Chinese writers. Fifty years ago there was a translation of Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* into classical Chinese, and subsequently many other books of tales from Shakespeare, with parallel English and Chinese texts, appeared one after another. They are all out of print now.

The Children of Captain Grant, translated by Chih Jen, and published by the China Youth Publishing House. The novels of Jules Verne, the French 19th century writer of scientific "space fiction," are widely loved by young people everywhere. A recent translation of his *The Children of Captain Grant* has just come out. It is the first of three of his most famous works, the other two being *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *Mysterious Island*. Another Jules Verne's novel—*From the Earth to the Moon*—has already been translated by Lu Hsun from the Japanese translation in 1903. Further translations of Jules Verne are planned.

WRITERS AND ARTISTS IN THIS NUMBER

Li Chun was born in 1928 at a village in Honan. His father was a small tradesman running a one-man general store. When Li Chun was seven he went to the village school where he studied for two or three years. Then he worked for two years as an apprentice in a shop. In 1949, after liberation, he became a government employee, first in a state bank, and subsequently in a spare-time school for government employees, where he taught Chinese. He began to write in 1953. His first stories were about the peasants of the Yellow River valley, the peasants he knew from his childhood days. His "Not That Road" won wide popularity. Another, "The Poplar Tree," is also well thought of. His latest story, in this issue, "When the Snow Melts," was written in 1955.

Hsu Ti-shan (who writes under the pen-name of Lo Hua-sheng) was born in 1893 at Lunghsi, Fukien Province. He studied abroad, in England and the United States. On his return he tutored in social anthropology in Tsinghua University and philosophy in Peking University, and was later Professor of History in Yenching University.

During the war against Japanese aggression, he was in Hongkong, where he ran the Hongkong branch of the Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles Against Japanese Invasion and took an enthusiastic part in politico-social activity. At that time the Hongkong office of the Kuomintang Overseas Affairs Department made great difficulties for him, but he never gave way an inch. He died in 1941.

He began writing in the early twenties. His published works include *Slight Drizzle* and *The Emancipator*, both collections of short stories. His "Blooms on a Dried Poplar" which is printed in this issue appeared originally in the *The Short Story Magazine*, and "Big Sister Liu" was written in July 1934.

Jen Ta-lin, born in 1929, comes from Chekiang. His family being very poor, he could only afford to finish junior secondary schooling; and in 1946, he worked as a clerk in the Hangchow Senior Secondary School. In 1947, he entered the Hangchow Normal College as a student and began to write himself. In 1949, he went to work in the countryside and wrote quite a number of articles and stories for young readers. These were published in 1951 as a collection, under the title of *The Story of the Red-Soiled Hill*. Since then he has written some short stories, among them "The Peach Is Ripe," and "Granny Tien's Little Goat." He is at present the editor of *Youth Literature*, a monthly published in Shanghai.

Hsiao Ping was born in 1927 at a coastal village on the Shantung Peninsula. His father worked in a silk filature factory. After finishing primary school, Hsiao Ping was apprenticed to a photographer's studio and then to an electric appliance shop for five years. Since 1944, when his native town became one of the Eighth Route Army bases in the anti-

Japanese war, he taught in a primary school there for seven years. After the birth of New China he entered the Shantung Normal College, taking Chinese as his speciality. After graduation, he taught for some time in a secondary school. He is now in the research class of Peking Normal University, studying literary theory and literature for children.

Kao Hsiang-chen, from Kiangsu Province, was born in 1920 of a poor family. When she was ten her mother died, leaving the family destitute, and she with her brother and sister were all sent to an orphanage in Nanking.

After liberation she became an editor of *Study,* a fortnightly. In her spare time, she wrote short stories about children. "Chubby and Little Pine" is one of her most recent works. She is now working in the Peking Association of Writers and Artists, on the committee which specializes in bringing on new writers. She herself is also writing.

