



WILD BULL VILLAGE

CHINESE SHORT STORIES

BY AI WU AND OTHERS

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Chinese Short Stories

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Wild Bull Village

AI WU

Luxuriant green trees covered the hills. All day long we had been trudging through the forest. The sun shone brightly in a cloudless sky. It was like summer. Occasionally a few trees with golden leaves reminded you of late autumn, yet some birch trees were just budding, as if it were spring. North China was in the grip of icy winter. But here in the south the borderland was a scene of wonderful freshness and joy.

Late in the afternoon we came to a stretch of level ground. Scores of thatched cottages were bathed in the golden light of the setting sun. Each was enclosed by a bamboo fence. Inside the fence the leaves of banana trees, palms and calami could be seen, green and glistening, and fat pigs lay with lazy half-closed eyes. Chickens scurried off as we approached, some flying to the tops of the fences. Comrade Chang Hua of the district office took me to one of the cottages.

"This is the chairman's house," he said.

We entered the gate. The cottage door was padlocked. Putting his shoulder bag down on the ground, Chang Hua took out a handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his forehead. "You rest here a while," he told me, starting to leave. "I'll go look for her."

A fragrance filled the air. I looked around. An orange tree by the hut was blooming with little white blossoms. There was also a pomegranate tree with attractive crimson flowers. The calamus entwining round a trunk was overgrown with fruit, all very small. The bananas were not big either. Probably it took more time for fruit to ripen in the hills. A green valley in the sunshine beyond was flickering with a golden light. At the end of the slope flowed a river, shimmering silvery bright. Fascinating peaks on the other side were tinged with a blue haze. I took out my camera ready to take a picture of this valley and river. But I was standing towards the sun. Starting to shift my position, I heard people laughing and talking, entering the garden. I turned to look. Comrade Chang Hua and a woman in her late forties were walking toward me, chatting in a lively manner. "This is the chairman of the commune," said Chang.

The woman had a brown complexion, rather plump cheeks and lively eyes. She looked very capable. Greeting me with pleasure, she held out her hand. As I followed her into the hut, I was thinking, "Where have I met her before?" Then I remembered — in the scrubland. Only then she wore clothes with many patches. Now she was neatly dressed in new clothes. Then her face wore an expression of worry and sadness, now she looked happy. Then there were wrinkles around her eyes, now there were none. This puzzled me. She couldn't be the same person. That woman would be over seventy now. Besides, this one was called Aunt Chao. The other woman was called Mama Hsu. They obviously were two different persons. Yet that friendly look, that gentle way of talking, the smile hovering about her lips — how she resembled that other woman!

She was now saying, "I can put you up in our house. Don't be in a hurry to leave. I'll take you to see anyone

you want to interview. If you want to write at night, I have a bright kerosene lamp. Our neighbour's children are very quiet they won't disturb you." I recalled what Mama Hsu had said years ago: "Come with us to the precious stone mine. We'll dig for precious stones together. Have your meals with us. Our house is much cleaner than the foodstalls. Ah-hsiu and I can mend your clothes in our spare time."

But why should I dwell upon the past? It had nothing to do with the present.

To keep my mind from wandering I asked Aunt Chao some questions: How many people were there in this village before liberation? How did they live? How many were there now, and in what way was their life different from the past?

I also asked if she was a native of this place. She smiled and replied that she was not born here. Nobody in the village was born here. Many years ago it was an uninhabited forest. Then, no one knows exactly when, people came and cut down the trees and burned off the brush. A broad stretch of land appeared in the forest. The people planted opium poppies. More settlers came. All grew poppies, very few planted grain. It was true that opium poppies were worth money. But they brought no prosperity to the people. On the contrary, they ruined the men's health, since nearly every man acquired the opium habit. Death took a heavier toll of men than women. Even today women outnumbered men in this village.

"This is a women's kingdom and she is the queen," Chang Hua interrupted Aunt Chao jestingly.

"Does anyone still smoke opium now?" asked I.

"No," Aunt Chao made a negative gesture. "After liberation the government persuaded the people to grow grain." She sighed. "If only liberation had come a few years earlier!" Her eyebrows knit and her head

bent, she looked the very image of Mama Hsu. I had stopped wondering whether I had met her before, realizing that there was just a chance similarity between her and someone I used to know. At dusk a girl of about 18 came in. Her sun-tanned face flushed with walking, her big black eyes lively and intelligent. Greatly surprised, I almost cried out, "Ah-hsiu, where have you been? I haven't seen you in years!"

She on her part merely shot a brief glance at me and greeted Chang Hua pleasantly. The chairman took the medicine kit from her, saying, "Put this down first. You've walked quite a distance. Aren't you tired?"

She let the chairman take the kit and smiled. "I'm not a bit tired, ma."

Chang Hua smilingly told me, "She is the chairman's precious daughter and our village's chief physician."

"Do you want a punch in the nose, Comrade Chang Hua?" The young doctor shook her fist in mock anger and smiled. "Only a month since we last met and you've learned to be so wicked. How can you be so sarcastic?"

Heavens, her girlish smile and the way she feigned anger, were all so like Ah-hsiu! I nudged Chang and asked in a low voice, "What's her name?" I knew her name could have nothing to do with Ah-hsiu, but still I wanted to know.

"Ah-ming," Chang Hua replied, laughing.

"Ah, you shouldn't tell people my baby name." She looked at Chang reproachfully and then, turning to me, said with a smile, "My name is Chao Shu-ying."

Again, it was a case of a person's features and expressions reminding me of somebody else. Nothing extraordinary actually, when you come to think of it. But in this case, the strange thing was that both the mother and the daughter should be so like another mother and daughter.

It happened many years ago. During the monsoon, it rained every day in the scrub-land. The trees were constantly dripping water. Only teams of pack horses and Tai traders, baskets of goods slung from their carrying poles, came to our inn. There were scarcely any Han customers. It was said that this was the season of the miasma. An outsider coming to the scrub-land was sure to fall victim to it. It was the first time I went there and as I had no mosquito net to protect me in the night, I soon became afflicted with malaria. Every afternoon I shivered from cold and fever. But once it passed I could work as if nothing had happened. One day just after an attack, I got up and saw a woman and her daughter entering the inn. I showed them a room. Looking around, the woman asked uneasily, "Isn't there a smaller room? We need only a small one."

In the scrub-land the inns usually had large rooms with bamboo walls. Bamboo shelves covered with bamboo mats served as beds. Each of these "beds" could accommodate twenty to thirty people. I took a good look at the woman and her daughter and told them, "We have no other guests. You two can have this room to yourselves."

The mother hastily asked, "Do we have to pay much? It's such a big room."

"Not much. We only charge by the person." I started to go.

The daughter came quickly forward and asked softly, "Is there any work I can do here?"

Looking at her in surprise, I was about to reply when her mother walked over and pulled her away. "Come and lie down for a while. You've walked so far today. Aren't you tired?"

The girl smiled. "I'm not a bit tired, ma." She looked at me, waiting for a reply.

I thought for a while and said, "We need an extra hand to sweep the horse manure out of the yard. But it's a

heavy dirty job. A mere slip of a girl like you won't be able to do it."

"I'm not useless. Try me and see," the girl exclaimed, somewhat resentfully. Her face was radiant. She was plainly happy at the prospect of getting a job.

"Hold your tongue, Ah-hsiu," her mother chided. "Don't be so rude."

"Ma, why shouldn't I take a job when I've got the chance?" Ah-hsiu could not conceal her joy. She continued, "I don't like to hear people talk like that. He shouldn't assume I'm no good before seeing how I work."

I said nothing but smiled. I'll see how you work tomorrow, I thought.

That night, when the day's work was done, I told my master, the innkeeper, about the mother and her daughter who was looking for a job. The innkeeper was in bed smoking his opium pipe. He acted as if he hadn't heard me. That was his way; he wouldn't answer at once. I sat down on the edge of the bed and waited. The innkeeper's wife came in from an adjoining room and said to her husband, "Mama Hsu has been talking to me. There has been a drought in their place and many people have starved to death. They are refugees. She begs us to let them stay. They'll do anything. They want only their keep."

The master seized upon this at once. "Refugees! I won't have them! They have been starved for so long, they are likely to eat up all we have."

When I first came to work at the inn I ate quite a lot. The master had sneered at me, "You're going to send the price of rice sky high." Now he was again afraid people would eat him poor. You want people to work for you, but you won't give them enough to eat! I thought angrily.

But the mistress smiled and said, "How can they eat you poor? At first they may eat a little more than average. But that doesn't matter. Look at him, he's got

fever every day. We have to hire an extra hand." Then she sighed, "It rains every day. It's no easy job to sweep that horse manure."

The innkeeper, eyes fixed on his pipe, demanded, "Can those two women do it? . . . It looks to me like the only thing they can do is eat."

When I heard they were poor refugees I wanted to say, "Let them have a try." But I did not speak out lest the master think I wanted to do less work myself. I looked at the mistress, hoping she would insist. If she gave up, I would have to speak.

The mistress seemed to have guessed my feelings. She nodded and said, "Give them a chance. Anyway, they don't want any pay. If they can't do it, they will go. From the way she talked I'm sure Mama Hsu is very sensible and will not force herself upon you."

"All right, let them have a try," agreed the master, looking at neither of us. His face wore an irritated expression.

The next morning it rained. The mountain villages nearby were all blurred in the misty downpour. The pack horses had gone, leaving the ground strewn with straw and dung. It was sickening to look at the brown, muddy water. I intended to clean the yard when the rain let up a little. But the girl who arrived the day before began sweeping the ground with a long bamboo broom. She had only a kerchief of printed cotton on her head.

The rain and mist in the hills were full of pestilential vapours. How could anyone afford to let herself be drenched? I hastened to fetch Ah-hsiu a straw hat and warned, "If you get soaked, you'll be sick."

She not only refused to accept the hat but retorted in anger, "What's there to be afraid of? It's not raining daggers." She even took off her cotton kerchief and let the rain fall on her head. Her long glossy plait, which had been swinging down her back the day before, was

coiled up on her head. Her zest for work filled me with amazement. But her defiant attitude made me uncomfortable. I cursed silently, "Damn the girl, she's still mad at me."

The mistress saw what was going on and took the straw hat to the girl herself. Only then did Ah-hsiu put it on. Usually it took me the whole morning to sweep the yard and carry the manure outside. With Ah-hsiu's help, it took much less time. I was very glad. At the same time I suspected she would do well only the first few days. Would she always work like that?

After we finished, she went to the river to wash her hands and feet. Then she went to the kitchen and, together with her mother, helped the master's daughter do various odd jobs. From morning to night, she kept herself busy. You never caught her idling. If there was really nothing to do, she helped the mistress take care of the baby. This pleased the mistress. Two or three days after Ah-hsiu and her mother had arrived, the mistress said to the master, "It's wrong not to give them a single copper."

The master pulled a long face and grumbled, "You squanderer. They're not asking for it, why give them money? You must think we've more money than we can spend."

"Stop talking nonsense," the mistress said angrily. "If you don't want to pay them, then don't."

In the afternoon when my attack of malaria had passed, I set up a table in the corridor and gave the innkeeper's son and two daughters a reading lesson. The master and the mistress had given me this spare-time job. I had agreed for the sake of the children. When Ah-hsiu was not busy, she would come around with the baby in her arms and listen. She learned some of the words too. When the younger daughter pronounced incorrectly, Ah-hsiu would put in, "There, you've got it wrong again." The elder daughter was already eighteen and was doing

all the kitchen work before Ah-hsiu and her mother came. She had been kept busy the whole day long. Consequently, she was not so good at learning vocabulary as her younger sister and brother. Sometimes she would point at a word and ask, embarrassed, "How do you pronounce it?" Ah-hsiu would giggle. The elder daughter would flush and look at her in displeasure. Sometimes she would snap at Ah-hsiu, "If you're so clever, let's hear you pronounce it."

If Mama Hsu was there mending, she would give Ah-hsiu a look, indicating that she should go away. But it rained day in and day out. Where could Ah-hsiu go? She could only go to the opposite room where the master was smoking opium. Or, if he was not smoking, he was lying in bed curled up like a lazy snake. When Ah-hsiu went in she might say: "Ah, the pipe is so dirty, let me clean it for you." Or perhaps she would tell him a story, like: A T'ai girl carrying two baskets of eggs slipped and the eggs were smashed. Ah-hsiu talked in such a lively manner and laughed so boisterously that the master laughed too. Sometimes if she did not go in to see him, the master would come to the door in his wooden clogs and ask genially, "Where's Ah-hsiu? I want her to clean my pipe."

One night, the master said to his wife ingratiatingly, "I've thought it over. You're quite right. It's really wrong not to give them a single copper."

The mistress pulled a long face. "Squanderer!" she hissed and walked away.

The master cursed, then smiled, a little shamefaced.

Thereafter I noticed that the mistress' face had lost its former tranquil expression. She became quite touchy. Mama Hsu probably noticed it too. Every afternoon when Ah-hsiu was looking after the baby, her mother would say, "Ah-hsiu, why don't you go and visit a neighbour?"

Ah-hsiu looked outside and smiled. "Where can I go in this rain, ma?"

Mama Hsu insisted softly, "My good daughter, must you be so chatty and jolly? Better listen to ma, go somewhere else." The mother said this in a gentle tone, without any censure or reproach. But on her face was a look of infinite helplessness and sorrow.

Ah-hsiu looked at her mother, murmuring, "All right, I'll go, ma."

Most of the people in the scrub-land made their living by innkeeping. All the hired help were bachelors. They plainly welcomed Ah-hsiu very much. Before Ah-hsiu started going to their inns they never came to ours. But once she visited them they began to call on us in the evenings. Ah-hsiu was always glad to see them and would smile and bubble with cheer. Sometimes, they even dropped over in the morning or afternoon. If she was sweeping, they always lent a helping hand, never failing to draw her into conversation and make her laugh. The cook at Li's Inn, nicknamed Roaming Horse, was the kind who couldn't take his eyes off the Tai girls staying the night at the inn. Now he played the gallant to Ah-hsiu.

"If it doesn't rain tonight, I'll wrap you in a blanket and take you away like the Tais do." When a Tai young man visits his sweetheart in the cool of evening, he drapes his blanket cape over her shoulders, and they stroll and chat under the same covering. It is a common custom of the Tai youth. But to the Hans it sounded nasty. Perhaps our master had heard of Roaming Horse's remark, for he commented maliciously, "Damn it, they're turning this place into a brothel."

