

CHINESE LITERATURE

1979 7



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No. 7, 1979

Ba Jin

Autumn in Spring

My younger sister sent me a telegram from home announcing the death of my elder brother.

I had no idea how he had died. So far as I knew he had been physically sound and planning to get engaged soon.

"Is it a dream? How could anyone die so easily? Especially just before his engagement?" I wondered.

I thought no more of the matter, for nothing around me had changed. There was nothing to remind me of his death.

The following day I received another telegram consisting of thirty-four ciphers, giving more details: My brother had committed suicide by cutting his own throat.

His hands slightly trembling, Xu, a friend of mine, helped me to decipher it.

"What's to be done?" he asked.

I did not know what to say. Gripping my own arm, I muttered to myself: "So it's not a dream after all."

Xu looked at me with compassion. To him, I must have seemed the most unlucky man in the world.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Before I could ask he had slipped out of the room.

Sitting on a sofa, I gazed at the portrait of Janet Gaynor hanging

We publish here the first twelve chapters of Ba Jin's short novel written in 1932. The other fourteen chapters will be published in our next issue.

on the wall. She smiled down at me. The silly girl had not smiled for a long time, so why smile at me today all of a sudden? Laughing at my bad luck? She was a blond with a healthy complexion, wearing a pale blue blouse. But what had all this to do with me? She was just a pin-up girl, and now my brother was dead.

My eyes turned from Janet Gaynor to the white-washed wall, white and spotless. But gradually there emerged from it a dark gaunt face.

There was nothing special about this face. It could have been yours, mine or anyone's. But no, it turned out to be my brother's.

It was truly his face, an ordinary young man's face which reflected his ordinary life.

"I'm dead." He suddenly opened his mouth. "I cut my throat with my own hands."

"You couldn't have," I countered. "It can't be true since you're here talking to me."

"That knife, that agony, those final death throes! Nobody knows my feelings. No one will ever miss me! That's how my life ended," he said sadly, big tears falling from his deep-set eyes.

"If a dead man can still talk and shed tears, death is nothing dreadful. Besides, everyone has to die," I said dubiously to myself, my voice too low for anyone else to hear.

"I don't want to die!" He pursed his lips, his face livid, his mouth a straight line, and his eyes two slits. I stared wide-eyed as his face kept sinking in until it looked as ludicrous as a bun.

The wall was white again, with no sign of my brother's face on it.

"Damn it!" I cursed myself. "You're dreaming with your eyes open!"

The telegram still lay on the table, that telegram of thirty-four ciphers.

2

"How would Rong console me if I told her the news? Girls are soft-hearted, she'd be sure to cry and feel distressed for me. Better not tell her." I thought my decision was right.

Just then she came in, already informed by Xu of what had happened.

"If you make me cross again, I'll follow your brother's example," she warned, pursing her little mouth. So she too could purse her lips!

Reminded of my brother's pursed mouth I was seized with terror.

"Don't talk like that!" I reached out to cover her mouth but my hand was warded off.

"Let's go for a walk," she suggested, picking up the telegram to fan herself.

"Shall we go to the garden under Rock Hill?" I proposed rather wearily.

"No! I don't like it. I can't stand that Malay gateman!" She turned her head away in exasperation dropping the telegram on the ground.

"Have a heart," I murmured, picking it up and putting it into my pocket. "Better go to the garden where the jasmine is so fragrant." I straightened up.

"O.K." she agreed with a smile. "Whatever you say."

So I closed the gate and followed her. Thus we set off.

A neighbour's dog trotted over barking at me but soon ran away wagging its tail.

We walked side by side, but she kept me at arm's length. I couldn't make her out. What was she up to?

The sky, trees, houses and street were bathed in sunshine. A winding road carried her slim figure uphill. Under her short skirt, her legs in black silk stockings danced nimbly on the soft tarmac.

When we came to the cemetery she stopped abruptly. Leaning against the fence, she gazed in silence at the rows of crosses and the tombstones beneath them.

How strange that a young girl should be interested in graves!

"Let's go!" I said impatiently. "What is there to look at?"

She did not move, but suddenly exclaimed with her ringing voice: "How peaceful to lie here!"

"You! . . . You envy. . . ." Shocked by my own ejaculation, I broke off before I might blurt out something ill-omened.

"Don't disturb me," she said reproachfully though not harshly. She took my hand in her soft one and held it tightly.

I looked at her with surprise and said no more.

What was in her mind? How could I ever guess?

Near by, there on two separate tombs were two wreaths, one already withered, the other still fresh.

"This is yours," she said, pointing at the fresh one. "That's mine." She indicated the withered one.

"I don't understand," I said frankly, sensing that something was preying on her mind.

"You don't understand?" She turned to me with a wan smile. I had never seen her smile like that before, and felt it uncalled-for; for it was the smile of an invalid, yet she wasn't ill. It made me feel like crying.

"You must be kidding!" she chuckled. "An intelligent man like you surely understands. . . . My future's gloomy and so I'm like these flowers." Again she pointed to that withered wreath. "You are like those others because your future is bright. The two wreaths are so close but they're not together — just like the two of us."

My future was bright, so I had been told perhaps a hundred times. But no one saying that before had made me feel like weeping.

"That's not an apt comparison! You can't compare men to flowers," I retorted with a forced smile, not trying to comfort her for fear of being reduced to tears myself.

"But I'm very fond of flowers." She had such a ready tongue that I couldn't refute her.

It was true that she loved flowers. Every time I went to her room I would see a big vase of fresh flowers of all colours on the table. On the wall of the room there hung a portrait of her mother, a middle-aged woman.

"A young girl shouldn't linger in a cemetery, let alone peep in surreptitiously from outside." To cover up my depression, I gave a hollow laugh.

"All right, let's go." She abruptly let go of my hand and turned to leave.

At the gate of the garden we were assailed by the fragrance of jasmine.

"Well? I didn't deceive you, did I?" I was pleased.

"I knew all along!" She smiled.

We climbed the steps into the garden. The Malay gateman riveted his beady eyes on her while wiping his hands with his red-checked apron. He was dark brown, with a bewhiskered mouth.

"Disgusting creature! His eyes are boring into my face!" she whispered as we passed him. "It's the same every time."

"That's because you're so beautiful," I said with a smile.

"Don't talk rot! Are you mocking me too? In that case you'd better leave me alone." She pretended to be angry and hurried away.

I stayed where I was gazing after her slim figure and slightly ruffled bobbed hair, thinking over her recent behaviour. I began to have misgivings.

I found her finally sitting on a stone bench under a jasmine tree. Her head in her hands, she seemed to be deep in thought. Her hair was sprinkled with little white jasmine blossoms.

She deliberately ignored me.

I sat down beside her and reached out to hold her right hand, but she wrenched it away. When I clasped it a second time, instead of resisting she nestled up to me.

I inhaled the scent of jasmine in her hair, held her soft hand. I did not speak, hoping to sound her out without words.

The plaintive strains of a violin drifted over from a brown building partially covered by the trees on the left. The Malay with his nasal voice began to sing a native love song.

I could not tell where her thoughts — or mine — had wandered.

"Lin," she suddenly asked, looking into my eyes, "is it true that your brother committed suicide?"

"Of course. You saw that telegram, didn't you?"

"Why did he kill himself?" she probed.

"I don't know," I replied frankly. Why did she keep dwelling on unhappy things about which a young girl should know nothing? I asked myself sadly.

"I'm wondering if it's really possible to kill oneself with one's own hands," she said with an effort, her hand quivering in mine.

"That's not something you need know." I tried to change the subject.

"But I must know," she insisted.

"Then listen to me. It is possible, of course. My brother killed himself. It's a fact," I said reluctantly, hoping my blunt answer might forestall further questions.

"To live or to die, which is happier?" she said as though to herself.

"Rong, don't you love me any more?" I asked with dismay.

"Why?" She was surprised. "What gives you that idea? When have I said I don't love you?"

"Your face shows it."

"My face? Aren't you used to my face?" She thrust her cheek against my lips and I kissed her. Her face was so cold that it did tell me something. . . .

"On a fine day like this and in such lovely surroundings, don't you think it's ridiculous for two young lovers to keep talking about life and death and suicide?"

After a pause she replied, "Don't start imagining things. I'm here beside you, how can you think I don't love you?" She was certainly adept at hiding her true feelings.

Yes, she was beside me but our hearts were far apart. How far I did not know.

"Love is a wonderful thing," she said in a low voice as if to herself. "Too wonderful to come my way." Her voice was as plaintive as that violin.

I looked at the shadows on her face which — like a bridal veil — made her seem even lovelier. But this bride would never be mine.

I clasped her to me as my dearest treasure. My tears fell like pearls on her hair.

"You're crying," said she, looking up with a smile which I thought more moving than tears. She laid one finger on my lips then kissed them, quick as a flash of lightning.

But when I tried to kiss her she turned away.

"Rong, you're not your normal self today. You've changed." I was very depressed. "What's the matter?"

"I don't know myself."

"Is there anything I can do to help? Lovers should have no secrets from each other."

"I just don't know," was her naive, frank reply.

I wondered if a rift had come between us.

The sun quietly set. We were enveloped in the fragrant dusk. The Malay, bare-footed, strolled to and fro before us.

"Shall we go back?" She got to her feet and took my arm.

We went back down that winding road.

"See me home, will you?" she said as if issuing an order.

"Fine."

"I cooked some dishes this morning, specially for you."

"Really?"

"There's wine too."

"I don't feel like drinking."

"It's good wine a friend of mine gave me. I've been keeping it to share it with you."

Instead of speaking, I eyed her gratefully. She smiled like a flower in bloom. The clouds had dispersed.

After rounding a few bends we walked up a slope. I recognized her house fenced off with green palings. Inside the courtyard there were red and white blossoms.

We opened the gate, climbed the steps and entered her room, a young girl's bed-sitting-room.

"You sit here." She pointed to a sofa.

Then she went to the table from which she took a vase of flowers which she placed on the stool beside me. She pressed her face to the flowers and then disappeared behind a screen.

They were white lilies, purple violets and yellow canna.

I bent over them to smell the fragrance of the lilies and her perfume.

She reappeared with two dishes.

"Shall I give you a hand?" I asked as usual.

"No, thanks. You don't know how. Just sit here quietly," she said with her usual smile.

Dinner was ready now. Two dishes on a little round table across which we faced each other.

"How does that taste?" she asked as usual.

"Delicious. Just to my liking," I gave my usual reply.

She took a bottle of wine from the sideboard.

"Look! It's as red as blood, so bright!" She poured me a full glass then filled her own.

She raised her glass and I mine.

After one glass my face began to burn.

"That's enough," I said, setting it down.

In silence she refilled my glass, her eyes flashing at me as if to say, "Come on! Drink as much as you can."

I downed another glass.

By then she had already drunk four.

Her glowing face was lovely, her eyes gleamed bewitchingly.

"I'm not drunk! I'm not drunk!" she defended herself hurriedly, her voice like a bird singing.

"Feel my cheeks and temples. They are cold." She pressed my hand to her face.

Her hand was hot! Her cheeks were burning! Yet she said they were cold.

"Yes, they are cold." I lied to her and myself, in the hope of caressing her face a little longer.

"Have some more." She raised the bottle to refill my glass.

"I've had enough. Any more would make me tipsy. And you'd better go easy yourself. You used not to like drink." I covered my glass with my hand and smiled at her.

"It's fine to get drunk. Warms the cockles of my heart, stops me worrying and gives me a little peace. So why should we have any scruples? When we're together the world belongs to us." She pulled my hand away from the glass and filled it.

Then she began to sing softly.

"Rong, don't drink any more," I pleaded.

A smile flashed over her rosy cheeks. She picked up some food with her chopsticks and thrust it into my mouth. "Have some more," she urged, her voice as sweet as honey.

I ate and was pleased. I looked into her eyes. We both smiled.

"My head's swimming," she suddenly put down the chopsticks and said.

"You must be drunk. Who told you to drink so much?"

"Drunk? Impossible. I want to take a boat out to sea to watch the stars!" Her large eyes were wide open.

"Do I smell of wine?" She came over to me and blew at my face. Her breath certainly smelt of wine.

I could not help laughing.

"If you puff at me again I may bring up my dinner. And you say you don't smell of wine?"

"How mean you are!" She patted my head before going back to her seat.

"In what way am I mean?" I asked teasingly.

"Anyway you're mean," she pouted. She kept moving her chair towards me.

"My mind's in a turmoil, Lin." She leant against my shoulder.

"I don't want to drink any more. I don't feel like eating either."

"You're drunk. I warned you, didn't I?" I challenged jokingly.

"Are you still going to go out boating and watch the stars?"

"Why not?" She rose sulkily to her feet, but then plumped down again.

"Well, I give up," she admitted, shaking her head. "I'm just not up to it, I feel so limp."

3

I found it hard to get up the next morning.

Outside the window, white and red flowers were smiling in the sunshine. There came the ring of a bicycle bell from the gate.

Her landlady's little boy brought me a letter. It read:

Lin, sorry we couldn't go and watch the stars at sea last night because the wine went to my head. It should be more mysterious, more fun too, star-gazing while you're drunk. You should have taken me there. We must go tonight to watch the star clusters and listen to the whispering of the sea. I feel so pent up, I'm longing to roam the seas.

We'll set the boat adrift. You can sit there cradling my head in your arms while I watch the stars and listen to your breathing. That way I shall feel safe in your arms for ever. No one will see us, the stars won't disclose our secret. The whole world will be ours at sea!

You can tell me the names of the stars, those red and green ones, and all the lovely stories there are about them.

Oh, I remember:

I wept last night; why, I don't know. The tear-stains on the sofa and pillow-case remind me of how I quarrelled with you, or rather sobbed out all my troubles to you.

I can't remember the details. Did I annoy you? If so, have you forgiven me?

I never used to drink, but that wine was such a brilliant colour! Besides, it was as thick as blood, so how could I help drinking it? I've got another bottle here to drink next time you come. Lin, if drinking is wicked, let's be wicked for once. Young people often are, aren't they? Please don't refuse me, Lin. Don't put on that serious look like a moral preacher.

There was another note:

This bunch of lilies is from my vase. I know you love flowers and so I specially picked these for you. Let them keep you company for me, and let their fragrance dispel your pedantry.

With love,
Rong

"Where are the flowers? The lilies?" I asked the boy in surprise.

"I've no idea. What lilies?" The boy was puzzled and stared at me wide-eyed.

"She says in her letter that she's sending me a bunch of lilies. Where are they?"

"The young lady just asked me to give you this letter, she didn't give me any flowers."

I sent him away rather crossly.

What strange creatures girls are! What was she thinking of? Was she trying to make a fool of me? I'm not a man to be trifled with!

"Hey there!" I jumped out of bed to run after the boy. "Come back!"

It was too late. The child was nowhere to be seen. There was only a dog barking at the gate.

The ground felt warm to my feet. Only then did I realize that I had no shoes on.

It was a fine day. Red and white flowers were blooming in my garden, but no lilies.

I caught the faint sound of a hymn sung to an organ accompaniment in the church and realized that it was Sunday.

Where should I go? . . . To find Rong.

The dog barked when I was knotting my tie. The gate creaked open and in came Xu.

"Any other telegram from home?" he asked.

"No."

"Any letter? The letter should've arrived by now."

"Yes, I should think so too."

"So no more news?"

"None."

"Why did your brother commit suicide? Do you have any idea?"

"No. I don't know."

Xu sat facing me. I was on the sofa, my collar unbuttoned and without a tie.

Neither of us spoke for a moment. His sallow face and rather sunken eyes revealed the wretchedness of his life as a newspaper editor.

We stared at each other. His face was overcast like a cloudy sky.

"Lin," he broke the silence in a dispirited voice. I looked out of the window fancying that I heard a crow cawing.

"Lin, you shouldn't. . . ." He hesitated.

I looked back at him, pretending to be listening intently.

"I haven't seen you cry over your brother's death."

"No," I said coldly.

He was right. I hadn't shed a single tear. I couldn't force it, could I?

"You aren't in the least upset. All you think of is Rong," he said slowly.

"It's not right. Your brother was very good to you." His solemnity couldn't conceal the weariness in his eyes.

"You don't go to your office today, do you?" I asked abruptly.

I knew that he never went to work on Sunday because there was no Monday paper. I just didn't want him to go on about my brother.

"Of course not," he replied listlessly. Sure enough, he stopped lecturing me.

"Shall we go to see Rong?" I came to the point.

"No, I don't feel like it," he answered glumly.

I paid no attention but knotted my tie and put on my suit, then made him go out with me.

He still pulled a long face which amused me. He was a good man who put up with everything. He often complained about his life, his fate and all that struck him as unreasonable. But it was no use. So in the end he gave up and went along with them. What a pitiful man, a pitiful good man!

The sun stealthily climbed down from tree tops to roofs and then to the ground. In many little gardens flowers were in bloom. Along the winding street, shaded here and there by foliage, people came and went. Children laughed inside their gates. A fat Western woman appeared round a corner and soon vanished down a small lane.

"I'm sick and tired of life in a newspaper office," Xu complained again. "Such a beautiful town, yet I can't enjoy any freedom." He looked up at the blue sky through the tree leaves and let the warm sun caress his sallow face. He seldom saw the sun, having worked indoors in the press for several years.

"You're luckier than I am. Everything is so dull in my place: electric light, scissors and type-setters' gaunt faces. It's so

monotonous, always seeing the same few people, the same tired faces," he almost moaned.

"Why don't you resign then?" I said automatically, having heard complaints like this so many times.

"What am I to live on then?" he snapped back as if stung.