Wang Chi-ssu was born in 1905 in Chekiang. The district where he was born and brought up, Wenchow, has been a centre of Chinese drama since the 12th century. His childhood and school-days were permeated with drama, and he never lost his interest in it. In 1924, he entered Nanking University and began to study the works of Kuan Han-ching, Wang Shih-pu, Ma Chih-yuan and other well-known Chinese classical dramatists. After his graduation he taught in the secondary schools in the coastal provinces at the Southeast and meanwhile continued his studies of drama. In 1941 he became a professor in Chekiang University and in the same year he thoroughly edited and published *The Western Chamber,* one of China's most famous and beloved classical dramas. Since 1948 he has been teaching Chinese drama and the history of Chinese literature in Chungshan University at Canton, and is the head of the Department of Chinese Literature.

Chou Yang was born in 1908 in a village in Yiyang County, Hunan Province. In 1926 he entered the Great China University in Shanghai where he came into contact with Marxism. His career as a writer began in 1930. From 1931 to 1937 he was a leading member of the League of Chinese Left-Wing Writers in Shanghai. During this period, he published some literary criticism and translated Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* into Chinese from English, and some short pieces by Soviet writers.

In 1937, at the outbreak of the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression, he left Shanghai for Yenan, the centre of the revolution, where he took up educational work, meanwhile continuing his writing of literary criticism. Most of his works of this period have been collected in *The New Age of the Masses.* He also edited *Marxism and Literature* and translated *The Aesthetic Relationships Between Art and Reality* by Chernyshevsky, the great Russian critic.

Since 1949 he has been Vice-Chairman of the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists and Vice-Chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers. In 1954 he was elected a deputy to the National People's Congress of China.

Fu Pao-shih, now 53, graduated from the Imperial College of Fine Arts of Japan. He is one of China's best-known artists. From 1935 onwards, he has been Professor of Art in the Central University (now Nanking University) and Professor of Fine Arts and head of the teaching section in the department of Chinese paintings in Nanking Normal College. Among his recent paintings are *The Long March, Illustrations for Chu Yuan's Nine Odes, The Four Seasons, A Scenic Spot in Nanking, The East Shines Red,* and *Spring Rain.* The inspiration for the example in this issue was the scene at the Raining Flower Mount (the Nanking Martyrs' Cemetery) at Chingming Festival. The Festival in 1956 took place in a heavy downpour, but thousands of people came despite this to pay their tribute. "I was

deeply moved," he said, "and had to sketch it."

Fu Pao-shih is a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a member of the Classical Arts Committee of the Union of Chinese Artists and a council member of the Kiangsu Provincial Association of Writers and Artists.

Jen Pe-nien, from Shanyang County, Kiangsu Province, was born in 1840 and died in 1896. He was brought up in a poor family and, as a child, showed aptitude as an artist. At nineteen he was painting paper fans in a shop in Shanghai. At that time he was bent on imitating a well-known artist of the time who specialized in figures. Jen Pe-nien began to be known in his own right, and the artist he was imitating came to see him and was struck by his talent, so much so that he recommended him to take lessons from his brother. He studied under the brother for some time, and made further progress.

He had a knack for portrait painting, and his studies of flowers and birds are particularly outstanding. He is considered to be one of the best artists in this genre of the last hundred years.

The Hunters This lively painting (tenth century), of which the original is in the Palace Museum, is by an unknown artist of the early Sung Dynasty. Prior to those times there were many artists who were fond of painting the nomadic tribes roaming over the north China plain in those days, but very few works remain. Of these painters the best known are a father and son, Hu Huai and Hu Chien, and Li Tsan-hua.

There was a distinctive style of some northern painters of this period, and *The Hunters* is typical of this. It is considered to have been influenced by Hu Huai, as it is strongly reminiscent of a pastoral scene generally attributed to him, now on view in the Peking Palace Museum. The artist used the same graceful, energetic outlines and composition, and the same treatment of colour. We owe much to this style, which dates from late Tang to early Sung, not only for the inherent beauty of the paintings, but for its historical interest. It is "documentary evidence" of the life and times of these vigorous northern peoples.

Wu Fan, now 33, comes from Chungking. He graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts at Hangchow. Before liberation he taught in a secondary school.

After liberation he worked for *Ta Chung Literature* and *The Literature for the Masses* as the art editor. Since June last year he has been working on the committee of the Chungking branch of the Union of Chinese Artists which specializes in bringing on new artists. He himself is painting. His *Herald of Spring* in this issue is one of his recent works.

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