Peace and happiness had returned to the mistress' face. When she heard her husband curse like that she scolded him. "You're too dirty-minded. She's just a bit wild. How can you say such things about her?"

The innkeeper angrily threw down his pipe. "Wait and see, you'll soon be hearing something more!" he said wrathfully.

Before long, something more indeed was heard. The story was brought by the pack-horse teams. They said that a despotic landlord had made a young girl his concubine. The girl ran away but was soon caught by the landlord. After giving her a good beating he sold her to a brothel. She again ran away. The girl was no other than Ah-hsiu. Roaming Horse told the story to everyone he met. He talked as if he had seen her in the brothel himself. The bachelors of the other inns stopped coming. One afternoon Ah-hsiu went out with the baby. She returned very quickly looking quite distressed.

"Why are you back so soon?" her mother asked.

Ah-hsiu's lips twisted. "Ma, let's leave this wretched place."

Mama Hsu said tearfully, "This is the rainy season and we've got no money. Where shall we go?"

Hanging her head, Ah-hsiu said, "There must be some place where we can live in peace." Her tone was strong and indignant.

Before long, I heard the innkeeper say to his wife, "Now, you must have heard yourself. . . . Your ears are good enough, aren't they?"

The mistress did not argue. She sighed and said, "I've told our children not to play with her. And I no longer let her care for the baby."

"Away with them, both mother and daughter," the innkeeper roared. "They're dirtying our good name."

The mistress hesitated. "Wait until he gets over his malaria. Then we'll tell them to go." Again she sighed, "Without a single copper, how can they manage? Give them some money, however little."

The innkeeper laughed spitefully and sneered, "Why should it be difficult for such people to manage? The girl has ways to earn a living."

After that, the mistress took care of the baby herself. One day Ah-hsiu put on a straw hat and slung a crate on her back. An axe in her hand, she made for the door. "Ah-hsiu, what are you going to do?" Mama Hsu called after her.

"I'll cut wood to sell, ma. We can't just wait for death."

"How can you cut wood in all this rain and water?"

"There are burnt down tree trunks everywhere in the cultivated hills. Nobody wants them. I have only to cut them down," Ah-hsiu said confidently, looking pleased at the prospect. Rolling up the legs of her blue trousers she trudged out to the muddy wet road in the rain. Every day she brought back two loads of firewood which she sold to the neighbours. Sometimes the mistress bought her firewood in secret and paid her as much as the others. The gloom on Mama Hsu's face lifted somewhat.

One evening at about midnight I was wakened by the master. We had a bamboo pipe leading from the mountain gully to the horse shed. He wanted me to go into the hills to find out why there was no water coming through. The horses had no water to drink. Perhaps the pipe was clogged with fallen leaves. I jumped up and lit a lantern.

In the next room, Mama Hsu heard us and woke Ah-hsiu, telling her to go with me.

"It's dark and raining. She mustn't go," I protested. I put on a conical straw hat, took the lantern and was just going to pick up a spade when Ah-hsiu snatched it and walked out ahead of me. Raindrops drummed on our hats and danced in the beam of light from the lantern. Entering the mountain, we came to an overgrown path. Dripping leaves and branches brushed against us, wetting our clothes. Walking in front with the lantern, I turned repeatedly to urge Ah-hsiu, "You had better go back. You'll get sick in wet clothes."

"You are as worrisome as an old woman," she answered, irritated. She took my lantern and strode on ahead

of me. By the time we came to the gully a *li* away we were drenched to the skin. Nothing was clogging the bamboo pipe. Yet no water ran into it. Looking further up I discovered that the little stone dyke had been breached by the rising water and the water level had dropped so that it could no longer reach the pipe. I wanted Ah-hsiu's spade to repair the dyke. But instead of handing it over she jumped into the water.

"Look out for the leeches," I warned her. I had been here many times and knew that as soon as your feet stirred the water, the leeches attached themselves to your legs.

"What about leeches! I wouldn't be scared even if I stepped on a water snake." She looked at me with disdain.

Putting down the lantern, I joined her. I piled big stones on the dyke with my hands reminding Ah-hsiu repeatedly to pull the leeches from her legs. But she was shovelling stones, and paid me no heed. With the dyke repaired, the water level rose quickly. A small outlet had to be made or the force of the dammed water might breach the dyke again. I started making the outlet. Though there was nothing for Ah-hsiu to do now, she stayed in the water watching me.

I called out, "Why don't you come out, silly? Aren't the leeches killing you?" Only then did she climb the bank and pulled off the leeches. Blood dripped from several places.

"I never imagined that there could be so many of them," she said frowning, as I climbed up after her.

"You just won't listen," I reproached her.

She sighed. "You are the only one who hasn't changed," she said. She took the lantern and headed for home.

Following close behind her, I asked, "Who says I haven't? I admit now that you're very capable and stronger than a young man."

"I don't mean that," she said.

The rain was letting up. The only sound was the leaves brushing against us as we splashed through the muddy water. "Tell me: What did you really mean?" I urged again.

She turned around. Fixing her eyes on me she asked softly: "Haven't you heard the rumours about me?"

My head lowered under her gaze. "Naturally."

"Do you believe them?"

"Who would believe those bastards!"

She turned and walked on. When we were out of the hills she inquired again, "What if everything they said was true?"

Silent for some time, I said at last, "What of it? It was against your will. Besides you have run away."

"They don't look at it that way," she sighed. "I don't care. Let them talk." She sounded indignant. Then she said mildly, "Our clothes are wet. Let's go back and change, or we really will fall ill."

The next day when I was not doing anything, Mama Hsu proposed that we go and dig precious stones together. I wanted time to think it over. That night, a woman came and talked secretly to our mistress. Afterwards the mistress went to Mama Hsu and with tears in her eyes, said: "What an unfortunate lot you have!" She told her that the mountain chieftain had taken a fancy to Ah-hsiu and was going to send men down to kidnap her. His wife was jealous and had sent the woman to tell Ah-hsiu to run away. "This comes of her cutting wood in the mountain. You mustn't stay. You'd better leave tonight."

"How far away is the precious stone mine? Mama Hsu has been wanting to go there," I said.

"That won't do. They will go after you there just the same." The mistress waved her hand in disapproval. Then she said in a low voice, "You had better go back to your home town. They won't be able to harm you once you have crossed the mountain."

"We'll leave tonight," Ah-hsiu said determinedly. She packed her things.

Afraid that they might lose their way, I took them across the mountain through a short-cut. It was pitch dark and raining but we could not use a lantern or an electric torch. Groping along, we were silent as we quickened our steps. It was impossible to hear each other in the pouring rain and rumbling thunder anyway. We went as fast as we could. No one was in the mood to talk. My thoughts were in a turmoil. I wished I were like a knight in the novels, with a sword sharp enough to slash through iron, and the ability to fly up to roofs and jump over walls. Then I would be able to protect them in any kind of trouble. But I was a nobody. I could only escort them across the mountain, hoping that the mountain chieftain would not catch up with us. At dawn we crossed the mountain and were finally out of his clutches. Only then did I breathe more easily.

Mama Hsu leaned back against a tree. Putting down her bundle, Ah-hsiu said happily, "We have escaped another disaster."

"Where will you go now?" I was very concerned about them.

"I have a younger sister, Ah-hsiang, who was sold as a bondsmaid when she was small. We are going over there to find her." She pointed at the distant mountains.

The rain was letting up but the distant mountains, still shrouded in black clouds, appeared aloof and monstrous. I looked at Mama Hsu and wondered: Can they make it?

With tears in her eyes Mama Hsu sighed, "But who knows whether Ah-hsiang is still there? The road is long and we haven't seen her for years."

"We will find her," said Ah-hsiu confidently. She seemed to be courage itself.

Head lowered, Mama Hsu said softly, "I am afraid something might happen on the way. I'm really. . . ." She could not continue for weeping.

Her daughter tried to comfort her. "What is there to fear now that I'm disguised as a boy? Tell people I'm your son if they should ask."

Ah-hsiu's plaits were wound on top of her head under a blue kerchief. She was dressed in a blue shirt and black trousers. Her feet were bare, like a young man's. But her fine, beautiful brows, limpid black eyes and pink sunburnt cheeks were telltale signs of a girl. I thought to myself, "You won't fool anybody."

Mama Hsu shivered and sneezed. "Let's go on," she said straightening up with a sigh. "If only I had a son like you."

"Be a son to her and come with us. What do you say?" Ah-hsiu proposed.

"Don't be silly," Mama Hsu said. "He has a job here and he hasn't received his wages yet. How can he come along?" Turning to me, she said in a motherly tone: "Your clothes are all wet, my child. Go back quickly and change." It was the first time she had spoken to me in such a manner.

I wanted to see them further across the mountain but they wouldn't allow it. Ah-hsiu snatched her bundle from me. "Come to see us some time. My sister lives in a place called Wild Bull Village in the Big Mountain."

The rain started again. I turned back only after they had disappeared into the distance.

I slept poorly that night. Past events appeared before my eyes like scenes on the screen. The very name Wild Bull Village excited me. The chairman could be Ah-hsiu herself. Wasn't I staying in a Wild Bull Village in the Big Mountain that very night? What a coincidence! It was turning out like a fairy tale. But I had to ask some more questions to prove my guesses correct.

At breakfast the following morning I could no longer refrain from asking the chairman, "Have you ever been to the scrub-land?"

"No." Her answer puzzled me and put an end to my questions. "Have you?" she asked in return.

"Yes, I have lived there for some time," I said.

"I have heard about the place."

"It was years ago." I looked at her.

"Naturally," she said calmly, without any sign of remembrance.

I recalled that Ah-hsiu was an optimistic person who faced reality and for ever looked forward. She did not like to remember and talk about the past. Perhaps that was why she gave me a negative reply. If she had never really been there, why did she confess that she knew the scrub-land? I had to get to the bottom of this. Curiosity and uneasiness pressed heavily on me. I was unable to shake them off. But how was I to proceed?

After breakfast the chairman took me to the river to see the Leap Forward Dyke they had built in 1958. Her daughter, on her way to a patient in a village by the river, went with us, a medicine kit slung over her shoulder. The path meandered through a grove of trees. Sometimes we could see the dark blue river flowing quietly and flocks of wild geese taking flight. Sometimes they were hidden by the dense foliage of the green forest. The day was fine. The leaves sparkled in the sunshine reflecting pin-points of light. It grew warmer as we went along. Early kapok blooming against a background of green made an enchanting scene. I again recalled a night many years ago when a mother and a daughter and I were running away from danger in the rain, and how sad it had been. Today, another mother and daughter were walking leisurely along with me, blissfully admiring the scenery. I wanted to ask outright. "Were you called Ah-hsiu as a girl, chairman?"

Just then the chairman cried out, "Look, that is our Leap Forward Dyke."

From the slope we could see the fields below through the trees. At the end of the fields a dyke again obstructed

the river from our view. Bright autumn sun shone on the harvested fields dotted with round haystacks. Herds of oxen, some brown, some black, grazed in the fields. Here and there were green plants. Meandering little streams glittered like cellophane ribbons. I could hardly take my eyes from the scene.

Standing close by, the chairman pointed at the fields and said excitedly, "In the past this was a desolate river flat. During floods it became a sea. And when the water subsided, it was nothing but sand and pebbles. Wild grass grew rank here and birds, hares and wild geese made their nests in it. In 1958, when the whole country was leaping forward, our Wild Bull Village didn't want to lag behind. We were growing cotton, corn and other grain on the slope, but what we reaped wasn't enough to feed us. Every year the state had to supply us with grain.

"We held a meeting to discuss the matter. Someone suggested: 'Why not reclaim the river flats and grow rice there?' But others objected, 'What if the water rises?' 'We'll build a dyke,' the people said. That was a good idea and I talked it over with the district and county Party committees. They sent men down to look over the land."

The chairman turned to Chang Hua and asked: "Wasn't that when you came with Secretary Tuan from the county Party committee, Comrade Chang?"

"Yes. Secretary Tuan took one look and gave his approval," Chang Hua answered, taking his eyes from the fields below with difficulty. He seemed as much moved by the beauty of the scene as I.

"Let's get along, mother!" The chairman's daughter was growing impatient.

"You are always in a hurry," her mother scolded.

"I have to get to the other side of the river," the daughter said.

"Go on ahead, then," the chairman said with a laugh.

Nevertheless, she quickened her steps to follow her daughter as she continued with the story. "Hydrological experts drew up a plan for us. The dyke could be built in one year, they said. I went up that mountain over there to mobilize the Chingpo people in several villages, asking them to join in the project, explaining that they could plant fields too once the dyke was built. We worked hard and the whole project was finished in less than a year!"

Pointing to fields in the distance, she told us: "Those are cultivated by the Chingpo people living on that hill."

Without realizing it, we were in the fields already. Looking in the direction she was indicating I could see only a tall mountain overgrown with green trees and shrouded by a light blue haze; the houses of the Chingpo people were not visible at all. When I turned to look at Wild Bull Village where I had spent the night it was also hidden by the trees.

"We named it the 38th parallel in 1959 when the water rose," the daughter told me.

"It was really a terrifying big flood," the chairman said.

"Mother was knocked out several times in the fight against the flood waters," the daughter added.

"When there was a breach in the dyke the water rushed in like thousands of mounted soldiers. Unless you went right in and took the lead to stop the water, ten thousand *mou* of rice shoots would be finished just like that."

I nodded. "You always did have a lot of drive when you were a young girl," I applauded her in my heart.

"We worked like mad," the chairman related happily. "Everybody shouted, 'We'll stop the water the way the Volunteers stopped the American imperialists at the 38th parallel in Korea.' And since we succeeded, the name

stuck. Whenever it rains the people say, 'Let's have a look at the 38th parallel.' For if we can't defend the 38th parallel we will have laboured in our fields in vain!"

Chang Hua interrupted laughingly, "They sold a million catties of grain to the state last year, and turned a grain deficient district into one with a surplus. These women generals of the mountain are really something."

When we reached the dyke the daughter left us and ran to the ferry. Chang Hua who wanted to hunt wild geese went further down the river. I looked at the river where green water flowed slowly. Bamboo covered the small isles in the river. On shallow mud flats wild geese sunned their feathers serenely. A few, honking loudly, flew up and circled towards the valley on the other side of the river.