His logic was simple: A man lived on his pay and so must spend his life earning money. In other words, to keep alive you must sell your life bit by bit. Xu did not want to sell it but he had no choice.

"And there's my mother, she's the most important person in my life. I remit money to her every month. If I didn't work, what would she have to live on?"

It was true that he had a mother of whom he was always speaking. He had asked her to join him here, but the old lady was afraid of the trip by sea. Every month he sent her twenty *yuan* without fail. I knew all this. Besides, I could tell it from his face — each time he sent money his face became more bloodless. His mother lived on her son's blood, actually!

"A friend of mine recommended me for a post overseas," he once told me. "I might have found a better job there. But my mother wouldn't let me go, and I was reluctant to be too far from her. That would have made it difficult to raise the money to go back to see her. Besides, the manager of our newspaper was unwilling to let me go."

He was the only friend I had who loved his mother so deeply. Once he had cried for a whole day after seeing a film called *A Kind Mother*.

"I've only one person who's dear to me, and that's my mother," he said. "I'm ready to sacrifice everything for her."

He had his mother whom he loved and often talked about. My mother had long been lying in her grave, and I was not even sure where it was. I never talked about her. Perhaps I had never loved her.

We entered the green gate and saw Rong standing on the steps, in a pink blouse and short black skirt.

"How early you are!" She greeted us with a smile, a spring-like smile, her face glowing like a petal in the sun.

"This is your day off, isn't it?" she said to Xu.

"I only slept for three hours early this morning," he answered, his voice like rain on an autumn night.

"I got drunk last night and quarrelled with Lin," she laughed, her laughter like the chime of a silver bell.

"She was drunk, yes. But we didn't quarrel. She was laughing and crying by turns," I defended myself with a grin.

Why should she harp on our quarrel? We'd never had one. She had been tipsy and wept for no reason at all, refusing to let me go and asking me to keep her company. I hadn't understood a word of her tearful outburst.

"Why don't you have lunch here, Xu? I've still got a bottle of good wine. Really, it's as bright as blood, as rich as blood." A radiant smile appeared on her rosy face.

Her smile enabled me to forget yesterday's happenings. It was impossible that a girl who was smiling so radiantly today could have wept so bitterly only the previous night.

"I've given up drinking. My mother wrote asking me to," said Xu without any hesitation. He took his mother's words for gospel.

Rong knit her brows as if needed. The radiant smile vanished. Her face clouded over. "Mother... mother..." she murmured blankly. I knew her mother was bedridden, suffering from paralysis.

"Rong!" I called a couple of times to wake her up.

Then we went into her room.

As usual on the table there was a vase of flowers: yellow canna, purple violets and red roses. There were no lilies in it.

"Where are the lilies?" I remembered her letter. "The ones you meant to give me."

She pointed to the round table on which there stood a green vase with the lilies I had seen the previous day.

She took the bunch out, revealing a yellow ribbon tied round the stems. There was no water in the vase.

"I decided you'd have to come to fetch the gift yourself. I think you know what I mean."

Only today however, have I come to understand.

She and Xu sat down to a game of chess while I went behind the screen to her bed.

On it I saw a thin green silk quilt, a sheet printed with blue flowers and a pillow-case embroidered with the words: Everlasting friendship. This pillow-case was one of a pair, and the other was on my bed.

I smelt a scent like that of lilies.

"What are you doing in there?" her ringing voice asked.

"Looking at your pillow-case."

"What's there to look at? You've got the other one, haven't you? Come out and watch us play chess."

"I'm trying to find the tear-stains you mentioned in your letter."

I heard nothing except a giggle. Then she became engrossed in the game again.

I lay down on her bed and buried my face in her slightly damp pillow which cooled my burning cheeks. A sweet scent pervaded my nostrils. This girl was driving me crazy.

She called me several times and I pretended to be asleep. In fact I was recalling how we had met and how we had fallen in love. I was day-dreaming.

4

"Zheng Peirong!"

I first noticed the name on a register in the middle school of C town, where I had just gone to teach English.

Holding the register, I called the names one by one, pausing each time to familiarize myself with each new face.

And then I came to "Zheng Peirong".

The reply rang out like a silver bell. A pair of big eyes surveyed me. She had an oval face, and her red lips were curved in a curious smile. But very soon she lowered her head and all I could see was her glossy bobbed hair.

That was how we became acquainted.

Though she was not a boarder, she arrived early and left late. She often came to my room with a number of questions, and later

some of her questions had nothing to do with our class work. When she reappeared after the summer holidays we had opportunities to talk together.

Behind our school there was a stream on the banks of which grew longan trees. In that little wood I spent many happy hours. The trees were in blossom when I got to know her. By the time they bore fruit we had become close friends.

We both loved the green leaves and yellow fruit of those trees.

Among the green foliage of the largest trees hung clusters of small, round, olive green fruit. We had only to reach up to pick a handful, which we ate either in the wood or beside the stream.

White fruit, brown pips and olive green rind; two pairs of eyes; talk of everything under the sun. We were in love.

I left C town because of her. And recently she had come here because of me.

Both of us lived with friends.

5

I was day-dreaming, and there was no end to my dream.

I couldn't understand this girl's psychology. Lately she had been behaving rather oddly.

It was she who had taken the offensive against me, breaking through my defences, so that I became her captive. But then she had begun to hesitate.

What should I do?

Girls were really perverse. She often provoked me till I felt quite frantic, yet she herself pretended to be indifferent and aloof.

She was not as affectionate as she had been. She kept things secret from me.

What should I do?

— These problems were preying on my mind.

The sun was shining brightly outside the window. The wind carried in a Russian song which always sounded melancholy.

All of a sudden Rong started to sing softly *You're Always in My Arms*.



I was still lying on her bed, my face buried in her pillow. I had hoped to moisten my cheeks with her tear-stains, but they had already dried.

"You spineless weakling!" I said to myself.

"What are this bed and pillow to me if I finally fail to win her?"

"Finally fail to win her? Out of the question! I can't conceive of life without her."

"You spineless weakling! Why didn't you settle the matter long ago? Why didn't you propose marriage?"

"What if she stops loving me? If she jilts me and falls in love with someone else?"

"Everything is possible, of course. There are no end of men who are better than me. Even more devoted lovers could split up."

— I put forward these questions and supplied the answers.

Rong and Xu were fighting over a "chariot". "Lin, come out and help me!" she called laughingly. "Are you sleeping? Get up quickly."

I stood up and was leaving the bed when I caught sight of a letter under the pillow.

How funny that I hadn't seen it before!

I picked it up to examine the envelope, and recognized her father's handwriting. The letter had been franked four or five days before. Her father, I knew, disliked people from other provinces.

I was very curious to know what he had written. However, instead of taking the letter out I slipped the envelope under her pillow again.

I stepped out from the screen regretting not having read it.

When I reached the table, the fight for the "chariot" was over.

"Did you really fall asleep? Why didn't you answer me?" she scolded. Her face was not overcast, her eyes were dancing. Obviously she had got the upper hand of Xu.

Xu had a "horse" in one hand and was hesitating, I found his look of intense concentration amusing.

In vain did she urge him to hurry. She started humming *Ramona*, beating time with one of the chessmen.

"Why take it so seriously? It's so dull playing chess!" I lifted

the chessboard, scattering all the pieces, a few of which fell off and rolled on the ground.

"What do you think you're doing? I'd have won in another minute." She stamped her foot, threatening to hit me, but she was still smiling.

I ran and intentionally went behind the screen. When she dashed after me I lay down on her bed. She cuffed me twice on the head and told me to beg for mercy.

I quickly fished out the letter from under the pillow, waved it in front of her, then made as if to take it out to read.

Her face darkening, she snatched the letter away, thrust it into her blouse and left me without a word.

"Rong, Rong," I called, taken aback by her displeasure. Regretting my gaffe, I wanted to console her.

She looked over her shoulder quietly, but unfortunately I could not understand the expression in her eyes.

6

Xu proposed a trip to South Pu Tuo Monastery. Rong agreed after a little thought. I said nothing. Whether we went or not was the same to me.

The three of us walked along a tarmac street. Sunlight danced on our bare heads.

Her face was clouded. Xu's was beaded with sweat. My own I could not see.

My mind was preoccupied with the lilies she had promised to give me. I feared they might have withered by our return because there was no water in the vase.

Other passers-by were chattering, but none of us spoke. Xu took out a handkerchief to wipe his perspiring face.

The litchi trees were in blossom. Bees circled their branches, humming. The shadows of the lush foliage kept shifting on the road gilded by the sunshine.

On our way we passed the garden and were virtually immersed in the fragrance of jasmine. The Malay was singing his nostalgic love songs.

"How lovely spring is!" a voice cried in my heart.

I turned to look at her. The cloud on her face had disappeared. She reached up from time to time to tidy her abundant black hair, revealing her lotus-white arm.

A girl with a local accent, gaily dressed, strolled past in high-heeled shoes, holding a small red parasol. Xu pointed her out to me as a typical southern beauty.

The busy street was flanked with red and green fruit stalls, and cafés with signboards inscribed "ICE". There were British sailors in white uniforms, Chinese police patrolling with measured steps, and a host of ungrammatical Chinese advertisements.

So many things caught my eye, I had no time to take in the scene as a whole.

In the shade of a huge banyan tree was a small temple, with smoke rising from an iron incense burner before its gate. Little colourful pennants were pinned on the gates of some Western-style buildings, spirit-pennants bearing requests for divine protection.

We came to a dock from which we could see a white expanse of sea. A number of brightly painted sampans were moored there.

We hired a sampan and rowed out to sea.

I remembered her longing to watch the stars from the sea, and looked up. There were no clouds. We were surrounded by blue skies, glorious sun and milky water.

We made slow progress. The wind brought us coolness. As there were no big waves it was almost like boating on the West Lake in Hangzhou. But the West Lake couldn't compare with this vast sea!

Sunshine skimming the water made it gleam like satin. Then a junk sailed over, cutting through the calm water. Our sampan rocked up and down, water splashed her hair.

I dried her hair with my handkerchief. She turned to me with a smile.

"Why are you so quiet today, Rong?" I felt emboldened to ask.

"I don't know. Perhaps because of my hangover." Her voice was still clear as a bell, but I feared the bell would soon crack.

She was so close, I'd only to reach out to take her in my arms.

I loved her as never before, and would gladly have given my life for her yet I couldn't reach out to touch her.

Looking at my hands, I thought, "Come on! Come on!" Then I stared at her as if I would devour her. The next moment, however, I calmly averted my eyes to watch a three-funnelled British warship.

As we landed at the opposite shore, I secretly cursed myself: "You spineless weakling!" I smiled — a wry, cryptic smile.

We took a bus to South Pu Tuo.

On the bus, she and I said little. She kept looking out to enjoy the scenery.

Xu was in a talkative mood and had a great deal to tell me, as he had been here many times before, whereas it was my first visit.

Having got off the bus, I saw a half-Chinese, half-Western-style temple. Two fashionably dressed women in green satin gowns emerged from the temple, their faces very heavily made up. Tailing them were three students, all in Western suits.

Rong turned her head away. The students burst out laughing and, after a pause, followed the two prostitutes.

"You men are really disgusting!" Rong whispered to me through gritted teeth.

Both Xu and I laughed. I wanted to say, "That's because you're so beautiful!" But this time I thought better of it.

The first things we saw in the temple were four giant statues flanking both sides of the hall. When we came to the central hall, some prostitutes were consulting the oracle there.

"Look, how piously they're kneeling!" Xu sneered softly. "What do they want to find out? How good their business will be?"

I felt amused too. But Rong looked very grave.

"Do you think street girls have no souls?"

Why did she ask that? I had never given the question any thought, and never would in future either. I just found their behaviour amusing.

"Probably," Xu said, "to them, money is everything."

"Pooh! You know nothing about women's feelings." She was put out.

Who then understood women's feelings? They were such hypersensitive, complex creatures.

"All right, we don't know," I said, to make her speak. "So let us listen to you. Since you are a woman, you'll know what you're talking about."

She looked me in the eyes, and her face was clouded with an autumn cloud. Gone was the radiant sunshine. It was autumn already for her.

Why had autumn come so fast? Where was spring? Had spring gone for good?

"It's a long story," she began. "It would take days to finish, but even then you wouldn't understand. I'll just tell you one thing: A close friend of mine in our primary-school days is now a prostitute. I know she's a very good woman."

"How do you know? People change. Good people may go to the bad," Xu challenged her.

I suddenly remembered that Xu, like Schopenhauer and Strindberg, was a misogynist. It was said that a woman had jilted him, though he himself would not admit this.

"That friend of mine is really a good person, but she's the victim of her parents' prejudice," Rong continued. "She wrote to me only recently."

This was news to me. She had never told me about it.

Her friend might be a good woman, but what had that to do with me? Rong still kept many secrets from me. I had thought I had won her heart and soul. Evidently I had been wrong.

I followed Rong and Xu, filled with jealousy. I was jealous of those secrets she kept from me.

We encountered a group of students and some women. The men smiled at the sight of the women. But my heart was so gnawed by jealousy that I could not force a smile.

We came to a brook and Xu refused to go any further. He sat down on a rock.

"Let's climb that hill," said Rong to me. It sounded like an order.

We went through a tunnel and climbed up some steps, Rong taking the lead. She climbed so fast I could hardly catch up with her.

Halfway up the hill the path came to an end. Under a newly-built cement pavilion we stood for a while, then I sat down on a rock.

Slowly I mopped my perspiring forehead with my handkerchief.

"You look exhausted, but I feel fine!" Her voice rang out like a silver bell in spring. A happy childish smile appeared on her face.

So it was spring after all!

I lifted my hot face towards the blue sky, the free wind. But I had a vision of a pair of big eyes and two slender eyebrows. The big eyes gleamed with love, love of spring and love of the south.

"Lin!" she called.

Our eyes met again. I was enchanted by her big eyes and slender eyebrows. But her expression kept changing rapidly, spring and autumn alternating in a flash.

"Lin, do you still love me? As much as before?" she asked abruptly, her voice like the strains of a flute on a spring night. Her eyes were misted over, threatening rain.

Whether this would be a spring shower or autumn rain, I had no idea. My heart was quivering.

That was the question I had wanted to ask, yet she had forestalled me. So we thought alike though neither of us knew the other's mind. But now we had the chance to confide in each other. However, I hesitated for fear another mist might rise to hide our true feelings.

"Rong, you know me, know my heart. I never tell lies. I love you, love you more than ever before!"

My voice trembled. In my anxiety and fear, I did not speak fast lest she might misunderstand me.

All my blood had rushed to my face. I looked into her eyes, waiting...

"Don't wait! Take her in your arms and kiss her!" my heart

urged me. "Tell her your doubts and anxiety. Tell her you want to know all her secrets. Tell her how she's made you feel these last few days!"

My hands were shaking but they did not reach out.

She looked at me without a word.

"She knows now! Hurry up!" I urged myself.

Then I saw the rain in her big eyes which gleamed darkly. Rain, autumn rain! My heart was drenched.

"Rong, I love you, shall always love you! I can't live without you. I wish I could cut out my heart to show you what a place you have in it." I spoke as if declaiming a poem, and felt I had said all there was to say. In fact, I had left out the most important thing.

My eyes brimmed over with tears — a summer downpour. I seemed to hear thunder.

"Don't hesitate, Rong. I've given you my whole self. For you, I'll gladly sacrifice everything."

I could see nothing except her face, hear nothing except her voice.

"Are you sure you wouldn't regret it if you sacrificed everything for me?" This was not the sound of a silver bell but fluting on a rainy autumn night.

My heart trembled again at the thought that autumn had come back.

"No, I'll never regret it. True love knows no regrets."

What I wanted to ask her, but didn't, was: "Why are you still hesitating? Have you had a change of heart?"

"I believe you," she said, then broke off.

I was saved, I thought.

She had faith in me and loved me, so that was that. But why had she broken off short there?

I stood up, looking at her face which was in the sunshine. The tears in her big eyes were gleaming. The clouds had dispersed and spring had reappeared.

How fast a girl's feelings and expression could change!

"I believe you. But if you have a change of heart later, I'll cut my throat like your brother."

She rose to her feet too and smiled at me. The silver bell had sounded again, but I was not sure whether it was spring or autumn.

So she still remembered my brother whom I had long since forgotten.

"Let's go down and not keep Xu waiting too long," she said.

I followed her down to rejoin Xu by the brook. By then there was no sign of tears in her eyes.

7

We had dinner in her room.

Afterwards she saw Xu and me off, then closed the gate.

We walked in the dark, I with the bunch of lilies in my hand.

Stars, white, green and red, were bright against the black sky.

There were few people about in this quiet district under the pallid street lamps.

I pressed the flowers to my face. Their fragrance made me forget my fatigue.

"What did you say to her at South Pu Tuo, Lin?" Xu suddenly asked. "Both of you seemed to have cried."

"It was just lovers' talk." I raised my head from the flowers.

"Why cry then?"

"We didn't really, only shed a few tears. Lovers' talk often leads to tears."

"Perhaps I shouldn't say this... but if you shed tears at this stage, your love affair won't have a happy ending. I've sensed that for a long time."

I felt put out and retorted: "I didn't expect to hear anything good from a misogynist like you. Don't you admire Rong too? You know nothing about love! There's no love without tears."

"No. I've felt something wrong about this affair of yours. Felt it instinctively. I can't put my finger on it, but I'm quite sure of it."

This was like a basin of cold water poured on my head. Although I did not believe him, I lacked proof that he had no experience of love.

"You don't understand at all. You're too biased. I love her and she loves me. No problem!"

"Look!" Xu said, suddenly pointing to the sky.