I was left alone with the chairman who stood placidly looking towards the ferry.

"May I ask you, chairman, is your family name Hsu?" The question burst from my lips at last.

"Why, yes." She looked at me in some surprise.

Was I happy! My guess was right. "Were you called Ah-hsiu as a girl?"

Blushing, she answered, "Ah-hsiu was my sister. I was called Ah-hsiang. Did you know my sister?" She was overcome by surprise.

Instead of answering her, I asked impatiently, "Where is she now?"

Her face clouded over as she replied sadly, "She died years ago."

I felt terrible. It was as if someone had dealt me a blow from behind. Only after some time could I ask, "How did she die?"

"It's a long story." The chairman heaved a deep sigh. "She married about twenty years ago. But her husband went bad. He became an opium addict and gambler, and squandered everything they had. One day, after a quarrel

my sister became so angry that she drove him out. He went to a despotic landlord and got a few bad men together to come and seize her. My sister fled to the mountains and then to the river hoping to swim across. But a bullet hit her and she was swept away by the river."

I was stunned. "Which river?" I asked after a long time.

"This one, a little further up." She pointed towards the upper reaches, brushing away a tear.

In the bright sunlight the blue water flowed slowly. Clear and sparkling, it had been a picture of tranquillity and delight. But in an instant it changed into a fierce python, swallowing up a flower-like girl in one gulp. "There must be some place where we can live in peace." What Ah-hsiu had said came to my mind again. But she had not been allowed to live in peace after all. Then I inquired about Mama Hsu. The chairman lowered her head and said, "She died of illness soon after she came back. It was lucky that she died early. If she saw how tragically my sister lost her life her heart would have been torn to bits."

"Did your sister leave any children?" I asked softly. I hoped she had left a child in this world.

The chairman looked towards the lower reaches. I followed her gaze. The ferry had reached the other bank. Chao Shu-ying, carrying her medicine kit, was going ashore. Pointing at her, the chairman whispered: "She is Ah-hsiu's daughter. My sister died when she was only five months old. I brought her up."

Greatly surprised, I stared at the girl. She was walking nimbly up a slope; from the back she looked exactly like her mother. It seemed as if Ah-hsiu lived again in our new society. A new world unrolled beneath her feet. Step by step as she mounted the slope, the sun cascaded golden rays on her. For her the mountain flowers blos-

somed and the birds sang charmingly. I gazed after her until she disappeared into a grove of green trees. Brushing away a tear, I followed the chairman down the dyke. "Fortunately the world is ours now," I thought to myself.

The Flood

KAO YING

A man in a dark green raincoat was standing on a jagged rock, overhanging the river, shouting to the owner of a boat anchored on the opposite bank. The rain, driven by a violent wind from the mountain, poured down on him in a steady stream, running off the edges of his green raincoat.

He shouted, "Hey! Hey, over there! I want to cross the river. . . ."

His words were whipped away by the wind, and the only reply was the muffled rolling of thunder in the distance. It was dusk and the Sha River was muddy and dangerously swollen.

He shouted again, but no one appeared on the opposite bank. Obviously, it wasn't a ferry crossing.

Readjusting the pack on his back, he started off with long strides to head up-stream to locate the ferry. As he walked he constantly turned his head to look at the fields on the opposite shore. Through the curtain of rain, he perceived a broad, flat valley. Red clay hills could be seen in the distance and behind them towered the hazy outline of the mountains. The heavy down-pour which had already lasted many days had caused a flood which cascaded down the mountain into the Sha. The river had overflowed its banks, and submerged nearly half of the dyked rice-fields. The newly planted

rice seedlings were scattered by the swirling floodwaters. And silt covered some of the fields raising them above the level of the partition ridges. A small village cowered beside the flood-swollen river. The only sign of life was the wind blown smoke rising from the kitchen fires. The traveller gazed, frowned at the rain and quickened his pace. The lone man was Chen Hai-min, vice-secretary of the Chengkuan District Party Committee, a man in his late thirties of average height, with a broad face enhanced by a pair of thick, black eyebrows. He was one of several veteran cadres, just dispatched by the county Party committee to help those communes facing flood disaster.

He had shouldered his pack early that morning and braving the rain was hurrying to the Shaho People's Commune. Before setting out he had promised the county Party committee that he would do all he could, working with the cadres in the commune, to organize the people, fight the flood and save the 1961 rice crop. He was well aware of the many calamities that had befallen this particular commune: Not a drop of rain had fallen since spring and half the crop had been burnt up. In June the drought was followed by heavy rains which continued for about fifteen days. It now seemed as if the sky had a perpetual leakage, and on the face of things it appeared hopeless to try and save the rice crop in this low valley. But Chen had said: "So long as the people will work with me I have nothing to fear."

All day, he had plodded ahead through rain and mud unmindful of his weariness. He was hurrying on and wishing that he could save the commune with one big effort. He was worried because he could not locate the ferry, and sweat mingled with the rain rolling down his face. As he pressed forward, new doubts assailed his mind: what about the morale of the people in the Shaho People's Commune; had they given up all hope; what were they thinking; how did they feel. These things

were important for the crop depended upon the masses and their morale.

As night came on, the clouds seemed to drop lower. He could hear the raindrops beating on the hood of his coat and the dismal howling of the wind. At the turning of the rocky pathway he saw a small hut under a tree. Its thatched roof was black with age, it had no windows, but the door was half open and he caught glimpses of a fire inside. Looking around cautiously, he noticed an empty boat moored to the bank and rocking on the waves. He hurried to the hut.

Three people were seated around a fire burning brightly in the centre of the dirt floor. Two of them were quietly smoking while the third was drying his coat. The only things in the room were a small bed and some long bamboo poles and oars which were leaning against the wall.

"Is this the ferryman's hut?" he asked politely.

A lean old fellow, wearing a white turban, his wiry goatee out-thrust as he craned his neck, answered: "What, another night owl! Come on in and sit down. The river is too high to cross yet!"

"But Grandpa, I've urgent business waiting for me!"

"We know that, or you wouldn't be out tramping around in the rain like this, would you?"

The bare-armed young fellow who was seated near the fire drying his clothes began to plead with the old man in a booming voice. "Come on Grandpa Kuo, take us across now. You're the one who is afraid of the wind and water?"

Laughing, the old man patted the young fellow on his broad shoulders and answered: "I'm only thinking what a pity it'd be to lose a fine hunk of meat like you!"

The middle-aged peasant, seated opposite them, looked up and asked: "Why hurry, Shih Man-tse? Surely you aren't so reckless as to want to cross the river while it is in spate, are you?"

The young fellow did not answer. Flinging his jacket across his deeply tanned glistening shoulders, he rested his chin on his strong arms, and knitting his heavy brows stared moodily into the fire.

Chen Hai-min took off his raincoat, rolled up his trouser legs and sat close to the fire to dry his feet. He began to size up the three beside him, and reached the conclusion that Grandpa Kuo was the boatman and the others were travellers like himself. Just as he was about to say something to them and break the silence, Grandpa Kuo asked:

"Are you on your way to our Shaho People's Commune? On official business, eh?"

"That's right."

"You look as if you used to be a peasant," observed the old man winking.

"Do you know me?" asked Chen Hai-min, a little surprised.

"Not exactly," answered the old man shaking his head. Then, smiling as he stroked his goatee said: "It's your legs that give you away!"

"You're a pretty keen observer!" admitted Chen Hai-min, good humouredly accepting the comment.

Grandpa Kuo knocked his pipe very deliberately on a stone and remarked:

"I was punting boats before you were born and I've met all kinds of people. I find that every man has something special about him and one glance is usually enough to tell me what kind of a person he is. Take legs for example, a peasant's legs are strong and full of knotted veins but the legs of a townsman are usually thin and flabby. A hard working, honest man goes about fearlessly but a lazy man creeps around like a snail!"

Chen Hai-min burst into hearty laughter, and a dry chuckle forced its way through the lips of the middle-aged peasant.

The old man puffed at his pipe, looked in the direction of the young man who was still staring into the fire and said: "Just take Shih Man-tse for instance, I knew right away that he was worried about the crop; his knitted brows betrayed that." Then looking deliberately at the middle-aged peasant Yang Lao-liu he said: "Now Yang Lao-liu! His easy-going way told me that his pocket is full of cold cash."

Yang Lao-liu, his face flushing, protested: "Grandpa, why are you picking on me today?"

"Because it's you I'm after." The old man admitted, uncompromisingly. "While everybody else was trying to cope with the flood and save the paddy fields, you, and only you, went out to peddle firewood."

"The firewood isn't your property, is it?"

"No, it's not mine but the fields belong to us all, you, me and everybody else!"

Irritated, Shih Man-tse raised his head and said: "All right, now stop your fussing! The wind and rain seem to have slackened enough for us to cross. . . . Our team is waiting for me to get things organized so that we can fight the flood."

It was true that the rain had slackened a bit, but the wind was still howling furiously.

Grandpa Kuo fed the fire and said: "Humph, we'd better wait until it blows itself out before we make a move."

All except Chen Hai-min, who was secretly sizing up the others, were gazing into the fire. He, like other Party cadres finding themselves in a new environment, wanted to learn all he could about his new acquaintances. He hoped to find out something about the Shaho Commune from the three seated beside him. Shih Man-tse, low-spirited and scowling, was the first to attract his attention.

He asked him: "Are you a cadre from the production brigade?"

Shih Man-tse didn't answer. The old man replied instead, "He's the leader of the third team in the Yinping Brigade." Chen Hai-min nodded. Then he asked Shih, "How are the rice seedlings doing in your team?"

"Rice seedlings!" exclaimed Shih gruffly. "There are none left! They've all been washed away. . . ." Knitting his brows, he spread out his big hands and added: "There won't be much of a harvest this year! We can forget all about the wheat harvest. Let's talk about the crop that's facing us. When we really needed rain not a drop fell, the maize was as dry as kindling and the sweet potatoes withered away. We waited and longed for rain. Who could have imagined. . . . Curse it! Fate has really been too hard on us!" He clenched his fists and an angry gleam came into his eyes.

"Can't any of the crop be saved?" asked Chen Hai-min.

The effect of his question was like pouring water over a fire. It silenced Shih, who sighed once more, then propped his chin on his hands.

"What's the use of worrying? Times are hard, but come what may, we have government aid to rely on . . ." began Yang Lao-liu.

"Pah!" interrupted Grandpa Kuo, who spat before continuing, "am I seeing ghosts again. Shame on you! How can a commune member talk like that? How can we ever build up our country if everyone relies on the government for grain?"

Yang Lao-liu scowled angrily and replied: "You only use your mouth to talk rubbish. Do you want us to think that you're the God with a thousand arms and can save the crop?"

Vexed, Grandpa Kuo rose to his feet and brandishing his pipe in the air he said: "Yang Lao-liu, stop talking nonsense! I'm no God but the masses are! The fields may be flooded with water and the rice seedlings floating about, but we don't have to stand about and just let them rot, do we? Of course everything will be lost if

the rest of us act like you and only think of a way to make a fast dollar. It's fortunate for the commune, there are only a few people like you!"

"All right, all right, it's no use arguing with you, you're too smart," answered Yang Lao-liu angrily as he turned away.

"Hee, hee," chuckled Grandpa Kuo. "You can't win because you're in the wrong!"

"Brother Yang," interrupted Shih Man-tse. "You have the wrong slant on things. . . ."

A smile of triumph hovered over Grandpa Kuo's face as he turned to Shih saying: "It was only yesterday, Man-tse, that I told you the rice seedlings could be saved! There isn't a road under the sky that can't be walked along and not a stone in this world that can't be moved. Make up your mind and stop talking about planting maize one minute and setting out sweet potato slips the next. The first and most important thing to do is to save the rice seedlings!"

Chen Hai-min listened attentively. It was almost, he felt, as though he had looked through a number of reports on this commune and found a clue to the solution of its problems. His eyes reflected the glow of the firelight as he nodded in agreement. Grandpa Kuo glanced at him then continued more heatedly:

"You're not the only one I've told. In fact, I've said the same thing to everybody who has crossed the river here and what is more they have all agreed with me. As a team leader you should think of a way out. Now is the time for you to concentrate whatever forces you have. Organize your man-power and put all your draught animals to work on the water wheels. The first thing to do is to drain off the water, repair any breaches in the dyke and build up the dividing ridges. Then straighten up the seedlings that have been dislodged by the rain; replough the fields that are silted over and plant late rice on them. . . ."

Still staring into the fire Shih mumbled:

"Useless. . . . We won't get anything out of it. . . ."

"It's like trying to dip out water with a sieve. . . ." interrupted Yang Lao-liu.

Ignoring Yang Lao-liu, Chen Hai-min asked Shih:

"Is it really as bad as you say?"

"It certainly is!"

"How much of the crop do you reckon we can save?" he asked.

"At best, only a third."

"All right, then you must save that third," replied Chen Hai-min. He sat on his heels and said: "Suppose we take another look. Since the rectification movement in the communes in the spring, the policy of the Party has been carried out all the way down and the people are more of one mind than ever before. Suppose everyone works energetically and farm more intensively, and apply twice as much fertilizer, how much more do you think you could produce?"

"Twenty per cent more at least," interrupted Grandpa Kuo, his chin up and his goatee out-thrust.

"I don't understand how you arrive at that figure," said Shih Man-tse, smiling faintly.

Chen Hai-min looked straight at him as he said:

"Well, suppose we count in everything, we'll be assured more than half the usual harvest." Then seeing that Shih Man-tse seemed almost convinced he added enthusiastically, "Comrade, you have to learn to see things in their right perspective. Take note of the loss, but also take the enthusiasm of the masses into account; size up the difficulties but when calculating the results offset them by the conditions in your favour. You must look ahead. . . ."

"Right!" agreed Grandpa Kuo. "Any man who has ever sailed a boat knows that when navigating you have to look ahead, particularly when you're crossing rapids. If you turn your eyes away, even for one second, you'll

be heading for disaster. . . ." Thrusting his lean face closer to Shih Man-tse he teased: "Your eyes are in the back of your head!" Then, with a quick glance at Yang Lao-liu he jeered: "There's another type whose eyes are in his behind and all he can see is filth!"

Blushing, Yang Lao-liu asked angrily: "Old Kuo, do I owe you any money, what's the matter with you?"

Grandpa Kuo only clenched his pipe between his teeth and chuckled.

Annoyed, Shih Man-tse waved his hand and said: "Stop talking nonsense and let's get back to the subject!"

Chen Hai-min poked up the fire.

"How much non-irrigated land have you?" He inquired coolly.

"A hundred and eighty *mou* or so."

"That's good!" exclaimed Chen Hai-min with a slapping on his knee. "You can make up for your loss in the paddy by making better use of the dry land. There's still time to plant corn, and even more sweet potatoes, with vegetables to fill in the spare land. Then you can beat the flood, eh?"

"That's just what I think!" agreed Grandpa Kuo, delighted. Shih's frown faded in a questioning manner but he still looked low spirited.

"Nature has really treated us badly," he began. "We're behind with everything! We'll have to save the rice seedlings, drain the water, plant the corn and the land that wasn't flooded, damn it, will have to be weeded." Feeling even more frustrated he continued: "There's too much to do all at once. . . ."

Chen Hai-min laughed and said: "Things can be tackled one by one, can't they?"

"What do you suggest we do first?" asked Shih Man-tse.

"How many people have you got?" Chen Hai-min asked.

"Ninety-odd, counting both major and auxiliary manpower."

"That's plenty!" shouted Chen Hai-min, and clapping his hands in his excitement. "First you must round up all the strongest ones and spend three days rescuing the rice seedlings, at the same time a few people should be set to work re-planting them where they have been washed away. While that is going on let the others weed the dry land. When the planting is finished, the group should hurry up and sow late corn and plant sweet potato on the dry land. Last of all, mobilize the commune members to get melons and vegetables planted on every vacant space around their homes, and along the roadside. . . ."

As his words echoed through the room Shih Man-tse's eyes glowed and Grandpa Kuo repeatedly nodded his head. Yang Lao-liu seemed fascinated, even his melancholy face seemed to gain liveliness.

"You sound like an expert who knows what he is talking about!" remarked Grandpa Kuo.

"Well, it's only a suggestion. We must find out what the people think about it," replied Chen Hai-min.

"I'm one of them and I agree!" snapped Grandpa Kuo. He leaned towards Chen Hai-min as he admitted: "I work on the boat but my heart has always been in the fields. Tomorrow I'm going to ask if I can do some field work."

Chen Hai-min answered confidently: "Right! We need everyone out to fight the flood." Turning to Yang Lao-liu he added: "You should keep your mind on the collective work too."

"Of course, of course," replied Yang Lao-liu hurriedly.

The wind had gradually subsided and the rain had stopped unnoticed.

Shih Man-tse was still frowning, and after a brief silence he said:

"The morale of our commune members is high. . . . It's just that our area is hit too hard and we have not enough oxen for the ploughs. I came over here today to

try and borrow a few but the people here are all using theirs."

"But we've plenty of them!" announced Chen Hai-min cheerfully.

"Where?" asked Shih Man-tse with a gleam of hope in his eyes. "If we can only borrow them I'll pay double!"

"Several of the communes in the Second District are not hit by the floods at all and they've already agreed to send some oxen to help the Shaho Commune. They'll be here tomorrow!"

Shih Man-tse jumped to his feet and asked: "Is that true?"

"You can take my word for it! When one commune is in trouble others will never stand on one side and refuse to help!" He looked around the small hut, laughed and said: "And here's some more good news. The county Party committee has decided to send some more chemical fertilizer to help the flood-stricken areas."

Shih Man-tse grinned, showing a set of strong, white teeth. Then shaking his fist he shouted: "Hurray! Although nature acts against us it can never crush us!"

Grandpa Kuo stroked his whiskers saying: "Of course, it's as I've always said, so long as we have the Party and the people's communes, a disaster need never worry us overmuch." Knocking the dottle out of his pipe he went on: "A tiller of the land has to be strong enough to face all difficulties. As for me, I don't believe in going about frowning and sighing. You can't get anything done by looking miserable! You're a team leader. Never mind how terrible things are, you must clench your teeth and bear it, and always look happy when talking with commune members. When they see that you're not worried they'll feel better, too. . . ."

Shih Man-tse threw his jacket around his shoulders saying: "All right, all right. I've heard you say the same thing many a time before. But, please, let's stop talking now and go!"

Grandpa Kuo frowned as he commanded: "You just wait until I finish, young man!" Staring at Chen Hai-min he went on: "The hardships we're having now aren't half as bad as they were back in the old society. That year when . . . ai . . . I was still so young. . . ."

As he was speaking, a young girl entered the hut. Her clothes were dripping water and as she snatched off her bamboo rain hat, a pair of eyes sparkling beneath a crown of glossy black hair was revealed.

"I wonder who. . . . Oh, it's you, Fen Wa!" exclaimed Grandpa Kuo, hurriedly making room for her by the fire. "Come and get dry by the fire. You mustn't catch cold."

Shih Man-tse inquired: "Why are you out so late. Collecting the facts again?"

Yang Lao-liu shook his head and said: "Fancy girl like you being out on such a night as this. You're not a bit afraid either!"

Wringing out her coat as she squatted by the fire she answered, "What is there to be afraid of? Are there tigers around here to eat me?"

Chen Hai-min looked at this saucy girl with a quick tongue and assumed that she was probably a clerk to the district Party committee.

Fen Wa had not noticed him, and bursting with news she said: "I have a message for your Shaho Commune. And it's good news, too!"

"Good news?" questioned Shih Man-tse and Grandpa Kuo with one voice.

Rattling away like a string of exploding firecrackers Fen Wa announced: "The weather station has just announced that the rain will stop tomorrow. And the district Party committee has notified us all to get organized and hurry to save the rice seedlings!"

"This sounds more like it!" exclaimed Shih Man-tse.

Grandpa Kuo winked as he remarked: "I've known all along that it would soon blow over."

"All right, Old Kuo, don't start boasting again. You're always wise after the event! We all know that!" jeered Yang Lao-liu.

"Damn it, Yang Lao-liu, why are you picking on me so much today?" Grandpa Kuo grumbled, disgusted.

"Stop arguing," laughed Fen Wa. "I've some more good news for you."

"All right, tell us then," said Grandpa Kuo. "Some day I'm going to give you a little present, maybe some pears. Eh?"

At this point Fen Wa who had taken a quick look at Chen Hai-min, turned and asked: "Grandpa, did a stranger cross the river today?"

"Many people crossed the river. How do you expect me to know which one you mean?"

"I don't know who he is either," replied Fen Wa seriously. "But I heard some comrades from the district committee saying that the county Party committee had sent a comrade to the Shaho Commune to take over as Party secretary."

As Chen Hai-min listened a smile played around the corners of his mouth.

Shih Man-tse lifted his eyebrows and said: "This is even better. Another leader for the commune! Good! Has he come yet?"

Grandpa Kuo clenched his pipe between his teeth, cocked his head birdlike, and remarked: "It looks to me as if the new secretary is sitting right here under our noses!"

Everyone turned to look at Chen Hai-min, who felt a bit embarrassed.

"Are you . . . ?" asked Fen Wa with questioning eyes.

"I'm rather late in getting here," murmured Chen Hai-min.

"Oh, you're not late at all," exclaimed Shih Man-tse, and taking hold of Chen Hai-min's hand he added: "You're right in the nick of time!"

"You're the smartest imp in the Sha River district. How did you guess who he was?" whispered Yang Lao-liu to Grandpa Kuo.

Grandpa Kuo was elated and winking knowingly he said: "Every man has a special air about him that I can spot at a glance." He looked at Chen Hai-min and went on. "Take the Party secretary here, there's something about him that's different from us. . . ."

But Chen Hai-min insisted, "We're all the same. I'm no different from any of you."

"Generally speaking, Party secretaries have a special Party air about them as if they can conquer all the evil spirits in the world."

"That's true!" admitted Yang Lao-liu nodding in approval.

"Well, I'm too silly to be able to distinguish," Fen Wa remarked.

"I'm not boasting," continued Grandpa Kuo. "You tell me has there ever been any cadre who has crossed this river without my help? So it's I who carry the Party policies over this water. He, he. . . ."

Stamping his feet impatiently Shih Man-tse shouted: "Grandpa Kuo, you'll have to stop talking for a while, at least long enough to take us across. Come on!"

Roaring with laughter they put on their clothes and shoes and prepared to leave.

Darkness and a slippery road awaited them outside. Grandpa Kuo picked up his small lantern and led the way. The glow from the swinging lantern and the shadows that it cast on the ground wavered to and fro, as they groped their way down the stone steps and walked towards the river. Grandpa Kuo held the boat steady and one after another they jumped in.

The waves were still rolling. . . .

Shih Man-tse took up an oar, spread his legs and dipped the oar in the water.

"The water's still rising!" he shouted.

"Don't worry. The boat will rise with it."

Grandpa Kuo, the last to jump aboard, took a bamboo pole and pushed the boat away from the bank.

As the waves dashed against the sides of it the boat rocked violently, but defying the strong current it moved swiftly towards the opposite bank. Chen Hai-min sat silent in the boat listening to the sound of the waves, the wind, the oars and the heavy panting of old Grandpa Kuo. Unblinkingly he stared at the night scene on the opposite shore, feeling as if his eyes were flickering on and off in unison with the twinkling lights in the sparsely lit village on the opposite bank.

Suddenly he felt that his blood was coursing more strongly through his veins, and his personal worry of a moment ago was now dispersed by a new flow of feeling as he realized that the morale of the people here will never collapse in the face of calamities. Some may become discouraged, but with a little support they too will stand up and fight with the rest! In the little ferry hut he had felt the pulse of the Shaho Commune. It wasn't weak, it was vigorous and strong. . . .

He recalled the words he had said to the county Party secretary the previous day: "So long as the people will work with me, I have nothing to fear."

The surface of the river was churned into a mass of tossing waves.

Fen Wa moved closer to Chen Hai-min and shouted above the roar of the water: "Secretary, listen, on the opposite shore the people are singing. . . ."

"Uh. . . ."

He could not distinguish it clearly, but above the faint sound of folk music wafted on the night air, he was conscious of the sound of the waves, the river and the happiness flowing from the depths of his own heart. . . .

Barley Kernel Gruel

LI CHUN

All was quiet at noonday in the sultry fields.

Not a breath of wind stirred the drooping leaves by the roadside. Clouds like fish-scales drifted lazily across the sky. The early June sun beat down like fire on to the wheat, making the tips glow the ruddy gold of ripe apricots. The barley had been reaped, leaving nothing but silver stubble along the ridges.

Because of the heat and the fact that it was noon, not a soul was to be seen in the fields. The very trees and crops drowsed, as from the ears of wheat in the terraced fields wafted penetrating gusts of fragrance.

This was hilly country and a dirt track wound like a brown ribbon across the undulating landscape. Along this steep road two men were pushing a cart loaded with four telegraph poles of stout, straight red pine. The wheels of the cart were creaking.

The younger of the two men, Lei Wan-sheng, was a sturdy fellow in his early twenties. Sweat had gathered on the bushy eyebrows above his large black eyes and, full red lips parted, he was panting for breath. Ho Sui-lin, his mate and senior by several years, looked the younger of the two. Short and light on his feet, he had small, rather boyish features, giving him the appearance of an overgrown child.

It was clear that both had come unprepared for this heat, for they wore long pants and thick shirts. Lei was sweating so much that the printed red characters "Chengchow Electric Machine Works" on his shirt were sticking to his chest.

The telegraph poles were from Chengchow and had to be delivered to the White Goose Ridge Production Brigade. A month previously their foreman, Old Lu, had joined a work team sent to help the villages and had been assigned to this production brigade to help install an electrically operated pump station. The brigade had prepared all the necessary wire, machinery and other equipment, but proved to be short of four telegraph poles, which were not procurable on the spot, the region producing nothing but deciduous trees. The local cadres collected carrying poles used for sedan-chairs and old cross-beams, but none was the specified height or thickness. In the end, Old Lu wrote to his management asking them to help by sending some of the works' own stock of poles. Lei and Ho had been chosen to deliver them.

This county was not far from Chengchow, only two stops away by train, and when they alighted at the station and learned that White Goose Ridge was just eighteen *li* away, Lei rolled up his sleeves and started off with the cart.

"Let's have a snack first," said Ho. "It's after eight."

But there was quite a crowd round the canteen and Lei, observing this, answered airily, "Come on! It's only eighteen *li*. We'll eat when we find Old Lu."

So the two of them set off with the telegraph poles. To start with, they exchanged light-hearted comments on the probable yield of the wheat on both sides of the road, and the strength and stamina of donkeys. Young Lei also enlivened their progress by imitating the calls of different birds.

They covered a dozen *li* without stopping to rest, but after crossing several ridges and climbing not a few steep

hills, they suddenly found the road cut. A passer-by informed them that the commune was building a highway to White Goose Ridge and they would have to go round by Walnut Gully. When farmers give directions, instead of confining themselves to a simple "Turn left" or "Turn right" like city folk, they launch into detailed instructions like a mathematics teacher holding forth to his class. On the basis of what they were told Ho made a rapid mental calculation and found that this detour would let them in for another eighteen *li*. They were reassured, however, by the information that after reaching Persimmon Valley in the east they could follow the telegraph poles to White Goose Ridge.

As they trundled the cart back the way they had come, young Lei's comments on the wheat and donkeys dried up. So did his bird calls. He plodded glumly along, too disgusted to take out his handkerchief, using his sleeves to mop his sweating face.

Ho knew just how he felt, and in an attempt to keep his spirits up hummed snatches of Honan opera — slightly off-key. Young Lei could sing Shaohsing opera but he was silent, except for the rumbling of his empty stomach.

After toiling up a few more ridges and down some more valleys, Ho lapsed into silence too. By now all the peasants had left the fields and the sun was beating down more fiercely than ever. The swish of the cart wheels through the dust, punctuated by laboured breathing, was the only sound on the highway.

In the distance two large, leafy walnut trees came into sight, and just beyond them tall telegraph poles stretched away into the distance. That put new life into both men and with joyful shouts Lei pushed the cart up the slope, beads of sweat pouring off him and dripping into his eyes. But great was their disappointment at the top. There was nothing but walnut trees, not a single village

or wayside stall in that empty, rolling country. They could see White Goose Ridge, true enough, but one look at the line of telegraph poles made it clear that it was at least ten *li* away and very difficult going into the bargain.