A light shot down from the sky and disappeared in a flash. I seemed to have heard a faint whistle.

"A shooting star," Xu said to himself, still searching for it in the darkness. "A lost star," he added tenderly as if calling his sweetheart's name. But then he repeated firmly: "I'm sure of it."

To me, his last words sounded like the toll of a funeral bell. I was suddenly afraid.

I covered my face with the lilies. Their cool fragrance reminded me of the scent of her pillow.

She belonged to me. I must on no account lose her.

Having said good-bye to Xu, I hurried back home.

My neighbour's dog barked at the gate at the sound of my footsteps. When I drew nearer it recognized me and ran away, wagging its tail.

I carried the flowers into my room, changed the water in the vase and put in the lilies, then I placed the vase on a little table beside my bed.

I lay on my bed gazing at the flowers.

They looked limp though not withered. The fresh water, I thought, would revive them.

I would take good care of them because they symbolized our love.

8

The spring time of our love returned! I had a few happy days in which, although there fell some autumn rain, the sky soon cleared again.

She sent me an enlarged photograph of herself. I took down the picture frame from the wall and covered Janet Gaynor with her portrait.

Now it was she who looked down instead of Janet Gaynor and smiled at me. It was a spring-like smile.

Luxuriant black hair, slender eyebrows, shining big eyes, sweet lips curved in a smile.

"I love you," — a bell-like sound from those parted lips. Her two bright eyes illuminated my whole being.

Was I in a dream?

"Rong, I love you, shall love you for ever, more than anything in the world," I said to myself as if declaiming a poem.

When she was before me I would say: "I love you." When alone in my room, I would still say: "I love you." I had got to know her when the longan trees blossomed. I had fallen in love with her when they had borne fruit. Now the trees were in blossom again and I was still murmuring "I love you" to her picture.

You spineless weakling! — I covered my face and sank down on the sofa.

Xu's criticism came back to my mind: "You're a prisoner of emotion."

I wished I had been. I dreamed of becoming the prisoner of emotion. If I had, Rong would long ago have been mine.

How could I become a prisoner of emotion? Lucky prisoner! I felt I was losing my mind.

9

The telegram, lying on a corner of my desk, was creased. I spotted it again when I was sorting out my books.

I had received it more than a week ago, but had still not written a letter home to ask for details.

Because of Rong, I had forgotten my only brother. All my love was for her and there was none left for him. He had loved me so much and we had spent most of our childhood together. He was only two years older than me.

Now I began to think of him — more than a week after his death.

I sat down to write to my younger sister, asking why and how he had committed suicide and how things were at home since his death.

The sun crept into the room through the open window. Out-

side, butterflies fluttered about the flowers. Bees and flies danced in the room.

My heart faltered as I wrote.

The melancholy strains of a violin sounded not far away. I knew the violinist was that girl who often dressed in white. I frequently saw her sitting in her balcony when I passed by. She seemed to be a chronic invalid. Otherwise, in such fine weather, wouldn't a young girl go out for a stroll or to smell the jasmine in the garden or watch the stars at sea?

I put all this down in my letter.

The dog barked, the gate creaked, and I heard the sound of leather shoes. I knew who was coming.

"Lin!" How clear the silver bell sounded this fine spring day.

She came in wearing her pink blouse and short black skirt, her eyes shining, a charming smile on her oval face.

I put down my pen and folded up the letter.

"I knew you must be at home," she said smilingly. "Why didn't you come to see me?"

"I was writing a letter." I rose to my feet.

"Whom to?"

"My younger sister."

"I don't believe you. Show me." She pursed her lips.

"Here you are." I unfolded the letter and gave it to her.

She sat down by the table.

While she was intent on reading I watched her face. It clouded over once or twice, then cleared again.

"Well written. It reads like a story."

I smiled, my heart was singing.

"Why don't you carry on writing? Am I interrupting you?"

How could I write a letter while she was beside me?

"Interrupting me? Not at all! I knew you would come so I wrote it while waiting for you. I'll finish it tonight, as anyway I'm not posting it till tomorrow."

"Any letter from home? Any news?"

"No."

She sighed softly and then turned her eyes to my books.

Why should she sigh? Hadn't she just been smiling radiantly?

I looked at her face. The shadow on it was beginning to disperse. It was still redolent of spring.

"May she only feel the way she looks!" I prayed.

"Shall we go to a film, Lin?" she suddenly suggested after we had exchanged a few words.

"What film? Isn't it too late?" I fished out my watch. The spring sun caressed my head, bees were humming around me.

"Greta Garbo's *Romance*. People say it's excellent."

"Garbo's film? Why do you like her films? They're not the kind a girl ought to see."

"She's the only real artist among film stars. Her acting is so profound."

"A girl like you should go to see Norma Shearer or Janet Gaynor. As for Garbo, better leave her to middle-aged women to enjoy."

"You don't understand! Do you think Norma Shearer is typical of us girls? That's as ridiculous as some girls regarding Ramon Novarro as the ideal man."

I stopped arguing with her and we set off at once.

While talking to her on the way, I thought to myself: What a strange girl she is, fond of drinking blood-red wine and seeing Greta Garbo's films.

10

The stuffy, ill-lit cinema was crowded and humming with the local nasal accent, the laughter of women and the cries of children.

Then the lights went out and everyone quieted down.

On the screen appeared people and action, newsreels, comedies, and romances.

The world around us vanished, we were dreaming with our eyes open. I leaned against her and she against me.

Youth, passion, a moonlit night, deep love, a young couple, another young man, the eternal triangle, an unforgiving father, money, reputation, career, sacrifice, betrayal, a business in Egypt, long years in a tropical country.

An orphaned girl, an alcoholic brother, first love, a trusted lover, solemn vows, sudden separation, a downpour one moon-lit night, a deeply wounded heart, a loveless marriage, the husband's fraud and crime, suicide and honour, social misunderstandings, the brother's blame and hatred, a widow's life, a permanent secret, wandering abroad, indulgence, the brother's illness, returning home, the brother's death, life-long regret.

Reunion after a long separation, another woman, a new wife, rekindled ardour, a hurried farewell, illness, roses, meeting in hospital, avowal of love, the eternal triangle, elopement, determination to die, death in a traffic accident.

... People sighed softly and the lights came on. The blue curtain fell. Nothing happened. We were still in China, and had only dreamed a European dream.

After drying my eyes, I looked at hers which were drenched with tears.

Holding my arm, she pressed closely against me as we squeezed our way out.

She lowered her head, silent for a long time.

"This society oppresses us women," she said bitterly.

I was struck by this statement.

A few film shots flashed back into my mind: The woman awaking in her sick bed to find that the roses have disappeared. With a great effort, she staggers out of the ward to find them. My eyes were blurred with tears when I saw these moving scenes. Rong, close beside me, put her head on my shoulder. I heard her twice repeat the heroine's words:

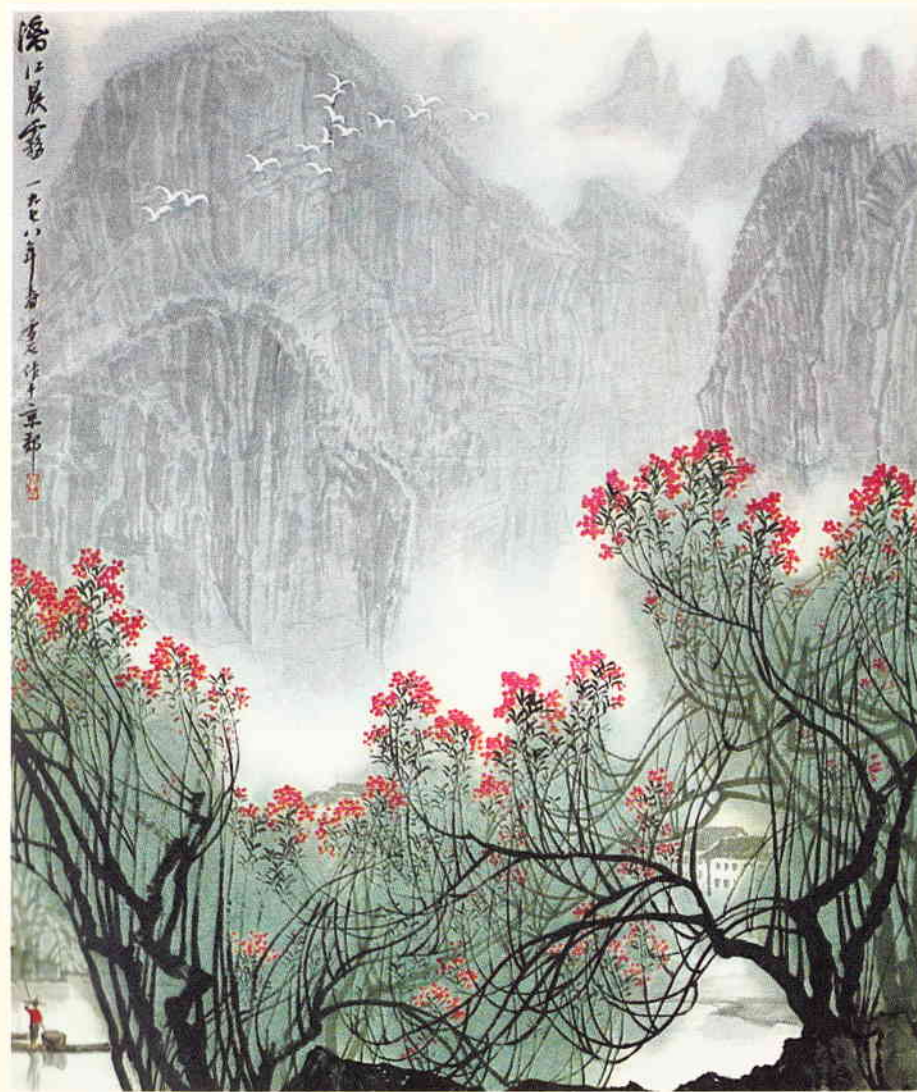
"My flowers! Where are you hiding my flowers? ... I want only you!"

I felt I understood Rong now. My heart bled for her.

Women's lives always make us shed tears. Rong was right to say that Garbo was a great artist.

But why had Rong asked: "Where are you hiding my flowers?" Her flowers were right beside her.

"Rong, this was a film, not something that really happened. Such a thing could never happen in real life." I forced a smile but it was very constrained because I wanted not to smile but to sigh.



"Don't you know there are many such cases? A woman's life is always sad," she answered dolefully.

How could I know that? I was not a woman.

"Rong, shall we have a Western meal?"

"No. I don't feel like eating. I want to go home to cry."

She was already on the verge of tears.

I wanted to ask: "Rong, don't you love me any more? Why do you want to go home and cry while I'm madly in love with you?"

However, I did not say a word but quietly dabbed my eyes. My heart ached for her and also for myself.

"I'll see you home," I said at last.

"No. I don't want you to. Let me go back alone."

It was the first time she had refused my escort. I could not help thinking of the silver bell, but now it was muted.

"She's beginning to be tired of you!" I said to myself. "You wait. The time will come when you'll be abandoned."

I corrected myself immediately: "No. She won't. She's not that type."

But these words could not stop my heart aching. I wanted to ask again: "Do you still love me?"

I gazed at her pink blouse, short black skirt and lowered head.

I loved her, more than anything else in the world. I couldn't live without her.

I said no more to her. But my eyes followed her receding figure. My eyes expressed what I dared not say — but not in speech that she could hear.

I escorted her home, so close behind her that she must have seen me.

"I've seen her home anyway," I told myself. But I hadn't the courage to call her name or to say something to soothe her.

At the green gate, I said in relief: "She'll be all right now." I went up to her.

"Don't be upset, Rong. You'll feel better after a short rest in your room. . . . You were happy when we left for the cinema, but now you've come home so depressed. Have I offended you? Just tell me frankly."

I held my breath, waiting for an answer.

"Let me have some peace!" she said with her back towards me.

She stood at the gate and I had to stand there too, looking at her while she looked at the ground.

"Go on home now."

Having said that she opened the gate and went in.

She closed the gate and leaned her back against it.

"Rong," I called from outside.

She neither replied nor moved.

She would stand there as long as I did, I guessed. But what she needed was rest.

"Let me in, Rong. I want to tell you something."

"Come tomorrow. Let me have some peace today. I don't want to see anyone."

She did not turn her head and I knew there was no hope.

"I'm leaving then," I said emotionally.

I walked away, my steps deliberately loud.

"She'll turn to look at me," I thought.

"She'll open the gate and come out."

"She'll call me back."

"Slow down a bit!" I told myself.

"Turn round and have a look!"

"Go and plead with her again!"

I slowed down and looked over my shoulder from time to time. But it was no use.

The gate was closed. The courtyard was empty. The pink blouse and the short black skirt had disappeared. No one came out to call me back.

I turned to go back to her but after a few steps continued home-wards.

"What if a friend saw me? Wouldn't I look a fool?"

"Better go home. There's always tomorrow."

I walked all the way home and she didn't come after me.

The evening breeze playing round my head wafted me the sweet scents of the dusk. The girl in white sat on her balcony. My neighbour's dog stood on its hind legs against the gate barking.

I looked up and saw a silvery crescent moon in the sky as well as a few stars, some bright some dim.

I entered my room, forgetting my hunger, took out the film synopsis and tore it to pieces.

I fumed, "The Garbo woman is a menace!"

The lilies in the vase were drooping, already withered.

Those lilies were the symbol of our love.

I wanted to weep, to weep over the lilies.

II

"Can it be true that she no longer loves me?"

"No. She's never said such a thing."

"Does she still love me as she used to?"

"If so, why did she behave like that today?"

"Was it a sign of love or not?"

Lying on my bed, asking myself these questions and answering them, I come to the conclusion:

"You don't understand women's psychology."

"She wanted you to go in."

"When a girl says she doesn't love you she means just the opposite. When she shut you out she meant you to go in. When she said she wanted to cry alone, she wanted to cry on your shoulder."

"What is a woman if not shy, inscrutable and devious?"

"You spineless weakling!"

When I was bored with lying there I got up.

"I'll buy a portrait of Greta Garbo tomorrow and hang it on the wall," I decided at last. If I keep looking at it, I may come to understand women."

I switched the light on to look at Rong's picture.

There was no smile on her face.

I turned my back on her.

"I'd better go on with that letter," I thought. "Write to my younger sister and talk about my dead brother."

"It's after being cold-shouldered by my sweetheart that I miss him," I reflected ruefully, then got out that unfinished letter.

But my mind didn't seem to be working, and I couldn't remember all I had planned to say.

I shed tears as I was writing. I don't know why I was so prone to tears that day.

I felt I had an inkling of why my brother had taken his own life.

12

Early the next morning I went to her home, thinking the events of the previous day past and done with.

I saw her come out from the green gate, wearing a blue checked dress.

She smiled to me at a distance.

"Lin!" The silver bell rang out.

Her face was as beautiful as a spring morning.

"I thought you wouldn't come."

"Why not? Tell me why you ignored me all of a sudden?"

"Well, that was yesterday." She smiled.

"And today? Will you do the same thing?"

"Forget it! Anyway, it was my fault."

"Where are you going now?"

"I was going to apologize to you."

Her affectionate voice was like music to me.

It warmed my heart, and my spirits rose again.

"She's all along loved you. You're too suspicious-minded!" I told myself.

"Shall we go to your room or somewhere else?"

"Will you come and do some shopping with me? A spring morning like this is perfect for a stroll."

Our way wound through golden sunshine, verdant trees, the fragrance of flowers, bird-song and huge boulders.

It was very busy downtown among the fruit stalls, cafés and fish shops. There were no trees or flowers here, only throngs of working-class people.

In a narrow lane I found a small bookshop selling a few second-hand books.

We walked for quite a long time.

"How irritating! Such a big place, and you can't even buy a portrait of Garbo."

So she wanted to buy one too.

"Shall we ferry over to the other end? There must be some there."

Sure enough there were. She bought two and gave me one.

So this was the picture of Garbo, starring in *Romance*, who had reduced so many audiences to tears.

It was the same Garbo with a wealth of long hair, a melancholy expression and high lined forehead, whose apathetic speech reduced people to tears and whose own eyes seemed washed by autumn rain. She looked exactly as she had when leaving the ward with an armful of roses.

"Looking at Garbo's portrait will help you to understand the greatness of women. Despised and oppressed by the whole society, we women struggle, suffer and are destroyed. This is the fate of women who regard love as their lives."

This was what she said when she gave me the portrait.

The portrait of this Swedish film star reminded me of the young lady in *Romance*. "It's impossible," I answered.

Were there really such women, I wondered.

She and I dined in a restaurant afterwards.

We spent the whole day together.

When I left her that evening, I had the portrait of Garbo in one hand, in the other some roses she had given me.

It was a tranquil night. The air was soft. The street was silvery white under the moon. Trees moved in the wind. The sad tremolo of a violin was carried far, far away. A soprano sang *Dream Lover*.

Bathed in soft moonlight on that island pervaded by the scent of roses, I felt intoxicated.

Arriving home I congratulated myself.

You are lucky to be loved by a woman.

(To be continued)

Illustrated by Yao Youxin

Ba Jin

On "Autumn in Spring"

Last week I met two friends from Sweden who presented me with a small volume in Swedish. To my surprise it turned out to be a translation of my short novel *Autumn in Spring*. It had been published in 1972 when I was in forced retirement, deprived of my rights as a citizen, mainly because I had written fourteen "pernicious books", among them this short novel *Autumn in Spring*.