Lei let go of the cart, squatted in the shade of the trees, and refused to move.

"What's up?" asked Ho. "That's White Goose Ridge ahead."

"I can't make it," Lei declared. "I've come over dizzy." Secretly amused, Ho joined him in the shade.

"Confound these blistering hills!" swore Lei. "Not a snack bar or a village to be seen, not even a river."

"We ought to have bought a few buns at the station," said Ho.

Lei ignored this remark and, his eyes on the walnut tree, asked, "When do walnuts ripen?"

"Not till autumn," Ho informed him. "It's no use looking so hopeful — there's nothing but leaves."

Still Lei stared up at the trees. "I wish they were loquats," he sighed. "Where I come from this is just the time for loquats."

They rested a while in a dispirited silence, their eyes fixed on the cottages on the distant hill beyond which lay White Goose Ridge. In the shimmering sunlight the village, surrounded by trees, seemed like an oasis of clear green and turquoise blue, while the brooks and irrigation canals below interlaced like sparkling silver girdles. The cackling of hens carried faintly to their ears. Plumes of smoke curled up from the cluster of grey-tiled roofs and hovered in the air.

This kitchen smoke caused Lei fresh pangs of hunger. And a bird, alighting at that moment on a bough above them, warbled a greeting which sounded for all the world like "Cuppa tea! Cuppa tea!" To young Lei, this was adding insult to injury. "Shut up, you!" he shouted. "We

haven't even water to drink." This made them both roar with laughter.

Lei had barely stretched out in the shade, his hat over his face, when he caught the appetizing smell of food. Sitting up with a start, he saw a girl approaching by a path through the fields. The wheat was waist-high but they could see she was wearing a new straw hat and blue check blouse. A few strands of glossy black hair lay over her temples, her cheeks were ruddy from exposure to the sun, and beads of perspiration had gathered at the tips of her finely arched eyebrows. The freckles on the bridge of her nose seemed vermilion in the sun. It was such a sweltering day that her eyes seemed to be brimming over. In her left hand she carried a blue porcelain pitcher covered with a pea-green bowl, in her right hand a bamboo basket. Beneath the white towel on the basket was a big pile of onion cakes.

The heat drove this girl, too, into the shade of the trees, but on the side away from the men. Sitting down with her back to them, she fanned herself with her straw hat, her bright, artless eyes watching the golden wheat.

The breeze set up by her fanning wafted the smell of food still more tantalizingly into the men's faces. They identified the spicy savour of onion cakes and lettuce with green pepper and gelatin. In addition there was the aroma of some kind of gruel unlike anything that young Lei had experienced before, reminiscent of the scent of young growing wheat heightened by cooking.

These appetizing odours made the men more conscious than ever of their hunger. With a glance at Lei, Ho suggested, "Suppose we move on?" He saw no point in staying there to be tormented.

Lei knew what he meant, for his own mouth was watering. "All right," he said. Then he turned to ask the girl, "How far is it, Elder Sister, to White Goose Ridge?"

The girl's finely chiselled lips curved in a smile at such a form of address from a bronzed, burly man. Shyly pointing to the hill ahead, she said, "Eight *li*. That red building beyond the stream is the brigade's new power station." Her voice was crisp as the ringing tone of a bell.

"Your *li* in the mountains seems longer than on the plains," remarked young Lei.

"Yes, it's uphill and down dale all the way, so that eight *li* really amounts to well over ten." Only now did she turn to face them.

Their spirits rose at her air of concern. Young Lei seized the chance to say, "Oh, well, let's go. I could eat three big bowls of rice now, if only I had them!"

"What about pancakes?" asked Ho, deliberately.

"Pancakes? I could polish off ten."

They watched the girl as they spoke, but she seemed not to have heard, judging by the lack of expression on her face. She was twiddling a wheat stalk and staring into the distance.

With a glance at his friend, Lei said rather sheepishly, "All right, get moving. No use talking about food here. I'd be thankful even for a sip of water."

"If you ignore the advice of your elders and betters, you're bound to run into trouble," declared Ho sententiously. "If you'd listened to me, you'd have eaten two big buns at the station and drunk some lentil gruel. Then you'd have more energy now."

Lei slapped his chest. "Well, missing a couple of meals isn't going to kill us. The Red Army crossed snowy mountains and fearful marshes—who's afraid of these little hills?" He tightened his belt, while the girl nibbled at her wheat stalk and smiled without saying a word.

"If we want to help the farmers, we mustn't mind hardships," continued Lei. "Didn't Old Lu say in his letter that once they have these poles eight hundred *mou*

of dry land can be irrigated? Come on — let's put on a spurt."

"That's all right with me." Ho grinned. "I'm not the one who's so hungry."

This last exchange had evidently set the girl thinking. She sprang to her feet and shyly yet firmly said, "If you're hungry, comrades, I've food here."

The two men hesitated and exchanged embarrassed glances.

"Go on!" she urged. "You've a steep climb ahead. And you're hauling a heavy load."

Her genuine sympathy overcame their scruples.

"Well, since Elder Sister's so kind and pressing, let's have a snack, young Lei," suggested Ho. "No need to stand on ceremony."

"Right you are," agreed Lei, who was blushing like a boy.

The food was passed over. Onion cakes, a cold salad, and paper-thin pancakes made of fine white flour. The two men did not bother with vegetables: the pancakes disappeared down their throats like a flurry of snowflakes.

While Lei was still eating, Ho and the girl started chatting.

"Is your wheat crop good this year?"

"The best for a very long time. We're planning to sell more grain to the state this year."

"Then the state will be able to produce more machines for you."

"That's right. Nowadays the workers in town are doing all they can for us in the country. Yesterday they brought back electric bulbs for our village — much bigger than the bulbs in electric torches. They'll soon be fixed up."

"Had you never seen electric light?"

"I've seen it at the film shows." She smiled naively. "Why, that big light throws the moon into the shade!"

Young Lei, still munching pancakes, casually rapped his chopsticks against the pitcher and said, "There are some as big as this."

The sound served as a reminder. The girl exclaimed. "Why, here am I chatting and forgetting to give you a drink." She made haste to fill a bowl for each of them.

Young Lei saw that it was a gruel made from golden beans and some grain much larger than rice but considerably smaller than lotus seeds, which floated like pearls in the bowl. He tasted a mouthful — it had a fresh, sweet flavour and slipped smoothly over his tongue and down his gullet.

He drank three bowls to two of Ho's, and was going to help himself to a fourth when the girl flushed red as a maple leaf and protested in some confusion, "Comrade, leave a bit for someone working in our fields."

It cost her such an effort to say this that the thumping of her heart could almost be heard. Lei felt abashed and Ho interposed, "That's quite enough. We've had plenty."

"Have some more pancakes," urged the girl.

The men assured her they had eaten their fill and hastened to get out some money.

"We don't take money, comrades, up here in the hills. You're welcome to a meal."

"That won't do. . . ." It was the men's first visit to the country and they continued to press payment on her, but were at a loss for words.

"No, really, comrades. This is nothing. I'm not a snack vendor!" She spoke gently and smiled, but they saw she was adamant. With sheepish thanks they set off with their cart.

After they had gone a fair way, young Lei remarked, "They're queer people hereabouts. She refused to accept any money, but she wouldn't give me another bowl of that gruel. Made me feel a regular fool."

"Must be someone waiting for her in the fields," said Ho.

"Well, I call it rather mean," rejoined young Lei. "If you offer a fellow food, you should let him fill his belly."

"Haven't you filled your belly?" retorted his friend. "You ate at least ten pancakes."

"Maybe. But I wanted a few more bowls of that gruel."

They delivered the four poles to White Goose Ridge by the end of the noon siesta, and then looked for Old Lu. The local cadres were loud in their thanks and soon the news had spread through out the village. Old Lu found the two young men a place to rest. "Take it easy now," he said. "When you fix up the poles tomorrow, mind you don't take up good land or spoil the crops. At meal times just eat what the peasants give you and don't say you fancy this or that, for if you do, the folk here will go out of their way to make it, and that's no good. When we come to the country, we must eat and live like the peasants." He looked so hard at Lei after this admonition that the young man stuck his tongue out in dismay. He had meant to ask what that gruel had been made of, but now he did not dare. Old Lu's word was law.

The next day dawned overcast and unusually fresh, with a light wind from the east. They set to work to fix up the electric cables. Lei climbed up a pole beside a big tree at the entrance to the village, and was so busy installing the porcelain insulators that when Ho walked past with a village cadre Lei did not trouble to call out a greeting, and Ho did not notice him.

Just then he heard a strangely familiar woman's voice saying:

"That man who just walked past is one of those who ate our lunch yesterday. There was a fat fellow with him who really tucked in, munching so lustily that it was all I could do not to laugh."

Young Lei recognized that voice, clear as a bell, and took care not to make a sound.

A man replied, "You were mean not to let him eat his fill."

"How was I to know they were coming to fix up the electric cables for our village?"

"What difference did it make where they were going? You should have fed them properly. They've come from their factory to help the villages."

"There'd have been nothing left for you in that case. You'd done a hard morning's work, so I took the trouble to make some barley kernel gruel for you. I'd have felt bad if you couldn't even taste it."

"Trust you to have an answer for everything. . . ." The man broke off. The girl began to chuckle.

Lei, hugging the telegraph pole, dared not look down but he was conscious of two pairs of eyes which seemed to be boring into his back.

When the time came for lunch, the chief of the production brigade sent Ho and Lei off with a young commune member who had been a poor peasant before land reform. He was a handsome fellow in his mid-twenties, with big, friendly eyes.

They followed him to his house in a small, clean courtyard. The gateway was newly built, and posted on the door was a wedding couplet:

*With men and women equal, work goes well,
Free marriages are happy marriages.*

The red paper had faded, but the writing still stood out clearly and could hardly have dated from earlier than January. A pomegranate tree in front of the gate was a mass of flame-red blooms. On the low coping round the tree stood two pots of garden balsam, which country girls use to redden their finger-nails.

The young peasant led the way into the house, made Ho and Lei sit down at a well-scrubbed table and then went into the kitchen. He returned with a staggering pile of onion cakes, then brought in some big bowls of rice and two side dishes of scrambled eggs and lettuce with gelatin.

When he next left the room, Ho rounded on Lei. "You are the limit! You must have told him what you fancied."

"I never did!" protested Lei, his cheeks burning. "Not after what Old Lu told us. . . ."

Just then their host came back with a large pot of gruel — the same kind of gruel as that they had eaten the previous day. Neither young worker made any comment, but each was puzzled.

The three of them started their meal. The young peasant set a heaped bowl of rice before Lei, saying, "I know what you like."

"Anything goes for me," Lei made haste to assure him.

Ho shot him an accusing glance but Lei, very injured, refused to meet his eyes.

They started chatting. And their host, helping them to gruel, remarked, "This is barley kernel gruel. It's made from the green kernels of newly reaped barley. We have a saying in these parts that mid-June is the time for three treats: fresh garlic, young lettuce and new barley. These kernels come from newly ripened barley and in the old days we wouldn't have dreamed of eating them. We got a good crop this year, from our private plot, so we'd like to treat you as you're here."

As the meal proceeded, both Ho and Lei had the feeling that the young peasant was no stranger.

They talked about the power plant and foreman Lu.

"Foreman Lu has eaten here too," their host informed them. "He's a fine man. Our villagers say that just by looking at the way Old Lu planned the power line, using as little arable land and materials as possible, they can see the fine qualities of our brother workers."

He broke off to urge young Lei to have more gruel. But the latter had already drunk three large bowls in addition to the rice and side dishes, and was incapable of eating any more.

"I've had all I can manage, comrade," he protested. "Couldn't eat another thing. I'm not being polite."

A girl's laughter sounded from behind the bamboo curtain. "Who's not being polite?" she cried. "Don't let's have that talk! Yesterday you said you could eat three bowls of rice and four bowls of gruel, but today you're not keeping your word."

Ho and Lei recognized the clear, bell-like voice they had heard earlier on the road. Flushing and grinning, they called back: "Today's different from yesterday!"

The Photograph *—In Praise of Teachers*

LIU HOU-MING

27th July, 1955.

My assignment completed, I returned to the editorial office for further orders. "Go and photograph the latest arrival at the zoo, a small chimpanzee," said Section Leader Huang. The job, he assured me, was quite urgent as the picture was needed for the next edition of the newspaper.

Leaving in a hurry, I was on the bus before I discovered that there was only one negative left in my camera. I consoled myself, never mind, if I focus carefully, one shot will do.

How was I to know that the unexpected would happen, and that for the first time in two years I would fail in my assignment?

It is summer vacation and today the youngsters had practically taken over the zoo. They were like a huge flock of magpies, creating noise and confusion as they ran here and there. The uproar seemed to make the dry, hot day drier and hotter.

Almost as soon as I put my foot inside the gate, a boy attached himself to me. He was about eleven years old, very dirty and wearing a red vest, blue shorts, the end of his belt flapping loose. His closely cropped hair stand-

ing up stiffly around his head reminded me of a huge dandelion. Like a moth round a lamp, he circled round me, never taking his eyes off my flashlamp.

I knew I must be on my guard, for there were several youngsters like him living in our block of flats and they were always up to some tricks. They would either kick their football through your windows and startle you, or like an army rushing in pursuit of the enemy, would chase the neighbour Huang's hens all around the compound. During their holidays, they would make such an uproar on the upper floor that the ceiling of my room seemed to shake, and I felt aggravated and uneasy.

The boy in the red vest finally got close enough to touch the shining cover of my flashlamp.

"What are you up to?" I asked rather gruffly.

"Uncle, please open it and let me see the light?" he asked not the least bit shy.

"No, certainly not," I replied coldly.

Not appearing to notice my intended rebuff, he continued to run beside me. There was a broad grin on his face as he again addressed me, "Uncle, what kind of a lamp is it? Is it very bright?"

I walked along, ignoring him completely.

I had no children of my own and although I was fond of youngsters they tired me. When I had the time to spare, I enjoyed amusing them, but I knew that they must be treated with reserve, otherwise they could cause a lot of trouble.