When I got home with the present I brought out my original work and leafed through it until late at night. The temperature in my room was 33 degrees centigrade and I could hear trains rumbling past in the distance. As the night was hot and noisy I had no inclination to sleep. I read through the book, page by page, recalling the events forty-six years ago. It was the spring of 1932 and I had just left my home in Baoshan Road in Shanghai after the Japanese invasion on January 28. I went to Jinjiang in Fujian to visit a friend, staying there for no more than two weeks. I had many friends in that old southern city, some of them local people and some who had gone there from Shanghai. They were teachers in two middle schools. Another friend was Mr. Shen, owner of the Jinjiang Bookstore, who kept me informed of happenings in the cultural and educational fields there. Several times he told me



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about a girl who was ill and gave me her story in brief. He wanted me to visit this young reader of mine and I agreed.

One sunny day after some rain, Mr. Shen and another friend who was a teacher took me along muddy footpaths between the fields to visit this utter stranger. Young and pretty, she lived in a dark room in the house of a rich landlord. She was lying on a big four-poster bed covered by a thin quilt, but sat up mutely as soon as we went in. We sat down, all three of us, on a long bench and Mr. Shen explained why we were there.

She merely smiled. I made a few encouraging remarks, which Mr. Shen elaborated on. She looked at me, as if about to speak, but all she said was "Thank you." We stayed about half an hour,

exchanging no more than ten sentences. When we took our leave, she was still smiling mutely, but I noticed that her tears were brimming over.

I have long since forgotten her name. She was no more than twenty at the time and I subsequently learned that she died a few years later, having never recovered. The reason for her mental derangement was that her father forced her to marry someone she did not love and made her leave school.

The story of this deranged girl preyed on my mind. How well I knew the pattern: No freedom in marriage, the fetters of traditional ideas, paternal despotism, in one word, the unreasonable social system which tormented thousands upon thousands of young souls. I determined to voice their wrongs.

Back in Shanghai I wrote a short novel at one stretch. When I laid down my pen I breathed a sigh of relief. I felt I had said a few words for the poor girl who'd gone crazy.

Actually it was not her story I told in my novel. I knew too little about her family background and the details of her story, nor had I made any further investigations. There seemed to me no need to find out these details, for I already had characters and a plot. The background of my novel was Xiamen (Amoy) and Gulangyu, because on my way to and from Shanghai I had stayed a short time in Gulangyu and taken a fancy to that picturesque little island. From there I often went by sampan to Xiamen and used to watch the stars from the sea at night. Spring in Gulangyu made a deep impression on me. I remember another southern girl who did not go mad, instead she silently wasted away and died. That was the tragedy I wrote about in my novel. Zheng Peirong in the story is that girl except that in the novel she bows to her father's will to prevent him killing her lover while the girl in real life was brave enough to give up everything to elope with her lover.

Her name was Wu. She was a returned overseas Chinese whom I'd seen but didn't really know. I knew about her tragedy and even now as I write this reminiscence nearly forty-eight years later I remember her with sympathy. I saw her in 1930 the first time I went to Jinjiang and was staying at Liming High School.

I had gone to Jinjiang to spend the summer vacation and the principal of the school was a friend of mine. I knew a number of the teachers there too. In the park near the school were a couple of longan trees and the yellow fruit was ripening. I strolled about the streets and lanes and often went to the park with a few friends. Most of the time I spent on writing stories or doing some translation or following the example of my friend Chen, that is, observing the life of the amoeba under a microscope in the day time and watching the stars in the autumn night. Occasionally, I sat in the principal's office and helped with miscellaneous chores. It was nearing the beginning of school and the principal was down with typhoid. When Wu came to register I happened to be in the office. I saw her once or twice after this. She was a lively and rather pretty girl.

Not long after, the principal was hospitalized and I went back to Shanghai. At the end of term when a friend who taught there came to Shanghai, he mentioned Wu during one of our chats. It seemed she had fallen in love with the school's English teacher, and when her family learned this they intervened. They had already picked a husband for her, one of the rich local gentry who was on the school's board of directors. The English teacher was also a friend of mine, his name was Guo. He loved literature and wrote essays. No more than twenty-four, he returned the love of this ardent girl who had fallen in love with him, all in the natural course of things. Though the affair went no further, they were put under pressure. As the girl would not submit, the man was first reprimanded and then driven out of the school. He went to live in a friend's house at Gulangyu. The member of the board came out victorious; the date of the wedding was put forward. The girl was still adamant, but how was she to escape? The day before her wedding, she went in the pouring rain to Gulangyu to find my friend and tell him she was ready to follow him to the end of the world, never to leave him. My friend was not a courageous man in the first place nor did he want her to share his hard life. He refused her offer as tactfully as he could and sent her home in despair. She made no further attempt to break away. A lonely death awaited her.

This was the love story I wrote, piecing together the tragedy of the two girls. Actually, as I was writing, quite a number of characters flitted in and out of my head and I could cite many names. A habit of mine was to write stories and novels for which I had no title, even when finished. I'd finished this short novel and still could not think of a suitable title for it. At that time a short novel *Spring in Autumn* which I translated had just been serialized in the magazine *Middle School Student* and I was getting it ready for publication as a book by Kaiming Bookstore. I reread the whole manuscript and suddenly an idea came into my head. I'd found a title for my novel: *Autumn in Spring*. I wrote a preface introducing the title and the story. That October both novels came off the press of the Kaiming Bookstore. The translation was from the Esperanto edition of the works of the Hungarian writer Julio Baghy.

So much for the novel *Autumn in Spring*, but I haven't quite finished my tale. After he left Fujian, my friend Guo continued to be a teacher. In those days, it was not easy for an ordinary intellectual to find a secure job. Without strong backing or "pull", though Guo's command of English was very good and he was an essayist he had to run around and beg for a job in order to make a living. When I finished writing *Autumn in Spring* I heard that Guo was teaching in an art school in Wuhan and was again in trouble. He fell in love with a girl student, or to be more exact they fell in love with each other. Her name was Xu and she was engaged to the principal's younger brother who was studying abroad. Once their feelings for each other became known, the principal put his foot down but the girl would not give in. Her father had her locked up, showing her a coil of rope and a sharp knife. She was to take her own life or stop communicating with my friend Guo. She would not bow to paternal despotism and the old man was stubborn too. At this critical stage, her mother and brother helped her to run away. With a ticket in her hand, she boarded a steamer for Nanjing, intending to find a home with some relatives. Guo went to see her off. Their meeting was so packed with emotion, Guo could not bear to leave her, so he went with her all the way to Nanjing and there they got married, staying

with a friend, a Mr. Chen whom I'd met in Liming High School in Jinjiang. Later Chen told me that when the young couple got to Nanjing, they'd gone to him together. Guo asked him to look after the girl for him. When Chen heard their story, he was very touched and let them have his room to get married in. Later Chen went back to Fujian to work. He died of tuberculosis in 1941 at Wuyi Mountain. When he told me about Guo and Xu, which was more than once, he always spoke with admiration. He was very happy that he had a room to offer them for their wedding.

But the story does not end there. The couple had two daughters and though they were not rich they had no troubles at home. They went from place to place, finally settling in Shanghai. Guo wrote a number of essays and translated several well-known foreign novels. Their life became more secure till the Japanese guns of August 13, 1937 broke up their little home and once again they were on the move. A few years after Liberation they went to Beijing, settling down in the Xidan area. I visited their house during the fifties. Guo was getting on in age and not as loquacious as in his younger days, but he laughed much more. I thought they would be able to live to a "ripe old age" together.

However, monsters like Lin Biao and the "gang of four" did not spare them. When the blow fell, Xu was alone at home, her husband was teaching at Jinan University in Guangzhou while their daughters were working elsewhere. At the end of last year, unexpectedly, I got a letter from her. I learned that in the summer of 1968 she'd been notified by the university authorities that her husband had died after doing heavy labour in the intense summer heat. So Guo died in 1968 and that should be the end of my story.

The past is over and done with. But when I reread this old novel I relive those happenings of more than forty years ago. In what way can I comfort the widow and daughters of my dead friend? Perhaps people have already forgotten him. But those who do research on modern Chinese literature will not forget his contribution to the development of the modern Chinese essay. I still have three collections of his essays written during the thirties: *To Dusk*, *Song of the Hawk* and *White Nights*. The Turgenev

novels he translated, *A Nest of Gentlefolk* and *On the Eve*, as well as *Rudin* which he edited, are still in my possession. I shall be reading them often. They have a right to exist, and perhaps the memory of this good man of letters will live on with them.

July 14, 1978



Zhou Jiajun

A Special Melody

Knowing a person isn't easy. That was my conclusion after more than forty years' experience of life. I also learned that to know oneself is just as difficult. Yet in the process of understanding another, one suddenly comes to understand oneself more too.

I'd experienced the misery before Liberation and enjoyed the happiness after it. And I'd survived the Cultural Revolution. I am what people like to call a tough character, for I'd been sent to a border region to do manual labour because I'd been charged with "worshipping everything foreign and favouring revisionism" on the grounds that I had translated and written a few articles on foreign technology. My son was also sent to the countryside, and my wife died. It was claimed she died a natural death, but we all know what that meant then. So in my heart were deep wounds that nothing could heal.

The October wind dispersed the haze covering the overcast sky like a spring breeze warming people's hearts. I, however, was indifferent to all around me, longing to escape from my empty home

in the northeast. Thanks to my leadership I was transferred to a steel plant construction site on the Yangzi. Still, my thoughts kept returning to the northeast. . . .

I was appointed as head of a newly established scientific and technological information centre, after being briefed about the importance of my work for the construction site. I accepted the post, but still felt depressed. I couldn't define my feelings.

People do have such indescribable feelings, I suppose.

After we had set up the centre, all sorts of material we subscribed to began pouring in from home and abroad. It took the younger colleagues in the centre ten days to store them in cupboards. Even the small dark room opposite our office was overflowing with them. Since they hadn't yet been properly sorted out, few came to read the books and magazines. When they did come, they had to search for what they wanted themselves and, more often than not, gave up rummaging around after a while. Though that didn't please me, there was nothing I could do about it.

One afternoon, I was reading through a thick catalogue in my office, when I heard someone in the corridor humming the *Gypsy Airs*, a violin solo by Sarasate, which expressed joy and sorrow in a beautiful melody. This was the liveliest part and as the humming came nearer, a young woman in her early thirties appeared before me.

I sized her up quickly. She had the figure of a ballet dancer. Later I learned she was a gymnast. A few freckles added to the charm of her full, round face. The corners of her wide mouth curved attractively downwards. She looked familiar, though I couldn't place her. Life is very strange. . . .

"Is this the scientific and technological information centre?" she asked.

I looked at her and in reply indicated with my eyes the newly painted sign on the door.

"But it's so quiet here!" she said looking around.

"Well, we haven't finished arranging the material yet," I answered coldly. Suddenly I remembered a sentence in a novel I had once read: "A woman of thirty is at her most carefree."

She gazed at me steadily, with a determined look: "Do you

have any foreign material on welding and cutting? I'm Yin Ping, a welding technician." She glanced around, her eyes taking in everything.

"Have a look for it yourself."

"Haven't you found any?"

"There is so much material. We can't read everything," answered young Wang beside me. He had come with me from the northeast.

"Where is it?"

"Over there," he pointed to the four corners of the room.

She frowned at the piles of books and magazines. Then she relaxed and inquired: "Any more?"

"Plenty. Take her to the room opposite," I told Wang who beckoned her to follow him.

Looking at her retreating figure I thought: "So she wants more?"

I could hear Yin Ping's excited chatter from the other room. Then she began humming a light, gay tune, a continuation of the previous part. Women like her seemed to care little for anything but music.

After a while, she emerged, her blouse soaked by sweat on that hot summer's day. Walking over, she glared at me and said sharply: "Your work leaves much to be desired!"

"Then give us a hand," I retorted.

"You're not afraid of being sacked, then?" she smiled enigmatically and wiped away the sweat on her brow. The melody of *Gypsy Airs* reverberated again in the corridor. A carefree woman in her thirties, I thought. But I had a vague premonition that this woman might become a factor in shattering the peace and quiet of our information centre.

Something unexpected occurred the next morning.

I'd got up early after a hot night. Shanghai was hot enough in the day, but even worse at night. Moreover, a sand and gravel tip outside my hostel radiated all the heat it had absorbed during the day. I arrived at the office feeling out of sorts. The door of the room opposite our office was ajar and someone was inside.

Wang emerged at the sound of my voice. "Who's there?" I demanded.

"No one. . . . Yin Ping was here a moment ago. She was here all night."

Shocked, I asked: "But how did she get in?"

"I gave her the key."

"It's outrageous!" I said to myself. With mixed feelings, I put down the catalogue in my hand and strode into the room with the tiny window, where all the books and magazines lay scattered. I was surprised by the partly arranged shelves. I examined the room out of curiosity. On the floor was a wrapping from a loaf of bread. A sheet of paper, torn from a notebook, was covered with Japanese and Chinese. Many English and French books on welding were placed in a pile. What was she up to, I wondered, as I left with Wang behind me.

Back in the office at our desks, Wang began arguing: "We're not making the best use of the material, Old Li. We shouldn't let it pile up unused."

I remained silent, controlling my temper.

Quick footsteps outside my door announced the intruder. Recalling her words about my getting the sack I felt my irritation mounting.

"Of course they must be read and studied! These have all been published in the seventies. Do you want them to lie around until the eighties and become out of date?" Her voice preceded her entrance. Her eyes scrutinized me.

I glanced at her, musing to myself: What did she know? Foreigners weren't fools. They didn't just publish the results of their research at the drop of a hat. It wasn't easy to read such a large number of publications for a few useful references.

"Listen," she continued tackling me. Raising her fine eyebrows, she asked: "Please could you translate this for me. It's in English which I hardly know. It's about small current plasma cutting. They've been using this method since 1972." Taking out a magazine from her bag, she pushed it into my hand. Though it was a request, she managed to make it sound like a demand. There

was no refusing. A commander couldn't have sounded more authoritative.

Still, my irritation was less and I had calmed down.

"I'm sure you can do it. Young Wang said your English is very good, didn't you, Wang?" she turned to him for confirmation.

I stared at her. Suddenly I was sure I'd seen her somewhere before, but I still couldn't place her.

Slowly my small information centre was transformed. Whenever I happened to arrive early, I'd find Wang already at work covered in dust, his face streaked with dirt.

"What are you up to?"

"I'm helping Yin Ping sort out the books."

Helping Yin Ping indeed! To whom did the material belong? To her or us?

"Look, Li, she's been at it for days now. We've at least two or three tons of material. She's been sorting it out while searching for what she wants. She only knows Japanese, so she has to use dictionaries to look up the other titles. Go and have a look, the floor's practically wet with her sweat!" He was full of respect for her.

I couldn't help asking: "Do you know what she's working on?"

"Some innovation which will help to speed up the construction."

"Really?" I was quite taken aback. That's some woman, I thought to myself.

On my day off I walked in the morning along a path across country for three kilometres, past some tall poplars until I climbed on to a large dyke beside the river. The cool morning breeze, the surging river and the soaring birds reminded me what the chief of the construction site had said to me one day. When your head is buzzing with the noise of people arguing for material, money or land, or when you're lost in a spider's web of construction plans, then the best thing to do is to leave everything behind and get some fresh air at the dyke. The result was indeed very soothing.

But I could not forget my wife who had been persecuted to death

by the "gang of four", or my son who was still in the northeast. My bitterness remained.

Suddenly I noticed some blueprints and pencils at my feet, held down by a stone. To whom did they belong and where was he? I looked around. Seeing no one I scanned the horizon. There, five or six hundred metres away in the river, among the waves, I could see a black dot bobbing up and down. I screwed up my eyes. It was a swimmer heading towards the dam.

"Very brave," I mumbled to myself. Walking over to the dam, I saw the water rolling towards the shore. The tide was coming in.

Presently a dripping Yin Ping climbed on to the dyke. Looking at her athletic figure I sighed: "You're risking your life!"

"No. Valuing life means fighting death." Laughing she wrung out her hair and ran into a cluster of reeds.

I looked away at the rolling waves.

She began to sing:

The Yangzi River embraces the sea;

Computers get rid of the old ways.

Let the spirit of the four modernizations

Blossom like sparks when welding.

She emerged again in clean clothes and shook free her long hair as she sang. She was rosy and suntanned. Walking over to the blueprints, she studied them for a moment and then wrung out her hair again.

I had wanted to talk to her, but this chance encounter had tied my tongue.

"It's beautiful here."

"Yes."

"Did you come here for a walk?" she asked abruptly.

"I came because I felt like it."

"You seem to be preoccupied with something," she stared at me.

"I don't know."

"Don't you know why you're living?" she stung me with her joke. Picking up a pebble, she tossed it into the water.

"You seem to like music?"

"Yes. I play the violin and I sing soprano. I compose songs too." She was very frank and honest.

"People of your age are happy and carefree. You're only thirty, aren't you?" I smiled bitterly, envying her happiness.

She immediately became grave, her look of happiness disappeared completely. She bit her lower lip hard. I felt most uneasy. Had I opened up a wound, or was she just one of those women whose moods changed in an instant?

We paced the embankment in silence. Below us the surf broke on the shore. A seagull skimmed over the waves. Small fishing boats were sailing before the summer breeze. I had walked here before. I couldn't remember my feelings then, but this time was unforgettable.

"The English article you want will soon be finished. Having been away from work so long, my English has got rather rusty I'm afraid."

"The sooner the better." Instead of thanking me for my help, she looked dissatisfied. Then she explained: "We're trying to use the technological innovation now." She paused before continuing: "I've suggested we drive in piles before we dig up the land, so as to push ahead with the plans. I've discussed it with some old workers, but some don't agree with me. Others say that foreign specialists have never tried this. Still I insisted that we can't always just copy foreign methods indiscriminately."

I was surprised that she was prepared to argue with foreign specialists, but I had to admire her guts.

"Many workers know a lot, but they're afraid to open their mouths. Why don't you say something? Don't you believe me?"

"Of course!" Her remark hit the nail right on the head. Flustered I tried to give her a short answer: "I admire you for your courage and guts!"

"Admire me? But you won't support me, will you?"

"I... I'm... I don't feel involved," I faltered.

She burst out laughing.

I heaved a deep sigh.

"What's the matter with you? You feel bitter. All right, you've got wounds, so let the atmosphere on the worksite heal them."

As she left, Yin Ping said that several technicians and workers were designing a plasma underground cutter, which if it worked would facilitate cutting underground steel pipes after driving in the piles, greatly speeding up the construction of the steel plant.

"So you must give us more technological information. I'll come to see you in a few days. I need you . . . your section's help." With this she shook out her red floral towel and, rolling up her blueprints, departed.

She didn't come, but every evening I saw her buried among the books and magazines in our store-room. She had four helpers including young Wang. From outside my office came the noise of hammers, axes and chisels as they made shelves with which to store the classified material. Although I tried to ignore them, it wasn't always possible. The material from abroad went through their hands. I didn't know why, but with them working so hard, my translations also went faster.

Assisted by other sections, the secondary constructions around the main one were completed. The problem now remained whether or not to drive in the piles or dig up the land first. This was brought before a large Party committee meeting for discussion. Many experienced engineers attended.

In the middle of the discussion, Yin Ping stood up. Even in front of the engineers she was confident.

"I'm Yin Ping, a welding technician. Although I wasn't invited to take part in the meeting, I hope you'll excuse me but I have to speak. . . ." This caused a ripple of laughter.

"You're welcome," smiled the chief engineer.

"I propose," she continued, "that we should drive in the piles before digging up the ground. Abroad, they do the opposite because of their local conditions. But we have our special situation here. Let's see. . . ." At this she left her seat and, taking the rod from the chief engineer, went to a geological map on the wall. Her audacity astounded me. I had to admire her courage and confidence, but I didn't like her lack of respect towards the old engineers and leaders. I felt as awkward as if it was I and not she who was talking to them.

At this moment a man rose and asked: "Since in your opinion driving in the piles first has many advantages, why do they always dig up the ground first abroad?"

"The essential difference, I think, is that they haven't yet acquired the technique of cutting the steel pipes in the piles underground."

That started a heated discussion. "When it comes to scientific debate, we can't speak in terms of 'I think'. What's the basis of your argument?" another man challenged.

"I base my argument on a careful study of various foreign material on the subject."

"Anyone here from the information centre?" The chief engineer's eyes roved around till they rested on me. "Is that so, Old Li?"

"Yes," I confirmed rising. "She's studied masses of material."

"Very good." Smiling he turned to her: "And what are your conclusions?"

"We are experimenting. We think that the best method is the plasma cutting one, invented in the seventies. It isn't affected by clay or water, so we can apply it to cutting underground steel pipes."

"How long have you been working on this?" He grew interested.

"Just a month, I wanted to keep it a secret still, but. . . ." She suddenly became shy telling him about the research group.

"So, you're trying to hide underground your underground cutter?" His joke made everyone laugh. "Splendid!" He nodded to her: "Keep at it. Any problems?"

"Yes, plenty. We need to study more scientific and technical material. We hope. . . ." Her eyes turned to me. "We hope Old Li in the information centre will support us and make a greater effort."

"Did you hear that, Old Li?" asked the chief engineer.

I don't remember how the meeting ended. Though I felt hurt, I didn't blame Yin Ping. She understood me as little as I her.

That evening I took some material translated by me and a roll of papers collected by Wang to her.

Her home was a small peasant cottage. Before entering I heard her playing her violin. The tune was a touching slow melody by a celebrated Spanish composer. Violinists interpreted it in different ways according to their experiences. Its poetic and sentimental tones struck my heart. I'd never have expected her to love it too. The door stood ajar. My appearance interrupted her playing. As she swung round, I was surprised to find tears in her eyes. Immediately I regretted my intrusion and felt at a loss for words.

"I love the violin. I've gone through a lot of exercises," she said calmly as if nothing had happened, though her head was lowered and she fidgeted with the bow.

"I love music too. You really play very well, honestly!" I wondered why I added that last word.

"What do you mean 'honestly'?" She laughed. "This is the first time you've visited my poky little home. Please sit down."

I sat down at the table on which lay a pile of blueprints and a photograph of a chubby girl of about five. Was this her daughter?

"Yes, that's my daughter. Isn't she sweet?" she asked me proudly when she noticed me looking at it.

"Yes. Does she live with her father?"

"No. She has no father," she said abruptly.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" I had never thought this carefree young woman had also suffered personal tragedies.

Her father had studied automobile engineering in France. On his return to China he had worked in Henan in a tractor factory. Because he had criticized his leader, he was labelled as a "rightist" in 1957. From that time on, one misfortune after another befell the family of this intellectual who had devoted his energies to socialist construction. After two years his wife had died of grief because of the bad treatment of her husband. Yin Ping, who was a clever child, was sent to live with a relative. Despite family problems, she continued to study and to play the violin which her father had taught her. At sixteen she passed an examination to be a gymnast. On the red carpet of the Beijing Children's Palace, people would enjoy her performances. She had an eventful life at the university, and after graduation she went to an engineering research institute to work on arc welding. Later when helping with the con-



struction of a boiler factory, she helped solve a welding problem and published her treatise in a magazine. Naturally such a young intelligent woman technician was exiled to a farm near a border region to do manual labour during the period of the "gang of four".

After telling me all this, she picked up the photograph and gazed at it. "I took my baby there. She was only about three months old then."

I was astounded. The puzzle in my mind was suddenly solved. I remembered now where I'd seen her before. "Weren't you invited then by a commune to teach music and sports in their middle school?"

"How do you know that?" She was amazed.

"Because I worked on the same farm. The day I arrived, you were just leaving by a donkey cart."

Tears welled up in her eyes again.

I could still picture the scene. It was evening as a cart pulled by a donkey rattled towards a mountain path. In the cart sat a young woman, her face, covered by a faded flowered kerchief, was almost invisible except for her sad eyes. After she had left, her colleagues, who remained, angrily and sympathetically spoke about the unfairness of her treatment. From them I learned that her husband, afraid of being involved in her father's problems which were brought up again during the Cultural Revolution, had abandoned her. The day he divorced her, she had left with the baby without saying a word.

"I hate him, but of course I forgive him too. You've no idea how badly we were treated then."

There was a silence. I seemed to hear in the quietness that sentimental tune she had just played. Her mother's death, her father's persecution and her husband's desertion had all touched this young woman.

"Let's go back to our discussion." Shaking her head, she seemed to forget her misfortunes. I looked up to comfort her, but failed to find the words, her story reminding me of my own sorrows. I preferred to sit silently, letting the music echo in my mind.

"Don't think about it any longer. We mustn't let our work be affected," she said breaking the silence.

I sighed: "You want to forget? No, never!"

"Of course not!" she added determinedly. "But grief can strengthen. As long as we live, our scars can help us to think deeply how best we can serve our country."

Only then did I really understand her. In spite of her carefree appearance, her enthusiasm influenced me and I began to find a new direction.

That night I tossed about in my bed until very late.

Summer had passed, but the heat didn't abate in the least. Despite that, our work was not affected. In fact it was making progress. Our office was often open at night. We not only supplied Yin Ping's research group with materials, but held an exhibition of various foreign books and magazines, which attracted many personnel from the different sections. There was no wasting time any more. Though busy, we were happier than before. Once when I took some material to Yin Ping's office, I found her eyes bandaged. Her hands, however, were still busy.

"We welders have to make our eyes suffer a little. I hope they'll forgive us." She smiled.

One fine morning, the long-awaited news came. Yin Ping's plasma underground cutter had succeeded. The noise of machines ramming in the piles was heard, signifying that the steel factory in which the people placed their hopes could begin construction ahead of schedule. There was a jubilant atmosphere at the worksite.

"You're very busy these days. Your exhibition was a great success."

On hearing her familiar voice, I turned to find Yin Ping standing before me, her face glowing with happiness. On her blue overalls was her identity tag and a sparkling badge.

"Look!" She came closer, pointing to her chest. I was delighted to see the word "engineer" on her tag.

"Congratulations!" I took her hand in mine.

"Thanks, but don't congratulate me on my promotion, but on our starting the construction of the factory ahead of time."

Illustrated by Chen Yifei



Wang Wenshi

New Companions

"**A**ren't you Wu Shulan? ... I've been wanting to see you, but I just couldn't find the time. ... *Aiya*. ... Good Heavens, how dainty you are!"

Wu Shulan, a tanned, oval-faced peasant woman in her late twenties wearing a well-fitting bright-coloured cotton blouse and black cloth trousers, stood at the edge of the field, a quiet but alert smile playing on her lips as she gazed at the speaker. Behind her the cotton fields stretched away to the blue horizon.

The speaker was a woman of about Wu Shulan's own age, who looked, however, somewhat older. She was of middle height, red-cheeked, the spirited look in her eyes showing her to be a dauntless, determined woman. Wu Shulan continued to gaze at her, her eyes inquiring: Who are you?

"I'm Zhang Layue, the Dreadnought!" the other woman said proudly. "Perhaps you've heard of me?"

"I know of you," replied Wu Shulan. She who was usually so reserved was already infected by the other woman's frank attitude. She quickly took Layue's hands into hers. "I heard the township head say that you were coming to the meeting too. ... The day before yesterday I went to the township office, but they said you were already on the way."

"I'm short-tempered. I don't like fooling around and wasting time," Layue declared laughing. "First meeting, strangers. Second meeting, old friends. . . . Today we meet and become sisters. I've asked around and found out we're of the same age. Both born in the year of the goat, right?"

"Yes!" Shulan smiled.

"Ah! See, what a coincidence!" Looking at Shulan, Layue continued, still seeming to be a little doubtful, "These last few days I've been thinking: That Wu Shulan! I'll bet she's taller and stronger than I am. Some people said you were more graceful than I, but I didn't believe it. . . . I never dreamed my opponent was such a lovely woman!"

Shulan smiled. "Sister Zhang, you're quite pretty yourself!"

"Me? Pretty?" Layue winked cheerfully and then said in all seriousness, "Ma said I was pretty when I was a baby. Then I was forced to be a slave for several years in a landlord's home. . . . After I married I went with that fool husband of mine to plough the land and follow the cart. So little by little I lost my good looks." So saying, she pushed her sleeve up to her armpit, exposing a round brown arm which she extended in front of Shulan's face. "See how pretty this is?" she said, joking at her own expense.

Shulan quickly pushed her arm away. "Pull down your sleeve! Some people over there are staring at us!"

Layue hastened to straighten her sleeve, at the same time glancing across the field. Then turning back, she wrinkled her nose, saying in a low voice, "I'm not afraid of them!"

"You're wonderful!" Shulan exclaimed.

"Ever since I was a little girl I've come out and worked in the fields." Layue was quite pleased with herself. "You seem to be a bit shy. Is this your first time out?"

Shulan nodded.

"Have you joined the Party?" asked Layue solicitously.

"No, not yet," answered Shulan bashfully.

"Oh, how is it that you've not joined the Party?" Layue stared incredulously with wide-open eyes. "Hurry and apply! You. . . ."

"I've already applied."

"That's all right, then. Your husband's not holding you back,

is he? Before, they used to say it was the wives who held the husbands back; now it's the other way round — some husbands hinder their wives. . . . What is your husband like?"

"He's a Party member."

"That's even better!" declared Layue in earnest. "But there are also quite a few Party members who hold their wives back. My fool was that kind . . . but he's changed now. Backward husbands have to be educated very thoroughly and often or they tie their wives down!"

"But mine . . . he often helps me!" Shulan said softly and frankly.

"What? You've held *him* back?" Layue said, laughing.

"No, I haven't."

Eyes fixed on Shulan, Layue thought a moment, then smiled meaningfully, "I have it now! You're what people call a 'good wife'!"

Shulan pursed her pretty lips in a sweet smile, and gazed warmly at lion-hearted Layue in silent agreement.

She really was a "good wife". Since childhood, she had been strictly brought up by her widowed mother. When Shulan was about to be married, her mother reminded her again and again, "When you are in someone else's home, it will be different from being here with your mother. Be careful about everything, remember what I've always told you and be a good daughter-in-law."

"Ma, I shall remember your words," she answered.

"A good daughter-in-law!" The villagers all praised her.

"A good daughter-in-law!" Her new relatives all marvelled.

"A good daughter-in-law!" Her husband's friends all honoured her.

But her husband, hearing all this praise, smiled and said nothing. He was a Party member, a cadre at the basic level; all the time that he might have spent at home he devoted to Party work. Shulan never complained about this. Always wearing that quiet smile, she did all the household chores: brought up the children, attended to her parents-in-law, sewed, patched, hoed, cut the grass, fed the cattle. . . .

Once her husband said to her, "There's a mass meeting tonight.

Why don't you come along?" She smiled but, seating herself beside the lamp as usual, picked up her sewing, saying nothing.

Some time later, he told her that the next day the secretary of the Party branch was going to give a report. "Why not come and listen?" he asked. Again she smiled but said nothing. The next day she carried her basket of washing to the well as usual.

Not long afterwards, he announced, "The village is going to start a women's study group. You should go and register." She smiled but again she said nothing. With her head lowered, she went on with her self-appointed tasks.

On more than one occasion her husband had spoken to her like this, and when he showed annoyance and dissatisfaction now and then, she would look at him in surprise with wide-open, uncomprehending eyes, and say in a gentle voice, "Isn't everything all right just like this?"

Frowning at her, he would shake his head and heave a sigh.

After the agricultural co-operatives were organized in the village, Shulan went with the other women to work in the fields. She worked with great enthusiasm and no other woman could compare with her. Always gentle and sincere towards everyone, she was liked by all the women. In six months she was elected deputy team leader. Although not overjoyed, neither did she try to evade the position. Still following the pattern of a "good daughter-in-law" she accepted her new duties. Whenever a meeting of the co-operative or the team was held, she was never absent or late, but neither did she voice any opinion. Instead she would take her sewing and sit in a corner, quietly smiling and listening to the discussion. When the meeting was over, she would go home, not leaving before it ended, nor lingering afterwards.

Last winter, when the Big Leap Forward began, everyone's life became hectic; everyone lived in a whirlwind. Gradually Shulan was drawn into it. She joined the cadres' study class and the women's study group and did not miss a single Party lecture. She spent less time at home, often spoke at meetings and began to argue with others. In her eyes gleamed a different light; on her lips there was a new smile. Her husband often looked at her with wonder.

"She's changed!" he thought. She, too, was aware that she had changed, but could not tell definitely when it had occurred.

At this time, Dreadnought Zhang Layue's fame had spread throughout the district. The women's production team she led kept the red flag whether the emulation drive was for digging wells or ditches, collecting manure, ploughing land. . .

Half a month previously, Layue had heard a rumour that Wu Shulan, a woman team leader of the Naner Co-op, was quietly competing with her, and that every farm tool belonging to Shulan's team had a slogan pasted on it: Surpass Zhang Layue. Sure enough, in less than ten days, at the township meeting held to decide the emulation drive winners, in high spirits the members of Wu Shulan's team took away the red flag. That day, Layue had been away on business, and in the afternoon, on seeing her teammates returning with the yellow flag, she demanded, "What happened to our red flag?"

"Wu Shulan has captured it," they muttered.

"What Wu Shulan? Don't tell me she has three heads and six arms!"

"She's daintier than you, and much prettier."

"I want to see what this Wu Shulan has got up her sleeve!"

Later, in Dongxiang Township the county organized an on-the-spot meeting about the management of cotton fields. The township Party committee sent these two women to participate, and there they became acquainted.

Layue felt a deep affection for Wu Shulan at first sight. "Don't put on airs too early, good woman!" Layue said zestfully, looking at the smiling Shulan. "When you are competing with Zhang Layue, you don't have time to catch your breath! What? You don't believe me? Just try and see!" And she pounded Shulan on the shoulder several times with her hand.

Smiling, Shulan dodged her.

Just then a man called out, "Everyone listen! Now we're going north of the village to see the experimental plot of some old women. Everyone must keep together; don't lag behind!"

"Let's go." Holding hands, the two women stepped on to the highway, striding along shoulder to shoulder. The men and women

walking beside them looked at them with eyes full of curiosity and respect.

That evening, after the group discussion, Shulan returned to her quarters. Her host's young daughter had lit the kerosene lamp and was waiting for her. Chatting with the girl and glancing around the strange but friendly room, Shulan's heart was filled with joy. Suddenly she thought of her husband, who often went away to meetings, on tours, or on other business and lived in the homes of strangers. Now she herself was experiencing this life, living in the home of those who had been strangers, but with whom she was as intimate as with old neighbours and friends. "So this is what his life is like away from home? What fun!" she thought happily.

Zhang Layue burst in with her bed-roll under her arm. "I told our leader that we'll stay together. Is there room for me here? Who is staying here with you?"

"Only this little sister," replied Shulan, warmly welcoming Layue and relieving her of her bed-roll.

"Little sister, is it all right if we squeeze up together?" Layue laughed.

"Yes, you're welcome!" The girl jumped with joy.

Layue assumed a serious air. "Mind you, I'm a restless sleeper. I stretch my arms and legs and I don't know what else. You must be careful!"