Locating the little chimpanzee's cage, I succeeded, after some effort, in squeezing myself into the front row of the spectators. Ha, how lucky I was! The little monkey was eating. It looked almost like a child as it sat on a stool, drinking milk from an enamel cup, which it held with both hands. Some milk had dribbled from the corner of its mouth, and hung like a string of pearls on to its hairy little chest. What a wonderful photograph it would make!

However, I hadn't taken it yet. It was too soon to be cocksure about it.

I manoeuvred to get a good angle, focused the camera, waited until the image was sharp, lifted the flashlamp, and holding my breath, pressed the lever. What followed happened more quickly than I can recount it. The very instant the shutter clicked and the lamp flashed, the image of the little chimpanzee was blotted out by a human face!

"Who's that?" I shouted out angrily. As I raised my head, I saw the boy in the red vest standing on the cement steps outside the cage. He was jumping with joy and greatly excited, as he clapped his hands and yelled: "It was dazzling! My eyes are all blurred! What fun!"

Trembling with anger, I tried to seize him, but he darted away like a flying-fish and disappeared in the crowd in the twinkling of an eye. The onlookers laughed heartily at my expense. . . .

Suppressing my anger and nursing my injured feelings, I hurried back to the office.

"Why are you dashing around and sweating like that?" asked Huang as he caught sight of me. "The house isn't on fire!"

"I didn't get a good picture," I replied indignantly, "I've come back for another roll of films."

"Oh!" exclaimed Huang in surprise, "that means you'll be too late for this edition. The news office has no helicopter, and you can't fly. . . . What's wrong with the picture? Develop the negative and let's have a look!"

Huang's words made me think that perhaps by a chance in a thousand, I had managed to photograph the little chimpanzee. However, I was doomed to disappointment! The proof showed only that shock-headed boy in the red vest, his mouth and eyes open wide in excitement as though he were caught in the midst of declaring: "How dazzling! What fun!"

Huang examining the picture under the light, asked, "What's this? It doesn't look like a small chimpanzee to me."

I wanted to pour out all my disappointment and annoyance, but only managed to say a few words before I choked. I could have wept with vexation. This was my first failure in two years.

"Well, forget it," suggested Huang trying to comfort me. "I've a picture of a seaside swimming pool. I'll use that as a substitute."

I replied, "I'll go again early tomorrow morning and take a picture of the chimpanzee."

"Leave it till later," said Huang. "Your assignment for tomorrow is to take pictures of Yu Chin-lien. The Culture and Education Section want them by the day after tomorrow."

The name of Yu Chin-lien was familiar to me. I knew her as a people's deputy to the people's congress of the city and also as an excellent primary school teacher, and was determined to take a good picture of her.

I couldn't eat much at supper-time but now, when I had got over my feeling of frustration, I feel very hungry. . . .

28th July, 1955.

Yu Chin-lien's home was in a street quite near the news office, and when I walked into the clean, quiet courtyard this morning, teacher Yu Chin-lien who was in her late fifties was on her porch writing. She wrote skilfully with a brush. A smile hovered on her face, which was both serene and gentle, and a light breeze was gently ruffling her grey hair.

I skirted quietly around a few pots of oleanders, pomegranates and dahlias arranged square-wise in the centre of the courtyard, and took a picture of her in profile. When she turned her head and saw me, I had already taken a second shot.

"You're really quick to seize an opportunity," she said greeting me like an old friend. Then inviting me to sit down she handed me a cup of tea and a palm-leaf fan, which she had ready to hand. I'd often heard people say that teachers are considerate. Now I know it's quite true.

"What are you working at so industriously?" I asked.

"Correcting and commenting on some compositions — it's the children's summer vacation work."

I opened one of the exercise books and scanned through an essay entitled "A Happy Day!" Lines of characters, written in pen and ink, were neatly corrected by the teacher. Her writing was fine and painstaking — every character beautifully written.

Noting the pile of books on the corner of the table, I could not help feeling some sympathy for the old teacher, for I saw that the correction of such a number of "A Happy Day" would cause her many "hardworking days". Our editor complained of a headache after only one day's work consisting of reading a dozen articles!

Thinking that I was interested in the essays, Yu Chin-lien commented enthusiastically, "Look, how well this sentence is written! 'Butterflies flit among the flowers as though playing hide and seek'; here is another one, 'The days passed like a song'. When I was young we could not write so vividly. We were only taught to write things like 'time flies like an arrow, days and months fly like a shuttle', or 'living in the world one must attach first importance to clothing, food, house and conveyance'. They are worn-out phrases typical of the decay and decline of the times in which we lived. You will probably say that these little essays are simple and childish but see how fresh and lively they are. The simple, childish sentiments expressed by the children today are what I could never have experienced during the last fifty years in the old society, . . ."

Yu Chin-lien opened the books praising them one after another. As she did so, her eyes expressed her heartfelt pleasure and smiles of satisfaction rippled across her face.

I began to feel that the characters written by her pupils were not only the result of her work, but also the fountain of her joy and strength.

"How many years have you been a teacher in primary school?" I asked.

"Thirty-six years," she replied, "but the more I teach, the more I realize how little I know. For instance, I know nothing at all about this flashlamp of yours. Please show it to me."

I thought this strange. Only the previous day my flashlamp had attracted the attention of that boy in the red vest, and today this teacher wanted to see it. My profession must arouse curiosity.

Of course I prided myself. To be a news photographer is far more suitable to a young man than being a primary school teacher; to defy difficulties, overcome obstacles, be here today and there tomorrow; how vigorous and exciting our life is. Except of course when we have bad luck, as I did yesterday with that boy in the red vest!

With enthusiasm, I explained my useful companion, the flashlamp, to Yu Chin-lien.

"Your description is too brief," she remarked. "Can you take it apart and give me an object lesson as I do in my classes?"

As I complied with her request I inquired, "Are you an amateur photographer, too?"

The teacher smiled and shook her head in a manner that clearly indicated: "Go on! I'm interested anyway."

I developed the pictures of Yu Chin-lien in the evening and sent them to the Culture and Education Section. They were very satisfied.

4th August, 1955.

My work for the anniversary of Army Day finished, so early this morning, I went to the zoo to take the picture of the little chimpanzee.

There had been a downpour of rain during the night, and the trees and plants looked fresh and beautiful. Many different kinds of birds flew from tree to tree, their songs blending into one harmonious chorus.

Walking slowly along the deserted, shaded path, I saw a pair of black shoes at the foot of a tall poplar. Thinking they had been lost by some child I was about to pick them up, when a voice shouted from above:

"Don't take them, they're mine!"

Rain-drops left on the tree after last night's shower fell on me, and looking up I espied something red moving among the dense green leaves. A moment later, a pair of shoeless feet began to descend, and like a monkey a boy slid down the smooth, sturdy tree trunk, descending so quickly that I had fears for his safety.

I quickly recovered when I recognized the youngster.

"Oh, so it's you!" I exclaimed impulsively, thinking to myself, "It's always easy to meet the people you would like to avoid."

"Uncle, you're here again!" he declared sounding as pleased as if he were meeting a long absent friend.

Wiping the rain-drops from my face, I inquired coldly, "What were you doing up the tree?"

"Uncle," he said, pointing to the top of the tree, "there's a nest up there with some small birds in it. I think they are little cushats. I'll find out from my teacher if I'm right. My teacher knows everything. They're like balls of fluff, so funny! The day before yesterday I saw the two big birds, carrying food to the nest. They made one trip after another. I thought there must be small birds inside, and when it rained in the night, I was worried and afraid they would get wet. So I just

went up to have a look — the young birds are still there right enough, as dry as snuff. . . ."

Bent on reproving him, I asked, "Don't you know that tree climbing is forbidden in parks? It's very dangerous too."

He appeared not to hear what I said. Fixing his gaze on my flashlamp, with an air of triumph he declared: "I know all about it without you telling me. It's called a magnesium-light lamp. You use a kind of powder called . . . called magnesium powder — yes, magnesium powder! When it comes into contact with electricity, it just. . . ."

"That's enough, that's enough!" I interrupted, my annoyance increasing because of his happy mood. "D'you remember what happened when we first met? And what you did then?"

His only reply was a ripple of laughter.

"Here, look," I said, taking his photograph from my pocket, "I took your picture instead of that of the chimpanzee."

"Oh! It's good! Please give it to me!" he begged, taking the picture and smiling so that his eyes narrowed like a pair of crescent moons. The picture had found its way into the pocket in his pants before he had finished talking.

It was obvious that he didn't feel at all sorry. This irritated me and was like oil on the fire of my anger. Looking at him severely I fired questions at him:

"How old are you?"

"Eleven and half."

"Do you belong to the Young Pioneers?"

"Yes."

The boy's face turned pale, and he blinked as though wondering: Have I offended him? Why is he so angry?

Hm! Now I'll make you see why! I thought.

"What you did that day was not what a Young Pioneer should do! I wasn't taking the little chimpanzee's

picture for fun." I continued, my tone was hard and severe. "That's my work. I'm a news photographer."

I told him how his practical joke had upset our editorial plan, and emphasized that thousands and thousands of readers had not been able to see the picture because of his behaviour.

His face was expressionless as he listened.

"You are not careful enough of the honour of the red scarf!" Then thinking to teach the little nuisance a lesson, I concluded, "I wonder what you'll do if I tell your teacher and schoolmates about it!"

He stood mute, and as motionless as though turned into a block of wood. Suddenly, picking up his shoes, quick as a flash of lightning he turned round and ran. As he went, I could hear his naked feet making a flip-flap sound on the asphalted road. He disappeared in the distance.

I thought I had done the right thing — and had made him feel ashamed. Yu Chin-lien, I reflected, probably taught her students the same way. But, the flip-flap of his bare feet kept ringing in my ears, and an unaccountable feeling of unhappiness seemed to descend on me.

5th August, 1955.

After the newspaper had published Yu Chin-lien's picture and the account of her fine record as a teacher, the Editorial Department received many letters from readers. Of these, one came from a coastal frontier guard, one from the members of the Great Northern Wilderness Reclamation Team, but the majority were from teachers in primary schools and students in teachers' colleges in many different parts of the country. They all praised Yu Chin-lien's work and expressed their desire to learn from her.

In the evening, as I was passing Yu's home, I decided to call in, and tell her about the letters. Yu Chin-lien's youngest daughter, a student at the teachers' college,

was sitting outside reading by the courtyard light. Seeing me, she looked in the direction of the house and whispered, "Mother isn't feeling very happy tonight. A boy came yesterday afternoon, pushed his red scarf into Mama's lap and, choking with sobs, said: 'Teacher Yu, I'm not worthy to be a Young Pioneer. I'm not worthy!' When Mama asked him what was the matter, he burst into tears, turned around and ran away."

"Mama has just returned from a visit to the boy's home. He wasn't in, and the other members of his family couldn't explain his action. I expect the boy had been up to some mischief, and his self-respect was hurt."

Oh, so no great tragedy had happened after all. . . . I felt much easier.

When I entered Yu Chin-lien's house I hastened to be the first to speak, and to choose a pleasant topic, "Teacher Yu, since your picture and an article about you appeared in the newspaper, readers have sent in many favourable comments. Everyday we continue to receive letters, some from teachers, some from fathers and mothers, all of them saying that they want to learn your fine method of educating children."

Sad to relate, my talk produced a result quite contrary to my expectations. Forcing a smile and heaving a sigh, the old teacher neatly folded a red scarf into a square, her unhappiness obvious as she said, "I'm far from being what the people expect."

In an effort to cheer her up, I urged, "Please don't say that, a naughty child has done a little mischief, that's all! If this child has really done something very wrong it is all right for you to reprove him."

"No, a teacher has no right to say that," replied Yu Chin-lien as she smoothed the red scarf on her knee, as though caressing the hair of a child. "This particular boy is brave, has great self-respect and a great curiosity. At the same time, he can be naughty and often makes mischief. In dealing with a child like this, great care

must be taken or you will be throwing out the precious wheat seedlings when you should be uprooting the weeds. An oversight can mean that a valuable young plant is mistaken for a weed."

"Yes, you're right," I answered in a voice that faltered a little, her words having stirred up an uneasy feeling inside me.

After saying good-bye to the old teacher, I walked slowly along the street. A gentle soothing breeze was blowing but I felt hot and uneasy, as confused thoughts surged through my mind.

I meditated, all mothers love their children and teachers are the mothers of all children. In comparison with Yu Chin-lien, I hadn't shown up too well. The only thing I'd given that boy in the red vest was an exhibition of my own anger. I wondered, had I hurt his feelings; had I unintentionally rooted out a valuable young plant, while trying to get rid of the weeds?

Perhaps I ought to go to the zoo and look for him and then have a quiet chat with him; youngsters can do wrong to an adult but an adult must not do wrong to a child, without trying to put things right.

6th August, 1955.

I strolled in the zoo the greater part of the morning today, but without results. There were several children in red vests, but unfortunately he was not one of them. I stood under that familiar big poplar for practically half an hour, and although I listened to the cry of the young birds, my ears seemed full of the sound of flip-flapping of bare feet.

The more I thought about it the more I was convinced that the boy in the red vest only jumped before my camera to see how the flashlamp worked, and that he had no intention of upsetting my plans for picture-taking. He was prompted by the same curiosity that he climbed the big poplar tree. He did it only to see if the small

cushats were wet, and without any thought of hurting them.

Ah! Perhaps I had done him an injustice.

17th December, 1955.

A heavy snow fell all last night. This morning, the entire staff of the photographic department was out taking pictures of people carrying on their work in spite of the wind, cold and snow. They included workers such as street sweepers, traffic police, pedlars and artists painting snow scenes. A number of pictures were scheduled to appear in the next issue of the Sunday Pictorial, under the caption "In bleak wind and snow, hearts are warm!"

I went to a crossroad to take a picture of a young traffic policeman. Against a silver background and protected by a short, black fur overcoat, he stood, quietly directing the coming and going of vehicles. Snow caught up by the wind whipped his face, he stood determined and dauntless.

Having found a good angle for the shot, I stood on the sidewalk ready to take the picture. However, there was a hitch. It was rush-hour, and school-children and pedestrians passed before the camera with the rapidity of shuttles in a weaving shed. I posed the camera several times, but was compelled to abandon all hope of getting a good picture because of the number of people flitting past.