"I'm not afraid," the girl laughed. "I have a stick ready for you."

"Good." Layue grinned and sat down heavily on the edge of the *kang*, hugging Shulan around the neck and talking on and on. "Sister Wu, let's be good friends. In the past, the men used to take the initiative and make friends everywhere, now we women are doing the same thing. Sister Wu, isn't this wonderful?"

Shulan was speechless with happiness. She hastened to make the bed. Though outwardly calm as usual, she was elated by sensations she had never experienced before. Again and again she looked joyfully at this curious woman by her side — who in only half a day had made her feel that she could never leave her.

On the afternoon of the following day, the two new friends started for home. Each had a bed-roll in a cloth wrapper slung

over her shoulder, and in addition carried a travelling bag with food and an enamel cup. A thin layer of yellow dust settled on their hair and shoulders, on their shoes, socks and trouser-legs. Hurrying along, they excitedly discussed how to surpass Dongxiang Township, and repeatedly raised their heads and looked at the sky. Across the fields the wind was whirling up clouds of dust, which, now rising, now subsiding, were chasing one another. Dark grey rain clouds veiled the sky, and were banked in the west, so low that it seemed you had but to reach up to catch one.

"Sister, we'd better walk a little faster," said Shulan anxiously. "It looks like this angry old sky is up to no good."

"Ha! That's nothing!" Layue roared, unconcerned. "If it's going to rain, let it pour."

"Ai, Sister Zhang!" laughed the other. "You're almost home, but I have more than ten *li* to go yet."

"There you go again." Layue was annoyed. "How many times have I told you! . . . Tonight you're staying in my home. If you refuse, you're not worthy to be my friend." Deliberately she uttered this last sentence in a deep tone of voice.

"Even so, we must hurry or we'll be drenched."

"That's more like it," Layue said happily, quickening her steps. Their feet kicked up clouds of dust behind them.

They had spent the previous night squeezed together on the *kang*, chatting intimately of everything under the sun: men, women, children, the co-op's small factories; from their present plans for production and study to their long-range aims. Even after the rooster had crowed for the second time, they had rejected sleep. Shulan was even more excited than Layue, and talked more in that one night than ever before in her life. In the course of their talk, Layue had invited Shulan to her home, and Shulan had accepted with the greatest of pleasure. But on waking up in the morning she had changed her mind, so anxious was she to return to her co-op. Because of this, Layue had been squabbling with her all along the way.

The sky became darker and darker. Soon the wind dropped and the clouds hung heavily. All at once pockmarks appeared in

the dust road; from both sides of it and the wide cotton fields came the pattering sound of falling rain.

"Hey! You old devil sky, are you trying to play a trick on us!" Layue shouted, as though afraid she would not be heard.

The two women stopped to brush the dust from their clothes and wrap their hair in their towels, then they went along at a more rapid pace. The village was not far off. The flock of chickens at the mouth of the lane could be dimly seen; while outside the village in the grove of dark green trees, the red flag of the Youth Shock Team was as bright as ever. As they hurried into the village, their shoulders were already sopping wet and the road had become a slough of mud.

Leading Shulan by the hand, Layue entered a small courtyard behind a locust tree. Before reaching the door, she called loudly in the direction of the house, "Ma! Come and welcome our distinguished guest!"

First to come running were several children, struggling among themselves to catch hold of Layue. With both hands she lovingly seized the face of the youngest girl, gave her a smacking kiss on her cheek, then waved the children back. "Hurry and get back! What do you think you're doing, running around in all this rain!"

Layue's mother-in-law came out, and, screwing up her deeply-wrinkled face, looked amiably at the visitor. "You ought to have sought shelter somewhere from this wretched downpour. Look! You're sopping wet! Hurry up!"

Once inside, they set down their bundles and, indicating Shulan, Layue cried out to her mother-in-law, "Ma! This is a good friend I've just made, guess who she is."

The old woman came nearer, and scrutinized Shulan, smiling. "You have so many comrades and friends, how can I remember them all?"

"I've talked a lot about her lately. She's from Naner Co-op."

Thinking for a moment, the old woman suddenly brightened. "Oh, I think I know! Is she Wu Shulan?"

"Yes, old auntie, you've guessed right," Shulan smiled.

"You be careful if you're to be friends with our Layue. She's

jealous of you!" She laughed, and went out slowly to get some tea.

"I can be 'jealous' too, old auntie!" Shulan said merrily, looking at Layue who was searching for dry clothes and making a grimace at Shulan.

Just then a tall, serious-looking man of thirty or more with a broad forehead strode in and took off his big straw hat. Shulan had seen him before in the township, but had never dreamed he was Layue's husband. On seeing Shulan, he said, "From far away I saw someone with Layue, and I felt sure it was you. It's grand to meet you. All of us want to see the actual person who beat our Nansi Co-op!"

"Stop chattering!" Layue broke in. "We're sopping wet; you should make a little fire to dry our clothes!"

"That's right. I'll go right now."

Shulan looked at Layue in surprise. The latter winked at her, as though saying: That's the way it is; see how he listens to me!

Soon he came in with a small portable stove in which there was a blazing fire, and while building it up with the tongs he talked with Shulan.

Handing Shulan a dry shirt, Layue said earnestly to her husband, "Don't you think it's strange that a person like Sister Wu hasn't joined the Party yet? What's wrong with your township Party committee? Haven't you been paying her any attention?"

"Don't jump to conclusions!" he answered. "Last night the Party committee held a meeting and studied Comrade Wu Shulan's application. How can you say the Party committee doesn't pay any attention?"

"Have you found your sponsors?" she asked Shulan, and not waiting for an answer said enthusiastically to her husband, "Let us sponsor her. Comrade Shulan, don't you think that's a good idea?"

"I certainly do!" Shulan was elated.

"Recommending a comrade like Shulan for the Party is a great honour," Layue's husband agreed, "but the two of us can't do it. One of the sponsors should be a comrade from the Naner

Co-op, who is more familiar with Comrade Shulan and understands her."

"You're always so conservative!" Layue criticized. "You mean you don't understand her? She made off with the red flag of your co-op, and yet you don't understand her!"

Shulan was not familiar with Party life, so she could say nothing, but she smiled and listened quietly. Layue's husband was trying to explain, but she cut him short. "Never mind! I can't win you over all at once. We'll talk about it later. Please go out now; we have to change our clothes."

He stood up, smiling, but just as he was about to go out he stopped to say to his wife, "Those women in your team are holding a meeting at Yinwa's home; they've been here looking for you several times..."

"I know. This morning I sent word to them that I would invite Comrade Shulan here to pass on experience."

"That's all right, then." Going out of the room he let down the door curtain after him.

Having changed, Layue said to Shulan, "You rest now. Lie down on the *kang* for a while. I'll only be gone for just a second."

"Yes, you attend to your business."

As Layue turned to leave, her mother-in-law called from the kitchen, "Don't be too long. Come back soon and eat."

"I know!" Layue's voice drifted back from outside.

The old woman brought some tea, all the time praising Shulan and the young women of today. "How happy you are, going about everywhere and making friends all over. Some good-for-nothing men can't even catch up with you!" Then she praised her daughter-in-law: "Four or five ordinary men aren't equal to my Layue. Don't think she just fusses about everything — in her heart she's generous and sincere. The neighbours say she's not like my daughter-in-law but like my own daughter."

"I could see that as soon as I came in the door," Shulan grinned. "Your family is wonderful!"

The old woman went back to the kitchen to prepare the meal. After drying her clothes over the fire, Shulan changed again and put them on. Neatly she folded the clothes Layue had lent her,

and carefully laid them on top of a trunk. Then lifting the curtain she looked up at the sky, which was getting dark. The rain was still rushing down the grooves in the tiles. Uneasiness stole over her. She had planned to meet Layue's team-mates and visit their cotton field on her way home so as to emulate their experience. It would be better if she could go home that evening, in which case she might call her team-mates to a meeting and tell them at once of all she had learned in Dongxiang Township and in Layue's co-op. Her uneasiness was all the more intense because the rain was gathering momentum and Layue had not returned. Suddenly she noticed something which looked like a flag on the trunk, and quickly she went and spread it out. It was a yellow flag bearing the word "Runner-up" and it was very familiar to her, for it had hung in her co-op many a day until she had moved heaven and earth to see that Layue had it. Through the window she asked the old woman, "Auntie, why is this flag here and not hanging in the team office?"

"Layue won't let it be hung up." The old woman grinned. "She says it's not ours; we're just keeping it for someone else, and we'll give it back soon, so why should we hang it up?"

"Oh, so it's like that!" Shulan folded it neatly and replaced it on the trunk, thinking to herself, "Sister Zhang! To whom do you think you will give it?"

She left the room and stood in the hall, looking through the open door at the grey-blue mist of rain. "Oh, what weather!" she said to herself resentfully. Turning back into the room, her heart full of tempestuous feelings, she again wrapped up her belongings and tightened her shoe-laces.

Just then, Layue returned, followed by a crowd of women who had come to see Shulan and all at once the room was alive. Layue complained of the dim light, and lit the lamp, then one by one she introduced all the women to Shulan. For all her impetuosity, Layue had sharp eyes. She quickly noticed that Shulan had packed her bundle, dressed herself carefully and wore an expression which showed she was impatient to be off. This idea was unbearable to Layue, who thereupon announced, "Let's all get acquainted, and listen while Comrade Shulan passes on her

experience. Nobody's to mention things like emulation drives. All right?" Everyone agreed.

Unable to decline the invitation, Shulan suggested that they exchange experience together. Layue accepted her idea and they had a heated discussion on cotton planting. Finally, glancing at Layue out of the corner of her eyes, Shulan started a flank attack. "What is your urgent business?" she asked the circle of women. "Having a meeting in such a hurry."

"Big Sister Shulan," a rash girl blurted out, "we're thinking of how to beat you!"

"Oh? And what did you agree upon?" Shulan asked the girl with interest.

The others were signalling to the youngster and Layue was trying to stop her, but unable to control herself the girl rattled off, "Big Sister Shulan, you took away our red flag and gave us that old yellow thing in exchange. We're not going to leave it at that. We want to learn from you and surpass you. . . . Our new slogan is: Retrieve our big red flag; and stand for ever firm."

"Ha! So you want to beat us!"

"We'll try!" the young girl said doggedly.

"All right, come and try, then!" Laughing, Shulan stood up; a gleam of determination sparkled deep within her outwardly calm and placid eyes.

"No such talk, remember?" Layue laughed. "There you go talking about such things again! You won't let Sister Wu have any rest. Today she is our guest."

"I've had a rest," Shulan said cheerfully, and pointing to the flag on the trunk she asked, "Sister Zhang, why have you put the flag here?"

"Because we're going to return it soon," Layue answered.

"To whom?" Shulan asked.

Realizing that she herself had also been drawn into the dispute, Layue hesitated, then chuckled. "Hey, Sister Wu! To whom do you think I'll return it? I certainly won't exchange it for a black one!"

"Then you'd better hang it up! We're kindred spirits — you know my heart. I'll never change with you!"

"You won't be the one to decide that!"

"If not I, then who?" Shulan said confidently.

"You've forgotten us here!" Layue was also proud.

Shulan picked up her bags and grinned. "Sister Zhang, think whatever you like. I must go back and ask my team-mates if they're willing to change or not."

Shulan's heart, lifted on high by the emulation drive, had long since flown across the fields to her team-mates. In spite of all the coaxing and cajoling by Layue and her mates, Shulan was determined to go home.

In the end, Layue could only scold and grumble, "Now I know you're really a very, very bad woman!" Although they had known each other for only one day, their friendship was deep and sincere. Shulan was right in wanting to go back and make good use of this stormy night. It would be difficult to make up the loss if she fiddled the night away. Layue understood this, or they would not have become such good friends. As Shulan took her departure, Layue could only say, "All right. It's getting dark, and the road is so muddy and slippery. Xiuying, come with me; we'll go and see Sister Wu part of the way home." Shulan could not prevent them from going along.

Layue's mother-in-law borrowed some umbrellas from her neighbours, and also brought a small hurricane lamp for Layue and Xiuying on the way back.

Outside the village, the broad fields could be seen but dimly; the surrounding villages were quite indistinguishable behind a curtain of rain in the murkiness of the twilight, but here and there in the fields some production teams were still at work in spite of the rain.

The three new companions, holding up the umbrellas and supporting each other, slipped and slid forward on the muddy road. On their way, they continued the debate. Their robust, enthusiastic voices cut through the fields and pressed back the roar of the wind and rain which filled heaven and earth.

"Sister Zhang, let's go and see your cotton field on our way," Shulan suggested. "It won't be easy for me to find another chance to come."

"Oh, but that's quite far out of our way!"

"What if it is?" Shulan demanded firmly.

"All right, I just want you to give us your comments," Layue agreed immediately. "Turn west. Xiuying, you lead the way!"

The three left the highway. They walked and slid along a narrow path, talking and laughing on their way to Layue's high-yield cotton field. . . .

September 1958

Landscape (traditional Chinese painting) by *Wu Guanzhong*



Wu Gengshun

Tang Dynasty Poets (2)

From the Mid-Tang (771-835) to the Late Tang (836-907) period, the decline of the dynasty continued. In literature, however, there were some outstanding prose writers, a new genre of prose romances and folk literature flourished. In poetry also there were notable achievements.

The Mid-Tang period was one of confusion and wars. The power of the central government was not fully restored and local garrison commanders made themselves independent. In the central government itself, eunuchs became so powerful that they sometimes assassinated an emperor to establish another. The bureaucracy was torn by fierce factional struggle. In the border areas, national minority peoples raided and pillaged. The people suffered even more from increasing exploitation. Thus many poets of the period advocated political as well as literary reforms.

A new upsurge in Tang poetry began with the movement to write critical poems as advocated by Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen. They called these "new *yuefu* songs". Seeing the rottenness of the

society, the corruption in politics and the miseries of the masses, these poets wished to develop the realist tradition in poetry so that literature dealt with topical subjects and served society. They were opposed to empty laments merely expressing personal feelings. As in the case of Du Fu, the titles of their poems expressed the content, which was a break with traditional *yuefu* song titles. The efforts of Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen established the foundation of this new movement.

Bai Juyi (772-846) came from a minor official family in Xinzhen, Henan. When he was eleven, his family fled south because of war. Aged twenty-nine, he passed the civil examination and was appointed to the Imperial Library. In AD 807, he passed another examination to become an Imperial Academician. In the same year he was appointed as a government adviser. Pleased that he could begin to serve the empire in a high position and fulfil his ambitions, he considered seriously all the iniquities in the society and made bold proposals and criticisms in court. In the summer of AD 815, Li Shidao, the garrison commander of Pinglu, sent some assassins to the capital to kill the prime minister, Wu Yuanheng. This frightened the timid government. Bai Juyi immediately wrote a report asking to have the assassins arrested and an investigation held. This annoyed some in power who persuaded the emperor to banish Bai Juyi to Jiangzhou to serve as a sub-prefect. This was a heavy blow to Bai Juyi and though he later served in minor official posts in the capital, Hangzhou and Suzhou, he never again tried to involve himself in internal politics so as to remain untarnished. His later poems reflect this.

More than three thousand of his poems remain, the sheer bulk of his work surpassing all other Tang poets. His poems were divided by him into four categories: critical, leisure, personal sentiment and miscellaneous. Most of his critical ones were written in the early period, while those of leisure and personal sentiment were later. The former, of which he wrote more than one hundred and seventy, are his most important contribution.

The most famous are his ten poems entitled *Poems of Qinzhou* and fifty *New "Yuefu" Poems*. These were written while he was still hopeful and politically ambitious, especially during his time

as an adviser. They cover a wide range of themes, depicting the sufferings of the working class and exposing the wanton luxury of the ruling class and their dreams of conquest. He attacked social injustices, expressing his concern for the people. In one famous poem, *The Old Man Selling Charcoal*, he exposed the government eunuchs making purchases in the market, who often bullied the vendors so that one old man was given nothing for his cartload of charcoal. Another famous poem, *Weaving Silk*, contrasted the hard lives of the weavers with those of the palace maids and favourites who squandered large quantities of the exquisitely made material. Bai Juyi clearly expressed his indignation at their luxury and waste. In *Proud Eunuchs*, he showed the arrogance and luxury of the court officials in comparison to the famine areas where men were driven to cannibalism.

His celebrated long ballad *Song of Eternal Sorrow* is one of his poems of sentiment. The story is based on a popular account of the love between the Emperor Minghuang and his favourite concubine, Lady Yang. In the early years of his reign, the emperor had shown his concern for the state and his abilities, but his rule ended in failure because of his decadence. When the Tartar generals An Lushan and Shi Siming rebelled in AD 755, Lady Yang was killed and the emperor abdicated in favour of the crown prince. He died later in isolation. The first part of the poem criticized the emperor for seeking pleasure at the cost of the interests of state, but it mainly described the tragic love of the emperor for his favourite concubine, which caused their eternal sorrow. The characterization is realistic, the story interesting and the language fluent and clear. Although it is a famous narrative poem, the story is not true since it tries to idealize the wanton life of the emperor. In this sense it is not as ideologically sound as another long ballad of his, *The Song of the Lute*, which was written when he was banished to Jiangzhou. This told of how the poet was parting with friends by the river when he came across a woman who was a skilled luteplayer. Her unfortunate past aroused his deep sympathy and the poem expressed his indignation at his own banishment. There is a passage of a very high artistic level describing the beauty of the music. His poems of leisure are more passive, but some de-

scribing scenery or visits are very natural. His poems are noted for their clarity and lucidity. Of all the two thousand and more poets of the Tang Dynasty, Bai Juyi ranks only second to Du Fu and Li Bai.