It could not be helped! No one wanted to stop in the street when the temperature was 20 degrees below zero. Besides, in this whirling snow, people were hurrying on and did not notice that a news photographer was trying to take a picture of the policeman.

I began to shiver with cold, and my hands and feet were becoming numb. To add to my problems, if things continued like this, I risked causing damage to the camera by long exposure to the cold.

I posed my camera once more, and then noticed many people rushing to catch a bus which was approaching the nearby bus-stop. Heaving a sigh, I was about to lower the camera again when I heard someone shout in a clear, sharp voice:

"Stop, everybody! Photographs are being taken!"

The confused shuffling of foot-steps stopped suddenly.

A quick glance around I saw a boy, wearing a blue woollen jacket, a red scarf and a fur cap, with the flaps about his ears. He stood, arms outstretched, obstructing a small group of pedestrians, all taller than himself by a head. He was shouting to those coming up behind:

"Comrades, please observe that all traffic is stopped for just half a minute!"

His politeness and good humour made everybody laugh.

The voice and appearance of this boy seemed familiar to me and he looked as though he recognized me too.

There was no time to waste on such thoughts, swiftly I took the picture.

Like a sudden gust of wind, the people swept on and into the bus. The boy waited until everybody else was aboard, then grasping the handle, with one agile jump he was inside the bus, and the door closed.

I searched my memory trying to remember where I had seen that face before and wondering who he was. Then suddenly a small head with black hair bristling, like a fluffy dandelion, appeared from the window of the bus, and a hand waved a fur cap with ear flaps dangling.

Above the noise of the traffic, I heard the words:

"See you again, Uncle News Photographer!"

"You!" I exclaimed, suddenly realizing that he was the boy in the red vest, whom I had twice met in the zoo last summer. However, my exclamation was lost as the traffic rolled on. I watched the bus until it be-

came a tiny red spot, disappearing in the snow-covered distance.

A gleam of winter sunlight shot through a break in the clouds, flooding the whole world with a golden light. I walked back to the news office full of happiness, the camera on my shoulder seemed a trifle heavier; inside it was the heart of a Young Pioneer!

21th January, 1956.

I am due to leave Peking tomorrow for Canton where I am to become a resident correspondent. This afternoon after purchasing my train ticket, I returned to the news office where I learned that a meeting was being convened by the Culture and Education Section in one of our meeting rooms. As Yu Chin-lien had been invited, I thought I would take this opportunity to say good-bye to her.

Twenty minutes before the meeting was due to commence, Yu Chin-lien was already in the room and engaged in earnest conversation with a young teacher. The old teacher, wearing a dark blue padded coat, was in high spirits and looking very well.

"Teacher Yu," I said as I went up to shake hands with her, "I'm leaving for Canton tomorrow to take up the post as a resident correspondent."

"Oh!" she said as she pulled me down to sit beside her, "you mustn't forget to let us have an account of the experiences of the teachers in Canton."

"Certainly, with pleasure," I agreed, adding, "I take a great interest in the education of children."

This is true. Ever since that morning of wind and snow, I had longed, like one longing for the sight of an old friend, to see that boy in the red vest again. Strange as it may seem, I had begun to take a real liking to children, particularly naughty boys. I could see in them the spirit of the boy in the red vest. I found myself really believing that they would grow up well, despite

their naughtiness when young. I loved to tell them stories and settle their quarrels and disputes. Gradually, they began to like me, too, and would listen to what I had to say. Once Huang remarked jokingly: "You've become the king of the kids in our apartment!" His wife added: "When International Working Women's Day comes, we'll invite you to our party! . . ."

Impressed by my sincerity, Yu Chin-lien looked very pleased, and asked me how I had become so interested in the education of children. I answered by telling her about my two summer encounters with that boy in the zoo.

Yu Chin-lien listened attentively. However, when I mentioned that windy, snowy morning, how the same boy had helped me to take a picture of a traffic policeman, she showed surprise at first, as though she had just heard some important news. Later her genuine pleasure was obvious and I saw that her eyes were moist with unshed tears.

Yu Chin-lien held my hands tightly as if she wanted to say something. Just at this moment, several other teachers, who had come to participate in the meeting, entered the room and greeted her. Someone also came to ask her about her health. "Young fellow," she said cheerfully, "let us have a competition. I am just returning from old age to girlhood!" Everyone laughed.

I stood up as the meeting was about to begin. Yu Chin-lien stood up too.

Helping me to button the collar of my padded jacket, she said, "What you told me today is very good — very good indeed! Happy journey!"

The joyful feeling inspired in me by Yu Chin-lien remained, as I mused, teacher Yu, you and the children are bound together, by ties of love! You are anxious and unhappy when a child has a little fault, but you're filled with happiness when they make the slightest

progress. How wonderful it would be if that "boy in the red vest" were your student!

6th April, 1959.

(A couple of weeks after my return from Canton.)

This morning, I was assigned to the Tien An Men Square to cover the Peking Juvenile Aeronautical Model Competition and take pictures of the winners.

Flooded with brilliant sunshine, the Square, overflowing with the innocent laughter and singing of youngsters, presented a delightful picture of spring.

The competition opened, batches of planes of all sorts and sizes, assisted by the warm winds of spring, shot up and circled in the air. Numerous secondary school students, red scarfs flying like banners, looked on, cheering and dancing for joy. The Square quickly became one vast sea of excitement, the noise rising and falling in waves.

The loudspeaker continually announced the names of the winners, and I ran here and there taking pictures, and sharing the children's joy.

Another batch of small planes took off. One of them made an outstanding performance, flying more steadily and reaching a height far above that of the others. Under the sunlight the wings of this plane, white and transparent, looked like the wings of a dragon-fly. The other planes had returned to the ground before this one began descending in a long curve. Nose up, and seeming to quiver with pride, it skimmed now higher, now lower.

Absolute quiet reigned over the Square. On the rostrum, a timekeeper, eyes fixed on the stopwatch in his hands, suddenly announced through the loudspeaker in a jubilant voice:

"Comrades, the plane above our heads has now equalled the all-China record for the third grade rubber elastic model plane!"

Thunderous cheers exploded like firecrackers in the Square. Spectators broke through the cordon, and like water bursting from a dam, they rushed to the point where the plane finally landed.

The loudspeaker announced, "Comrades, the maker of this plane is Tien Chun-hsien — Tien Chun-hsien, second-year student at the 43rd Secondary School! . . ."

The rostrum was now surrounded by a thick wall of spectators, and I could not find an opening no matter how hard I tried. At last, I had no alternative but to appeal to them, one by one, to make room for me to pass through. In this way I moved forward step by step like the foot-soldier on a chessboard.

When I saw the winning student standing in the centre, I was so surprised that I could hardly believe my own eyes. He was my old acquaintance, the boy in the red vest! Although he was now taller than me and his hair was brushed and neatly parted, he was still alert and roguish looking and when he smiled his eyes crinkled into crescent moons!

My own eyes misted over. This national record maker for the third grade rubber elastic plane was the same dirty little chap who had wanted to know how my flashlamp worked. It hardly seemed possible that he was the same naughty boy who had climbed the big poplar to see if the tiny cushats were wet?

Onlookers scattered as the next item was announced, and as I walked over to him I shouted, "Tien Chun-hsien! You!"

"Uncle News Photographer!" Tien exclaimed shaking hands in the manner of an adult, and as I held his hand I thought: Child, how did you grow up to be such a fine youngster!

"Now, let me take a special picture of you!" I suggested light-heartedly.

Tien's face flushed red, as he said bashfully, "I still have that other picture!"

He took a little red leather backed note-book from his coat pocket and from it he pulled out a picture — the one I had taken four years ago at the zoo. There he was, wearing the red vest, his hair standing up like a dandelion and his eyes open wide in excitement. I thought I could once again hear his childish voice announcing: "It's dazzling! My eyes are all blurred! . . ."

On the back of the picture I noticed several lines of small, beautifully written characters. They read:

"You told me the origin of this picture, because you care for the honour of the red scarf. From now on, always think of others first, direct your courage into learning."

Your teacher,
Yu Chin-lien

Summer vacation, 1955

Now I was able to sing the last notes of a most beautiful song which had lingered in my mind for nearly four years.

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Cavalry Mount

HAI MO

New trooper Liu Po-lin was small and swarthy, and the horse he rode was a small black. Rider and horse both small and dark—everyone thought they were a perfect match. The platoon leader wasn't trying to be funny when he assigned the mount. It was only natural to give a small horse to a small rider. Who could have foreseen that this would give rise to a whole series of events?

It began when the men kidded Liu about his horse having one white hoof and three black. In the cavalry of Ma Pu-fang, the Kuomintang warlord who had ruled Chinghai Province for years, horses with such markings had been called "orphan hoof", they told Liu. Whoever rode one was sure to have bad luck.

But Liu didn't believe it. He grew increasingly fond of the animal, giving it a taste of anything good he got to eat in the troop mess. He always walked it before unsaddling it when they camped, and it wasn't unusual for Liu to get up and feed his Little Black, as he called it, two or three times during the night. When they climbed steep mountains or forded big streams, Liu got off and walked. If the horse became ill, he tended it day and night. On winter marches if no stables could be found, Liu covered the beast with his cotton-padded quilt.

At the same time, the horse developed a fierce loyalty to Liu. It had a nasty temper, and no one could so much as touch it. But when Liu approached, the black pawed the ground, whinnied, and nuzzled him affectionately.

Our real story begins on the battlefield. After all, we're talking about a cavalry mount.

Have you ever seen the great misty Lake Kokonor? At the end of a range of hills, it looks like one blue sea arched over another. For those who haven't seen it, this may sound fantastic, but when you stand on the shore, the lake seems to rise up in the middle, parallel with the dome of the sky. In summer, the storms here are as big as any on the high seas. The winds from the Pamir Plateau sweep down through the corridor formed by the Kunlun and Chilen Mountains. Fish leaping in the lake portend the coming storm. In winter when the mountains are blanketed with snow, the lake freezes, turning to a solid sheet of ice that extends right up through the Tsaidam salt marshes.

We learned from a Tibetan that some bandits who had escaped after liberation and who were still ravaging their fellow Tibetans were intending to take advantage of the lake being frozen to cross over and escape. Our cavalry cut through a mountain pass and reached the lake shore first. For three days and three nights we waited in ambush. In that icy snowy world, Liu curled up in his fur-lined greatcoat at night and covered Little Black with his quilt.

The bandits, probably thinking they had shaken us off, not only removed their white camouflage capes when they reached the lake front, but began to quarrel loudly over a division of loot. Moving swiftly, we surrounded them. Each bandit had an extra horse. They were all murderous fellows and very good marksmen. Defeating them wasn't easy. But after a bloody battle, most of the bandits were dead. Their chief, however, could not be

found, though we carefully searched the battlefield. Liu and his Little Black had also disappeared.

What had happened was that when the battle was at its height, the bandit chief, realizing that things were going badly, raced his horse through the snow-storm to the frozen lake. Liu, busy wielding his sabre, didn't see him, but Little Black instinctively pursued the fleeing animal. Little Black had been co-ordinating its movements beautifully with Liu's actions, responding to every swing of his sabre and every pressure of his legs. But then it suddenly bolted after the bandit chief, and all of Liu's hauling on the reins couldn't turn it.

Liu had little time to think. But when he saw the hoofprints on the ice and a black blur further ahead, he leaned forward in the saddle and urged his steed to greater speed. The small man and small horse flew across the white ice like a black arrow. After riding for three days and three nights, the bandit chief had lost both his regular horse and his reserve mount during the battle. The animal he was now riding he had snatched from one of his cohorts. Although he galloped wildly, his animal gradually tired, and Little Black began closing the gap.

From the uneven swaying of the ice, the bandit chief in the foxfur hat could sense that his was not the only horse running on the frozen lake. Hastily wiping the ice particles from his eyelashes and beard and leaning close to his horse's neck, he shielded his eyes with his sleeve, and peered back. When he saw that only one man was following, he slowed his animal's pace.

Liu was a new trooper. He had never been shot at from a horse in front. Besides, the bandit chief didn't touch the rifle slung across his back. Liu wanted to capture him alive, and the distance between them on the open ice was plainly narrowing. So he was unprepared for the sudden move that followed.

The bandit chief knew that the bolt of his rifle must be frozen fast in that frigid temperature. In any event he didn't want to reach for it, since his adversary would be able to see, and shoot first. He had relied for years on the pistol hidden inside his coat; it had saved him many times. He slipped his hand in, snapped off the safety catch, pulled out the gun still warm from the heat of his body, twisted and fired from beneath his left armpit.

Liu fell from his horse, the back of his head striking the ice and knocking him unconscious. He slid a dozen yards into a snow bank, streaking a bloody trail behind him. Little Black, sensing from lack of weight on its back that its master had fallen, tucked down its rump and dug into the ice with stiffened legs, skidding to a halt ten yards away.

Very pleased, the bandit turned his mount and trotted back. He was too sure of his marksmanship to give Liu another glance, but he could see that Little Black was very well trained, and he sidled up casually to the riderless horse, wanting to capture it. Little Black snuffed at its fallen master, then moved off a few paces and stood watching the approaching bandit alertly. With a deft gesture, the bandit snatched up the small horse's trailing rein. Little Black pulled in its neck, twisted violently, reared, and swung its front hoofs down at the bandit's head. The rascal leaned quickly to one side, so that the smashing hoofs struck only his horse's rump.

The bandit chief was furious. He whipped out his pistol and aimed it at Little Black. But the animal was so attractive, he changed his mind. Vowing to make the horse his own, he gave chase. Little Black whirled around so fast it nearly knocked the bandit out of his saddle, then trotted to where Liu was lying.

It nuzzled Liu, and its warm breath against his face gradually brought him to consciousness. He opened his frozen lids with an effort. His gun was by his hand, his

horse was standing beside him, but his face and body were adhered to the ice. He saw the bandit jump from his steed and advance towards Little Black. Liu hastily closed his eyes. In that instant the bandit grasped the small horse's mane and leaped on its back. With a whinny of rage, Little Black reared, but the bandit stuck like glue. At the same moment, Liu wrenched himself upright. He and the bandit chief glared at each other, with all the hatred of the coming battle burning in their eyes. The bandit's contempt for the young soldier he had brought down so easily changed to fear. Liu, his face bleeding, his eyes flashing fire, seemed miraculously transformed into a giant. For three seconds they stared at each other. Then, the bandit clawed for his gun, but Liu fired before he could pull it out.