Yuan Zhen (779-831) was Bai Juyi's close friend and a leading figure in the new poetry movement. Starting life as a poor orphan, he experienced some of the sufferings of the poor. This influenced him so that he opposed the corrupt officials early in his career and wrote critical poems about the evils in society. Later under pressure he compromised with those in power and rose in the bureaucracy to become prime minister. His poems can thus be divided into two sections: the early ones which were critical of the government and his later ones which were not. As well as the *yuefu* form, he also used others. He wrote a long narrative poem, *The Lianchang Palace*, about the Emperor Minghuang and the Lady Yang, describing the past splendour and the present state of the palace to show how the empire was declining. This poem was greatly praised by later poets. Some of his *yuefu* songs like *The Woman Weaver* and *The Farmer* reflect the misery of the masses and present a vivid picture of his time.

Apart from Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen, there were other well-known poets who used the *yuefu* form like Zhang Jie (c. 768-830) and Wang Jian (date unknown). They were also friends of Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen. Other notable poets who were not in the new poetry movement were Liu Zongyuan, Liu Yuxi, Han Yu and Li He.

Liu Zongyuan (773-819) was also an outstanding prose writer and thinker. Since he had participated in the political reforms and helped the people, after the failure of the reform movement he was demoted and banished to distant parts. Most of his poems were written during his banishment, expressing his indignation and sorrow. Some describing local scenery are concisely written in his distinctive style, showing his high ideals.

Liu Yuxi (772-842) was another celebrated thinker, who shared a similar fate to that of Liu Zongyuan, having taken part in the reform movement and later suffered exile. His poetical satires

are forceful and vigorous, showing his courage and optimism. He also studied folk ballads and utilized their forms.

Han Yu (768-824) was best known for his prose writings, his main contribution being towards its reform, but his poems also showed great originality. More than three hundred of these still exist, with a vigorous and distinctive style. Like Du Fu, in his narrative poems, he combined personal feeling with political argument. His descriptions of nature are both original and bizarre.

Li He (790-816) was a talented poet who unfortunately died young. Born of an impoverished noble family, he failed to sit the imperial examination because of family difficulties. Thus he could only serve as a minor official and his talents remained undeveloped. He died aged only twenty-seven. His frustration and sorrow are expressed in most of his poems which abound with original and vivid imagery. Some were political satires criticizing the emperor and powerful nobles, condemning the local independent warlords and sympathizing with the exploited people. He often used the past to condemn the present. He was the best poet of the romantic school after Li Bai, and some of his well-known lines are still quoted today.

The situation became intolerable for the people in the Late Tang period with its increasing political oppression and economic exploitation. The famous peasant uprising (874-884) led by Wang Xianzhi and Huang Chao brought about the downfall of the Tang Dynasty. Late Tang poetry can be divided into two periods. In the early period the most famous poets were Li Shangyin and Du Mu.

Li Shangyin (813-858) was politically unsuccessful, only serving as a minor official outside the capital. Since he chose to remain aloof from the fierce government factionalism, his talents remained unrecognized. He wrote some deeply moving love poems, expressing the frustration of lovers in a feudal society. They are poignant with splendid metaphors and images. A few of the six hundred poems still extant contain criticisms of the political situation. In one of his long poems, *Passing the Western Suburb*, he described what he saw outside the capital, exposing the evils of his

society. This is one of his best. He also wrote about the past to express his criticisms of the present. He liked to obscure his meaning with metaphors. Some of his poems are very sad.

Du Mu (803-852) enjoyed equal fame with Li Shangyin but was more successful in his career, though he too was frustrated in his ambition. Many of his poems are sad and contain criticisms of the government through historical events. He was also noted for his scenic descriptions.

After these two poets, Tang poetry declined, becoming imitative and less original. Regarding content, however, Late Tang poetry still kept some of its realist tradition. The empire was racked by incessant wars among local warlords, minority peoples of the north and west raiding and pillaging, and emperors being successively assassinated or dethroned. In such a period of chaos, some poets became pessimistic, decadent and escapist, while others lost all their ideals and indulged in wine and women. Only a few like Pi Rixiu, Lu Guimeng, Nie Yizhong and Du Xunhe towards the end of the ninth century were critical of the corrupt society and voiced the sufferings of the people.

Poems of Bai Juyi

Song of Eternal Sorrow

Appreciating feminine charms,
The Han emperor sought a great beauty.
Throughout his empire he searched
For many years without success.
Then a daughter of the Yang family
Matured to womanhood.
Since she was secluded in her chamber,
None outside had seen her.
Yet with such beauty bestowed by fate,
How could she remain unknown?
One day she was chosen
To attend the emperor.
Glancing back and smiling,
She revealed a hundred charms.
All the powdered ladies of the six palaces

At once seemed dull and colourless.
 One cold spring day she was ordered
 To bathe in the Huaqing Palace baths.
 The warm water slipped down
 Her glistening jade-like body.
 When her maids helped her rise,
 She looked so frail and lovely,
 At once she won the emperor's favour.
 Her hair like a cloud,
 Her face like a flower,
 A gold hair-pin adorning her tresses.
 Behind the warm lotus-flower curtain,
 They took their pleasure in the spring night.
 Regretting only the spring nights were too short;
 Rising only when the sun was high;
 He stopped attending court sessions
 In the early morning.
 Constantly she amused and feasted with him,
 Accompanying him on his spring outings,
 Spending all the nights with him.
 Though many beauties were in the palace,
 More than three thousand of them,
 All his favours were centred on her.
 Finishing her coiffure in the gilded chamber,
 Charming, she accompanied him at night.
 Feasting together in the marble pavilion,
 Inebriated in the spring.
 All her sisters and brothers
 Became nobles with fiefs.
 How wonderful to have so much splendour
 Centred in one family!

All parents wished for daughters
 Instead of sons!
 The Li Mountain lofty pleasure palace
 Reached to the blue sky.
 The sounds of heavenly music were carried
 By the wind far and wide.
 Gentle melodies and graceful dances
 Mingled with the strings and flutes;
 The emperor never tired of these.
 Then battle drums shook the earth,
 The alarm sounding from Yuyang.
 The Rainbow and Feather Garments Dance
 Was stopped by sounds of war.
 Dust filled the high-towered capital,
 As thousands of carriages and horsemen
 Fled to the southwest.
 The emperor's green-canopied carriage
 Was forced to halt,
 Having left the west city gate
 More than a hundred *li*.
 There was nothing the emperor could do,
 At the army's refusal to proceed.
 So she with the moth-like eyebrows
 Was killed before his horses.
 Her floral-patterned gilded box
 Fell to the ground, abandoned and unwanted,
 Like her jade hair-pin
 With the gold sparrow and green feathers.
 Covering his face with his hands,
 He could not save her.

Turning back to look at her,
 His tears mingled with her blood.
 Yellow dust filled the sky;
 The wind was cold and shrill.
 Ascending high winding mountain paths,
 They reached the Sword Pass,
 At the foot of the Omei Mountains.
 Few came that way.
 Their banners seemed less resplendent;
 Even the sun seemed dim.
 Though the rivers were deep blue,
 And the Sichuan mountains green,
 Night and day the emperor mourned.
 In his refuge when he saw the moon,
 Even it seemed sad and wan.
 On rainy nights, the sound of bells
 Seemed broken-hearted.
 Fortunes changed, the emperor was restored.
 His dragon-carriage started back.
 Reaching the place where she died,
 He lingered, reluctant to leave.
 In the earth and dust of Mawei Slope,
 No lady with the jade-like face was found.
 The spot was desolate.
 Emperor and servants exchanged looks,
 Their clothes stained with tears.
 Turning eastwards towards the capital,
 They led their horses slowly back.
 The palace was unchanged on his return,
 With lotus blooming in the Taiye Pool

And willows in the Weiyang Palace.
 The lotus flowers were like her face;
 The willows like her eyebrows.
 How could he refrain from tears
 At their sight?
 The spring wind returned at night;
 The peach and plum trees blossomed again.
 Plane leaves fell in the autumn rains.
 Weeds choked the emperor's west palace;
 Piles of red leaves on the unswept steps.
 The hair of the young musicians of the Pear Garden
 Turned to grey.
 The green-clad maids of the spiced chambers
 Were growing old.
 At night when glow-worms flitted in the pavilion
 He thought of her in silence.
 The lonely lamp was nearly extinguished,
 Yet still he could not sleep.
 The slow sound of bells and drums
 Was heard in the long night.
 The Milky Way glimmered bright.
 It was almost dawn.
 Cold and frosty the paired love-bird tiles;
 Chilly the kingfisher-feathered quilt
 With none to share it.
 Though she had died years before,
 Even her spirit was absent from his dreams.
 A priest from Lingqiong came to Loyang,
 Said to summon spirits at his will.
 Moved by the emperor's longing for her,

He sent a magician to make a careful search.
 Swift as lightning, through the air he sped,
 Up to the heavens, below the earth, everywhere.
 Though they searched the sky and nether regions,
 Of her there was no sign.
 Till he heard of a fairy mountain
 In the ocean of a never-never land.
 Ornate pavilions rose through coloured clouds,
 Wherein dwelt lovely fairy folk.
 One was named Taizhen,
 With snowy skin and flowery beauty,
 Suggesting that this might be she.
 When he knocked at the jade door
 Of the gilded palace's west chamber,
 A fairy maid, Xiaoyu, answered,
 Reporting to another, Shuangcheng.
 On hearing of the messenger
 From the Han emperor,
 She was startled from her sleep
 Behind the gorgeous curtain.
 Dressing, she drew it back,
 Rising hesitantly.
 The pearl curtains and silver screens
 Opened in succession.
 Her cloudy tresses were awry,
 Just summoned from her sleep.
 Without arranging her flower headdress,
 She entered the hall.
 The wind blew her fairy skirt,
 Lifting it, as if she still danced

The Rainbow and Feather Garments Dance.
 But her pale face was sad,
 Tears filled her eyes,
 Like a blossoming pear tree in spring,
 With rain drops on its petals.
 Controlling her feelings and looking away,
 She thanked the emperor.
 Since their parting she had not heard
 His voice nor seen his face.
 While she had been his first lady,
 Their love had been ruptured.
 Many years had passed
 On Penglai fairy isle.
 Turning her head,
 She gazed down on the mortal world.
 Changan could not be seen,
 Only mist and dust.
 She presented old mementos
 To express her deep feeling.
 Asking the messenger to take
 The jewel box and the golden pin.
 "I'll keep one half of the pin and box;
 Breaking the golden pin
 And keeping the jewel lid.
 As long as our love lasts
 Like jewels and gold,
 We may meet again
 In heaven or on earth."
 Before they parted
 She again sent this message,

Containing a pledge
Only she and the emperor knew.
In the Palace of Eternal Youth
On the seventh of the seventh moon,
Alone they had whispered
To each other at midnight:
"In heaven we shall be birds
Flying side by side.
On earth flowering sprigs
On the same branch!"
Heaven and earth may not last for ever,
But this sorrow was eternal.

Proud Eunuchs

Their proud airs seemed to fill the road;
Dust reflected their gleaming saddled horses.
When I inquired who they were,
People answered they were palace eunuchs.
Red insignia signified the rank of minister,
And purple insignia a general.
Boasting of their feast at the army headquarters,
They galloped away like fleeting clouds.
Their goblets overflowed with choicest wines;
Their dishes were delicacies from land and sea.
For fruit, they peeled oranges from Dongting Hill;
For fish, they ate slices from those of Lake Tianchi.
Satiated with food, they felt at their ease.
Inebriated by wine, their spirits soared.
Yet this year saw a drought south of the river;
And in Quzhou, men were eating men.

Buying Flowers

Almost late spring in the imperial city;
Noise and bustle from passing carriages and horses.
People said that peonies were in blossom,
Following each other to buy the flowers.
Expensive or cheap, no fixed price, except according to
quantity;
Five hundred bright red blossoms cost five lengths of
silk.
Overhead were awnings and curtains for shelters;
Around them were bamboo fences for protection.
Sprayed with water and their roots sealed with mud;
When they were removed, they still retained their beauty.
Every family accepted this, none questioning it was
wrong.
Then an old villager came to the market.
Head bowed, he sighed to himself, though none knew
why.
He sighed because the cost of a bunch of deep red
flowers
Was the same as the taxes paid by ten peasant families.

The Salt Merchant's Wife

The salt merchant's wife has plenty of money;
She needn't farm, breed silk-worms or weave.
Wherever she goes she always has a home;
The boat her house, wind and water her home.
From a poor Yangzhou family,
She married a big merchant west of the Yangzi.
Growing rich, many gold hair-pins adorn her glossy hair;
Growing plump, the silver bracelet on her arm is tight.
She orders about her servants and maids;
Yet how did she become so wealthy?
Her husband has been a salt merchant for fifteen years;
Not controlled by the district, but only by the emperor.
Each year when the salt monopoly profit goes to the state,
The smaller share is for the government,
The larger one for private hands.
So the government profits less than private people,
But the ministry far away is not aware of this.
Besides, fish and rice are cheap in the Yangzi Valley;
With red herring, yellow oranges and fragrant rice.

She can eat well, dress herself up and lean by the stern-
tower,

Her red cheeks glowing like a blooming flower.
How lucky she is to have married a salt merchant!
Good food every day, fine clothes all year round.
But who's the source of these fine clothes and food?
She ought to thank Sang Hongyang for them.*
Sang Hongyang died a long time ago.
But he wasn't only in the Han Dynasty,
There are such people around today too!

* Sang Hongyang in the Han Dynasty started the salt and iron government monopoly.

My Village in the Bitter Weather

In the twelfth month in the eighth year of Yuan-he*
Snow fell thickly for five days in succession.
All the bamboos and cypresses perished in the cold,
What then happened to those ill-clad peasants?
When I saw those village families,
Out of ten, eight or nine were poor.
The north wind was piercing as a sword,
Yet they had insufficient clothing for their bodies.
They could only light a fire with brambles and weeds,
Sitting sadly at night to await the dawn.
Thus I saw during a severe spell of cold,
The peasants endured an agonizing time.
In those days I had a thatched hut with closed doors,
A fur coat with a cloth cover and raw silk bedding;
I had extra warmth, whether I sat or slept.
So I was fortunate to escape hunger and cold;
Nor did I have to toil in the fields.
Considering this, I feel ashamed,
And ask myself, what sort of person I am.

* The eighth year of Yuan-he was in AD 813, when the poet retired from office and stayed in his village home to observe the mourning period after his mother's death.

Zhang Shiling

Lion Dances

Lion dances are popular all over China, where the lion is considered to symbolize courage and strength. During festivals such dances were traditionally performed in streets or on threshing grounds, in the belief that this would exorcize evil, drive away demons and avert disasters so that people and livestock would be safe and sound throughout the year. These folk dances were among those loved most by the labouring people.

There are many legends concerning lion dances. According to one, when Jiang Ziya, commander of the army in the Zhou Dynasty (c 11th century B C) granted divine titles to certain dead warriors, the spirits of those who were passed over flew into a rage and made trouble by spreading pestilence. So the Jade Emperor ordered the lion to descend to the world and vanquish the pestilence. After it had done this, however, the lion was unwilling to return to heaven and remained on earth. Thereafter, lion dances were performed to do away with pestilence and subdue demons.

These dances were not the only ones imitating animal movements. In China, several thousand years ago, there was a form of bird and animal dance, a simple masked dance performed to celebrate victory in hunting or warfare and during sacrifices to the gods.

Lion dances had been greatly improved by the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and were often presented among the people as well as in the army and imperial court. During these performances the artistes masqueraded as five lions of different colours. At first each lion was led by two lion-trainers; later their number increased to twelve, each holding a red whisk to tease the lions, making them perform various movements, and a choir of over a hundred people accompanied the performance. The Tang-dynasty poet Bai Juyi gave this vivid description in his poem *Xiliang Artistes*:

Masked Hun and a mock lion
With head of carved wood and silk tail,
With golden eyes and teeth of silver tinsel,
It shakes its shaggy coat and flaps its ears. . . .

The most popular lion dances are those in which men masquerade as lions. *Big Lion* is played by two men, one wearing the lion's head while the other in a shaggy coat holds on to the former's waist to represent the body of the lion. *Small Lion* is played by one man. Both forms present different dance movements. The lion-trainers whirl gay rosettes or carry horsetail whisks or other props to tease or tame the lions.

These enactments fall into two categories: "gentle lions" and "fierce lions".

"Gentle lions" look sleek, affable and sedate. Whether they scratch themselves, lick their coats, shake their manes, roll on the ground, or chase a ball, all their movements bring out their docile and lovable dispositions. In *The Jovial Monk Teases the Lion* from southern Shaanxi, the pot-bellied monk wears a big mask and carries a horsetail whisk or rush-leaf fan. His indolent yet exaggerated movements are amusing to watch. *A Lion Catches Butterflies* from Anhui Province shows a lively, quick-witted lion playing with a small butterfly.

"Fierce lions" perform acrobatics, and this requires skill of a high order. They must be able to leap, pounce, turn somersaults, stand erect, walk on stakes, vault over tables, climb ladders, rope-walk and form pyramids. The *Small Lion* dance from Sichuan Province involves somersaulting down from a pyramid of fourteen tables. *Rope-climbing Lion* from Zhejiang Province has a rope



Gentle Lion

hung from a high framework up to which the lion climbs, performing many dangerous feats.

Apart from the lions played by men, there are others made of bamboo and cloth. The "hand lion dance" is performed by one man holding the lion with both hands while another actor carries the gay ball. Scrambling for the ball, the lion goes through extraordinary contortions beyond the ability of masqueraders. The "hand turning lion" is made of bamboo rings propped on two wooden or bamboo handles. It is manipulated by one or two people. The "fire lion", also made of bamboo and cloth and popular in Anhui Province, can spurt flames. The two operators, holding iron rings on its head and tail, move and dance after the bright rosettes. They make the lion whirl through the air and leap over clouds. When tired it finds a stream and goes through the motions of drinking and grooming itself. Now beautiful cloud lanterns appear on the stage so that the lion seems to be moving on a high mountain mantled with clouds and mist.

Since the founding of New China, much work has been done to

gather material about these dances and to improve on them. A *Lazy Woman Rushes in the Grain* put on by the Xian Song and Dance Theatre is a distinctive example of a "gentle lion" dance which has been revised. A lazy woman gets up after the sun is high in the sky. She goes to work on the threshing-ground but before long dozes off. The lion hates to see such lazy-bones and tries every means to wake her. However, she soon dozes off again. Later she spreads a mat on the ground and falls sound asleep on it. Suddenly a storm blows up. The anxious lion nibbles at the woman's foot and pulls the mat with its mouth. It manages to wrap the mat round the woman. She wakes, horrified to see the threatening clouds, and bestirs herself to rush the grain into the barn. The kind-hearted lion comes to her aid. Their dancing movements, now swift and exaggerated, keep up with the rhythm of the gongs and drums with their rich local flavour. The teamwork between the two of them brings out the lion's kindness and diligence.

The presentation of "fierce lions" has also made new headway. A *Pair of Lions* from Hebei Province shows the boldness with





A Lion Crossing the Bridge

which they charge out from a cave, jump over mountains and streams and frolic together. These lions not only can climb, prance and walk on stakes but also stand on their hind legs with nimble precision. The subject matter is skilfully conveyed, and by adopting certain engaging features of the "gentle lions" they appear thoroughly lifelike and make a strong appeal to the audience.

Two Lions Cross the Bridge performed by the China Acrobatic Troupe is also a "fierce lion" dance. A girl with a bright rosette in her hand stands on the back of a lion which is treading on a wooden ball about one metre in diameter. Another lion stands on its hind legs on another ball. To do this the actor who plays the lion's body has to lift up his partner — the head — and at the same time maintain the posture of a lion. The two lions teeter on these balls over a see-saw merely a foot wide. The actors have to be first-rate acrobats.

Constant innovations by our labouring people over the centuries have turned lion dances into a fine art form with a special charm of its own.

Tian Yongxiang and Ye Hong

Yuxian Papercuts

Papercuts have a history of more than a thousand years and have long been popular throughout all China. According to historical records, this folk art came into being during the Jin Dynasty (265-420). As the celebrated Tang-dynasty poet Li Shangyin (c 813-858) wrote in one of his poems:

Cutting foil into headdresses originated in Jingzhou,
Satin cut-outs of figures were first made in the Jin Dynasty.

Owing to the different tastes of the local people, each district has its own techniques and characteristics. For instance, the resplendent scissor-cuts of Foshan in Guangdong Province are always made of copper foil on a coloured paper foundation*; the charming papercuts of Yueqing in Zhejiang Province are mainly used as decorative patterns and those of Mianyang in Hubei Province, cut both by scissors and burins, are characterized by linear precision. Generally speaking, the papercuts of the north are bold and vigorous while those of the south are elegant and beautiful. The papercuts of Yuxian in Hebei Province which we are introducing here are different in style and rank high in this field of art.

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 8, 1973.

Yuxian, an ancient town outside the Great Wall, began to serve as a centre for cultural exchange as trade developed there in the mid-nineteenth century. Certain flower patterns cut by burins had long been widely used in Yuxian as designs for embroidery on shoes, pillows, pouches and clothes. The Yangliuqing New-Year paintings and Wuqiang County's water-colour block prints for window decoration were also popular there. The local people learned from these folk arts and in the course of practice created the Yuxian papercuts with a distinctive style of their own. Whereas the cut-outs in other areas were mostly made by scissors, those of Yuxian were produced by burins and painted with vivid colours. They are simple and vigorous in design, presenting a lively and flamboyant effect with their clear, gay colours. When pasted on paper windows, they look exquisite and dazzlingly bright in the sunlight.

The chief motifs of Yuxian papercuts are plants, animals, figures and facial designs from Chinese operas. The plant patterns are mainly of hemp, beans, wheat and other grains that are commonly grown there, while the animal forms are oxen, sheep, pigs, dogs and chickens or other domestic animals and poultry. These are skilfully arranged by the local artists, who make bold innovations in their shape and colour to form beautiful designs with auspicious meanings. Opera figures are most popular of all, numbering more than six hundred characters from about two hundred operas including both comedies and tragedies, romances and legends. Each set of these usually consists of several cut-outs. The facial designs imitate those in the operas, conveying the character of different roles through exaggerated lines and colours. Since the founding of New China, the Yuxian artists have done their best to carry on and perfect this traditional folk art, and have created a number of new papercuts to reflect the new life.

The Yuxian papercuts are marked by unique cutting skill and application of colours. They are mainly cut in intaglio, carving in relief being subsidiary. The latter increases the expressiveness of the lines while the former gives ample scope for brilliant colouring. Much attention is paid to the cutting, and the lines of the cut-outs are fluid and delicate. The handling of colours is also very im-

portant, and there is a saying that the delicacy depends on cutting while the liveliness depends on colouring. The pigments in common use are red, pink, yellow, dark green, light blue, dark blue, heliotrope and other monochrome colours which are mixed with alcohol to make them more resplendent. Sometimes a touch of blended colouring is used to bring more harmony to the whole picture. Because most of the spaces are painted with monochrome colours, they form a sharp contrast and make the picture more ornamental and lustrous.

This folk art is quite popular in Yuxian. After winter comes, the markets are very busy as peasants flock there to buy pigments and paper. In the countryside, a charcoal brazier burns in each household. Often the father does the cutting out, his daughter the colouring. On the eve of the lunar New Year, the market towns are lively again, dotted with many stalls selling papercuts. People crowd round to see their displays or buy their wares. This is an annual exhibition where experience is exchanged.

A large number of papercut artists have emerged in Yuxian, of whom Wang Laoshang (1890-1951) was the best known. He began to learn colouring while still a little boy of seven and could cut out replicas in his early teens. By the age of twenty he became a master of this art. When he was young, he was very fond of operas and paid much attention to the features of the characters. He liked reading historical novels too and was familiar with many stories from history. He used his spare time after farm work to make papercuts, ceaselessly perfecting his skill. In about forty years he created more than a thousand cut-outs of over five hundred figures in two hundred operas. He was capable of grasping in a flash and reproducing their postures and most beautiful movements. Thus each figure he produced was distinctive, ranging from martial generals to graceful beauties. Not only were their forms attractive, their inner world was also revealed through a few telling strokes. His works spread far and wide and were copied by others. He made more than a hundred burins, the smallest the size of a needle. And he handled these with the ease of a painter wielding a brush. Wang Laoshang raised the art of Yuxian papercuts to maturity.

After Liberation, Zhou Yongming and Zhang Jichun, two other Yuxian craftsmen, created cut-outs of facial designs. Zhou Yongming, now fifty-two years old, served his apprenticeship with Wang Laoshang. He has mastered all the skills of cutting, colouring and painting. He and Zhang Jichun between them have made almost two hundred facial designs based on the make-up of opera figures and the clay statues in temples. These cut-outs manifest the distinctive features of the characters and are highly decorative.



Yan Liangkun

Boston Symphony Orchestra in China

In the the past decade and more, the classical and contemporary music of other countries was virtually banned by Lin Biao and the "gang of four", so that our musicians and music-lovers became completely out of touch with it. In the early days of the normalization of relations between China and the United States, the renowned Boston Symphony Orchestra led by Seiji Ozawa, a world celebrated conductor, came recently as cultural envoys to our country. They made a deep impression on Chinese musicians and audiences, though their visit was very short. I shall never forget their last concert in which the Boston Symphony Orchestra and China's Central Philharmonic Society jointly played Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C minor. This masterpiece composed in the early nineteenth century praises the anti-feudal fighting spirit of the German bourgeoisie and the triumph of mankind over Fate. It has long been appreciated in China and was often played by the Central Philharmonic Society. But during the Cultural Revolution it was banned and we had no chance to hear it. With the enthusiastic and patient

The author is a conductor of China's Central Philharmonic Society.

help of Mr. Seiji Ozawa, the Central Philharmonic Society rehearsed this symphony again and during rehearsals and performances the musicians of our two countries exchanged experience. We learned their strong points and so the two orchestras were able to play together successfully.

The Boston Symphony Orchestra pays much attention to tonal quality. The collaboration between the players and the conductor is excellent. Their performances are carefully integrated. I was deeply impressed when I first attended one abroad twenty-two years ago, and even more so during this visit of theirs to China. They gave three concerts in Beijing, their repertoire including German classical music, French impressionist music, as well as melan-

choly Russian music and American and Chinese contemporary pieces. Each piece had its distinctive style and the characteristics of the age, which the orchestra brought out in full.

Mr. Seiji Ozawa became the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1973. He is a virtuoso combining passion with sensitivity and accuracy. Guided by his skilful baton, the two orchestras brought the coda of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C minor to a brilliant climax. When he conducted the fourth movement of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 in B minor, he made the orchestra hold the audience spellbound; when they played the first movement, his conducting was so relaxed and unconstrained that its tenderness was brought out to the full; while the different cadences

Joint performance by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Central Philharmonic Society





Seiji Ozawa

of the third movement were closely linked by his clear-cut, decisive motions. It is very apparent that when he conducts various kinds of compositions, Mr. Seiji Ozawa identifies himself with the music.

Mr. Seiji Ozawa has a deep love for China. When he came here two years ago, he paid a special visit to Shenyang, his birth-place. This year, despite many claims on his time, he also visited the house in Beijing where his family lived thirty years ago. His visit to China with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in March this year realized his hope that the peoples of China and America could speak to each other heart to heart through music.

Returning Home After Drinking
(silk fan painting) *anonymous*



Zhang Rongrong

Silk Fan Painting “Returning Home After Drinking”

The Song Dynasty (960-1279) saw a big development in painting, which flourished not only in the imperial art academy but also outside the court. There appeared many different schools and styles, so that many fine works were produced, some by well-known artists and others by anonymous painters.

Returning Home After Drinking, a silk fan landscape with figures, is by an anonymous Song-dynasty artist. It portrays a scene south of the Changjiang River one bright spring day. By a stream at the foot of the mountains nestles a tavern with a fence around it and a trade-sign flying from the top of a bamboo pole. Beside it is a group of peach trees in full bloom, and the two banks of the stream are linked by a wooden bridge. This lovely scene is animated by several figures: the tavern-keeper is carrying two buckets of water back from the stream; a man is riding a donkey across the bridge accompanied by two servants.

Although the painting is not big (23.9 × 25.4 cm), it is full of liveliness. The figures on the bridge are superbly executed. The man on the donkey is on his way home after visiting some relative or friend and drinking heavily. Too drunk to sit straight in the saddle, he has one hand on the shoulder of a servant as they cross the bridge. The servant is staggering forward, holding his master's hand and supporting his waist. Both have their backs turned to us. The painter has captured the drunken state of the master and with a few strokes brought out to the full the theme of "returning home after drinking". More subtle still is the inclusion of a servant behind with a wine jar which seems half full hanging from his shoulder-pole. This suggests that the master means to go on drinking as soon as he sobers up, but for the time being he has to get his servant to carry the jar for him.

Returning Home After Drinking reminds us of our great poet Li Bai (701-762) of the Tang Dynasty, who had the reputation of being able to "write a hundred poems in his cups". He wrote many poems in praise of drinking, one of which reads:

A jade pitcher tied with a black ribbon;
Why hasn't the wine come yet?
Wild flowers are smiling at me;
It's just the time to drink.
At dusk I enjoy myself drinking by the window;
Birds taking flight come back to join me.
Spring wind and the drunken scholar
Form one harmonious whole.

The spirit of *Returning Home After Drinking* is closely akin to this poem. The drunkard portrayed in the painting seems to personify Li Bai's "drunken scholar". For writers and artists of old "drinking" and "intoxication" were favourite themes, and scholars who were frustrated in feudal China liked to compose poems while drinking or drown their cares in wine.

In *Returning Home After Drinking*, the painter has used exquisite composition, meticulous yet simple brushwork and harmonious, beautiful colours to bring out the theme, with the emphasis on "drinking" and "intoxication". The peach blossoms, the flowing stream, the trade-sign, the tavern, the beautiful spring scenery, all

serve as a foil to the drunkard returning home. The apt setting and the vivid figures make the whole painting thoroughly lifelike.

Although *Returning Home After Drinking* has no signature or inscription, so that the painter cannot go down in the annals of history, it makes a strong artistic appeal to art lovers.



Awards for Short Stories

A meeting to award prizes for the best short stories of 1978 and some of the best of 1977 was held in Beijing recently. The stories chosen were *The Class Teacher*, *My Sacred Duty*, *The Window*, *Our Army Commander*, *A Night by the Xiangjiang River*, *Footprints*, *Sowing Time Is Set*, *Would That You Could Hear This Song*, *A Cellist's Dream*, *The Wound*, *Child of the Forests*, *Why the Rider Sings of Her Mother*, *Hot Peppers*, *Learning*, *Two Sisters*, *What Is Most Precious*, *Devotion*, *Graveyard and Flowers*, *Eyeglasses*, *My Marriage*, *Jade Cliff*, "Unwanted" *Brother-in-law*, *A Jailer's Diary*, *An African Girl*, and *Dead Light on Coral Island*.

These stories reflected the trials, sacrifices and victories of the Chinese people in their struggle against the "gang of four", the people's admiration for the achievements and fine qualities of veteran revolutionaries, and the selfless endeavours of people from all walks of life to speed up the modernization of our country. Some depicted the harm done to our society by the "gang of four" and the efforts to heal these wounds. Other themes were music, navigation, science, public security, war and love.

This prize-giving was sponsored by *People's Literature*, a national magazine. The awarding committee was made up of 23 well-known writers and critics including Mao Dun, Zhou Yang and Ba Jin who decided on the awards after a poll among a representative section of readers.

The writers of most of the vote-winning stories are young, the youngest being twenty-three-year-old Wang Yaping, the writer of *My Sacred Duty*.

Fifth Series of Theatrical Performances

The fifth series of theatrical performances in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China opened in Beijing recently. The repertoire includes three plays *Rough Waves on the Longjiang River*, *May Youth Be More Beautiful* and *Children's Hearts*, the ballet *Swan Lake* and songs and dances from the provinces of Jilin and Sichuan.

The previous four series which started in January had presented 26 items.

Traditional Tibetan Opera Revived

Traditional Tibetan opera banned by the "gang of four" for many years has been staged again in Tibet. An excerpt from *Nangsha*, an opera based on a beautiful folktale popular among the Tibetan people, is being performed now. It gives a detailed picture of the feudal serf system by presenting a poor girl's life and her struggle against oppression. It has been revised and is being played by the Tibetan Opera Troupe of the Tibet Autonomous Region. Other traditional operas in rehearsal are *Princess Wen Cheng* which takes as its theme the marriage of a Han princess to a Tibetan noble during the Tang Dynasty, *Nosang* which is about a young couple yearning for free love, and *Baima Wangbo* which extols the Tibetan people's resistance against foreign aggression.

The Life of Galileo on Beijing Stage

The Life of Galileo, a play on science and democracy by the well-known German playwright Bertolt Brecht was staged recently in

Beijing. This is the first foreign play seen on the Chinese stage since 1966. It was presented by the China Youth Art Theatre with Huang Zuolin of the Shanghai People's Art Theatre as guest director, assisted by Chen Yong of the Youth Art Theatre.

Twelve acts were presented, omitting the fifth, eighth and fifteenth acts of the original play and some of the astronomical terms in the other acts. The production highlighted the humanism of the Renaissance period. The characters, contradictions, depth of thinking and epic features of the original script by Brecht were faithfully portrayed.

Poems by Ten Old Men Published

A selection of poems by ten old men with its title written by Ye Jianying, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, was recently published by the China Youth Publishing House.

The selection comprises more than 350 poems by ten late veteran revolutionaries: Zhu De, Dong Biwu, Lin Boqu, Wu Yuzhang, Xu Teli, Xie Juezai, Xu Fanting, Li Muan, Xiong Jinding and Qian Qaisu. It reflects the revolutionary struggles of our people in various historical periods and the personal experiences and feelings of the poets. The poems are works of literature as well as precious historical material.

The Second Handshake to Be Published

The Second Handshake which circulated in secret among young people in the form of hand-written and mimeographed copies when the "gang of four" was in power will soon be printed by the China Youth Publishing House.

The novel depicts the tragic life of scientists in old China, their patriotism, frustrations, emotions and wasted talents, as well as the hopes held out in New China.

Zhang Yang the author is thirty-four years of age. He was labelled a counter-revolutionary and thrown into jail by the "gang of four" who said the book was pernicious. He and his novel have now been completely rehabilitated.

Selection of Chinese Folk Songs

The first volume of a selection of Chinese folk songs was recently put out by the Shanghai Art and Literature Publishing House with a preface by the well-known critic Zhou Yang, comprising 312 songs from 1840 to 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded. In the preface, Zhou Yang wrote, "In the past one hundred and more years the people of China have waged a long-term struggle for national liberation, freedom and democracy. These songs reflected this struggle." The second volume, comprising 305 songs from 1949-1978 reflecting our socialist revolution and socialist construction, will be published this year.

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by Xu Kuang



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