Some might say that a hardened bandit with long list of bloody crimes to his name, even though he was fatally hit, would still try a final shot. That's no lie. But his aim was deflected. For just as he fired, Little Black leaped up and crushed him to the ice. He fell head first, like a stricken antelope, his neck twisted against his chest. Liu stamped the crumpled bandit flat, and when he was sure that he was dead, removed his knife and pistol. It was only then Liu realized how exhausted he was. At his command, Little Black knelt before him and he managed to pull himself into the saddle. The horse rose, and soon was moving rhythmically through the mist.

When Little Black reached the victorious cavalry troop, the comrades helped Liu down. He had lost a lot of blood. The small horse then collapsed. An examination revealed that its skull had been badly nicked when it reared up and deflected the bandit's final bullet, and it was worn out from its exertions in the battle.

In the days that followed, Liu continued to lavish on Little Black the best of care, but the animal never fully recovered its former strength. Later when the troop was

ordered to Tibet, Liu was compelled to leave the horse with a rear line unit.

Liu was glumly silent the entire first day of the march. But when the troop halted for its first rest, Little Black trotted up and stood beside him. The animal had broken free and followed him all the way. It aimed a vicious kick at the roan mare Liu was riding. With everyone's eyes upon him, Liu didn't know what to do. "No sense of discipline," he shouted at Little Black. "Go on back." But there were tears in his eyes.

The political instructor, who happened by, could see how Liu was feeling. He rode up and patted him on the shoulder.

"Never mind. Take the horse along. I'll put in a report about it."

And so Liu and his Little Black went to Tibet together.

Ahead lay Dangra Pass. Liu's wound had healed and he was quite fit again, but Little Black was in poor shape. Travelling at a height of nearly six thousand metres would be a strain on any horse, and for Little Black it was particularly hard. Its neck and rump always in a lather, it staggered up the steep inclines, stumbling frequently. Liu was very sorry he hadn't hardened his heart and asked the political instructor to leave the animal behind.

No one was riding now. The weaker men went up the mountains hanging on to their horses' tails. Ignoring his headache and difficulty in breathing, Liu helped Little Black mount the ever-rising slopes.

The local feudal lords had started a rebellion against the people, and our troop took part in its suppression. One day as the detachment was waiting for orders, enemy forces were observed on the mountain top beyond. Of course, this opportunity couldn't be lost. The assistant troop leader took a squad and circled round to the enemy's rear to cut off their escape. The troop leader headed the frontal assault.

As soon as the firing commenced Little Black, in spite of its weakened condition, pricked up its ears, arched its tail, and flew at the enemy like a true cavalry mount.

Unfortunately the squad that was supposed to cut off the retreat didn't get there in time. When the charge started, the enemy turned and fled. Although they weren't very far away, our horses couldn't catch them because they weren't as yet accustomed to the thin air. But a few of the cavalry mounts doggedly persisted. Little Black of course was among them. In this battle Little Black again did splendidly, but after it ended, the horse fell to the ground and died. Not only Liu, but every man in the troop was disconsolate at the loss of the heroic steed.

Little Black was buried on the side of a towering peak in northern Tibet. Its exploits will long remain in the memory of fighting men.

But this is not the end of our story. It is only the beginning.

Not long afterwards, our detachment crossed the grasslands in pursuit of a gang of rebels now turned bandits, and arrived at Lake Nam after an arduous march.

In Tibetan, the lake is called Tengri, which means "Heavenly Sea". According to Buddhist lore, whoever walks around the lake will have his sins forgiven. Every year many pilgrims perform the rite. When the bandits reached here, they murdered and robbed many of the pilgrims. We pursued the gang around the lake and destroyed it. Some of the bandits we captured, after a period of education, returned home and became activists in their local reform movement. Others joined the Tibetan contingent of our people's army.

In the course of the battle we captured more than thirty horses. Needless to say, one was given to Liu. At his request, he was issued a small black. Although it had no white hoof, it resembled the horse he had lost in every other respect. Liu treated his new mount with

the same loving care and, probably in memory of the first, also named it Little Black.

After several strenuous chases and battles, big and small, both the men and horses grew accustomed to the high altitudes. Thanks to Liu's careful training, the new horse quickly became a fine cavalry mount and performed many feats equal to those of its predecessor.

One night as we were chasing a gang of the enemy in a snow-storm, both sides were so blinded by the swirling snow that they mingled in with each other. This was discovered by trooper Chang Hu. He was a heavy smoker, but on the march, of course, smoking was prohibited. He noticed another man concealing the glow of his cigarette with his sleeve. Although Chang's first inclination was to stop him, somehow he pulled out one of his own butts and rode over to borrow a light. In the glow of his first puff, he noticed that the fellow had unusually fierce eyes. It gave him a peculiar feeling. He took a closer look. Sure enough, the fellow was wearing the big fur cape and carrying the typical rifle of the bandits. Chang rode quickly up to his platoon leader.

"There's something wrong here. We're mixed in with the enemy."

The platoon leader at once told the troop leader. The troop leader made a quick decision. He ordered the messengers to pass the word along:

"Have our men move towards the left. No one is allowed to fire."

But the enemy were so dizzy with fatigue that they thought only of wrapping themselves tightly in their fur capes and keeping their heads protected from the wind and snow. Wherever the man in front of a bandit went, there he went also. If our man stopped to rest, the bandit halted beside him. We couldn't shake free of them.

This went on until dawn, when we clashed with them in a hand to hand struggle. Our unit was the advance guard, and the troop leader had with him only a platoon,

whereas the enemy were well over a hundred men. We fought in a narrow valley, horse jammed against horse. By the end of an hour, each side had withdrawn to heights on opposite sides of the valley and sealed it off with heavy fire.

From the upper end of the valley a glacier moved slowly downwards. Halfway up at the confluence of a warm spring with the glacier milky white water flowed, carrying down chunks of unmelted ice.

The commander checked his troop and discovered that five men were missing. But the mist rising from the warm spring prevented him from seeing through his field-glasses whether there were any dead or wounded comrades on the glacier. Enemy fire was too strong to risk sending anyone down the slope for a look, to say nothing of the fact that fighting in that rarefied air had left many of the men dizzy and gasping for breath. It was then that Liu's Little Black darted into the valley. No matter how accurate the enemy's shooting, they couldn't hit the rapidly zigzagging animal. Little Black returned with two wounded comrades on its back, but neither of them was Liu. Even as the troop leader was puzzling this out, the steed again ran down the mountain.

Liu, who had been hit in the back, had fallen from his saddle. Luckily, he managed to squeeze in between two rocks, and so wasn't trampled by the milling animals. Because there was such a throng of enemy men and horses, Little Black couldn't work free until the bandits retired to the hilltop. Searching for Liu among the dead and wounded, it finally found him. The young trooper had discovered two badly wounded comrades among the casualties. Although he couldn't carry them, he was able to drag them together. It was at this moment that Little Black appeared. Liu raised the wounded men on to its back. When Little Black saw that Liu hadn't mounted, it didn't want to leave. Agitatedly, Liu struck the horse

with his rifle butt. Only then did Little Black take the men up the mountain.

About that time, two slightly wounded bandits recovered consciousness. They saw a People's Liberation Army man step over them. He seemed to be looking for something. They couldn't find their guns, but they pulled out knives and rushed him. Sensing the attack from behind, Liu whirled and threw himself on them. But he was severely wounded, and it was two against one. Of course they were too much for him. Fortunately, another badly wounded comrade, Ma Feng-liang, just then revived. Grabbing the gun at his side, he shot one of the bandits. The other, who was just plunging his knife into Liu's ribs, shrank back in fright and turned to run. Liu clenched his teeth and pulled out the knife, and with one spring was upon him. Thus ended another bandit's life.

His strength spent, Liu collapsed to the ground. Little Black returned for the second time and lay down before him. Ma, his head whirling, pulled Liu on to the horse's back. About to get on himself, he discovered the body of another comrade, and lifted that into the saddle instead, then urged Little Black up the mountain. When Liu awakened, he found himself back with his unit, but there was no sign of Ma. So he sent Little Black down into the valley again to fetch him.

The enemy continued firing at us from the mountain opposite until dusk. By then the rest of our unit caught up. Unable to escape, the bandits were wiped out to the last man.

From that day on, there were many stories about the exploits of Liu's mount. They were confused with tales of the other Little Black and no one could tell them apart.

After three months of continuous fighting, the men were worn out. A period of rest and rehabilitation was ordered. Camp was made in the Yadrog Lake region. A democratic reform team had begun work here over a

month before. The arrival of the troops brought a stability to the area that greatly facilitated its efforts. Many local people who had run away during the fighting now returned home. Then an unfortunate incident occurred.

One day Chang Hu called Liu out of the squad room and pointed at a big Tibetan standing beneath a tree not far from the corral.

"That fellow's up to something," he said. "I saw him here at noon, hanging around your Little Black. Maybe he wants to steal it."

Liu looked the man over. He was wearing a tattered sheepskin robe. One arm, burnished copper by the sun, was exposed free of its sleeve. His face too was dark, but his lips were very red. A large turquoise ear-ring hung from one ear, a dagger was thrust in his belt. All this, plus his direct bold stare, gave him a formidable appearance.

"Do you know him?" Liu asked Trashii, a former household slave who happened to pass by.

Trashii shook his head. "He's not from this estate. A lot of former Tibetan soldiers set free by the PLA have passed through here on their way home in the last two days. Maybe he's one of them."

"If he's on his way home, why doesn't he go?" Liu's suspicions increased.

That night, Liu couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned on his bed. Several times he got up to see whether anything was amiss in the corral.

But the night passed without incident.

The second night, Liu saw the big fellow on the road. He seemed to have just come from the corral. Liu ducked out of sight till he passed, then followed him. The man left the village. Although the wind was howling and it was very cold, Liu couldn't let this opportunity escape. But after travelling half a *li*, the big Tibetan merely lay down on the steps of a small Lama temple and went to sleep. So of course Liu learned nothing.

He returned to camp and told the troop command all about it. The political instructor felt that something important was involved here. While ordering the men of the entire troop to keep alert, he warned Liu against making any rash moves. Under no circumstances should we fire the first shot, unless we were sure the man was a bandit, he said.

For three nights, Liu didn't sleep well. At dawn of the fourth day, just as Liu was dozing off again after feeding his horse, a comrade in his squad shook him and said:

"I saw that big fellow hanging around your Little Black again. He beat it when I came to the enclosure."

Draping his greatcoat over his shoulders, Liu rushed out. In the moonlight, he spotted a dark figure near the trough. As he took a few steps closer, he saw the flash of a dagger.

"Who's there?" Liu demanded, cocking his rifle.

The dagger swung near Little Black. Liu dashed forward. The man grasped Little Black's mane, leaped upon its back and, leaning low, galloped away. Liu didn't shoot for fear of hitting his horse or killing an innocent man.

"Little Black," he shouted.

The small animal halted. Strangely, it didn't come back, but only paced in a circle. Frantic, its rider struck it with the hilt of his dagger, and the horse bolted down the road.

Liu's yell had alerted the sentries, and several troopers also came running out. But the horse and rider had disappeared.

Needless to say, Liu was miserable. The entire troop felt badly.

Because of the loving care he gave his horse, and because he had distinguished himself a number of times in battle, Liu had been cited as model for the entire regiment. Naturally the steed and its master had been pointed out many times to men in the other troops.

And so the next day a telephone call came from regimental headquarters announcing that Seventh Troop had caught a Tibetan riding Little Black. The horse was at headquarters, and the Tibetan was being questioned.

Liu in great delight went immediately and took back his beloved mount. But the next day a call came from the regiment's political department, directing Liu and the troop political instructor to report with Little Black to the regiment's propaganda section for an important assignment.

All along the way, Liu and the instructor tried in vain to guess what this assignment might be.

At the propaganda section the chief of the political department was waiting for them. He gravely invited Liu to be seated and poured him a cup of water. Liu and the political instructor were mystified.

"What is the purpose of all our fighting and rushing about?" the department chief queried Liu after sitting down also.

That was easy. "To bring happiness to the Tibetan people, of course," Liu replied. Have I pulled some boner? he wondered.

"Right." A fleeting smile came to the chief's lips. "And so I don't suppose you'd want to do anything against the people's interests?"

"Say it straight out, chief. If I've done the slightest thing to hurt the Tibetan people, I'll accept any punishment given me."

The chief of the political department's smile broadened. "Would you be willing to sacrifice your personal interests for them?"

"What a question. Even if I had to lay down my life, I swear —" Remembering that he wasn't in his own squad room, Liu stopped himself from speaking too strongly.

"In that case I don't have to persuade you. To be perfectly frank — your horse has found its original owner."

"But wasn't he the bandit leader we killed in battle?"

"No. His real owner was the Tibetan who stole him from the corral."

"What?" Liu didn't know what to say.

"The regiment has decided to return it to him. Have you brought the horse?"

"We have," said the troop political instructor. "What a coincidence. It's a pity. That horse —"

"Haven't you thought this out clearly yet?" The department chief turned to him.

"Of course, of course," the political instructor said hastily. He realized he had made a slip. "The decision will be obeyed."

"I know the horse is a fine mount. The regimental commander himself says he's seldom seen a better. But that's as a result of training. Right, Liu? The propaganda section is going to write up the way you've cared for your horse and pass the story around the whole regiment as an object lesson to be studied."

"Department chief —" Liu began.

The chief walked over and patted him on the shoulder. "I know what you want to say. I'm sure you understand without my telling you. Even with the best of cavalry mounts, our army can't even exist without the support of the people. On the other hand, when the people are with us — remember when the Red Army passed through national minority areas during the Long March? — there's no problem they won't help us solve. One good cavalry mount is nothing compared —"

"Say no more, chief. The order will be carried out."

"Good." The chief turned to the head of the propaganda section. "Be sure to add the reason why Liu returned his beloved mount to its original master to his write-up. It's the key point."

After lunching on an estate not far from regimental headquarters, Liu leading the horse set forth accompanied

by the head of the propaganda section and the political instructor.

On seeing Liu, Little Black extended its neck and whinnied, prancing with delight. But the young trooper's gloom was not alleviated.

Each of the men was in a different emotional state as they trotted their steeds down the road. It was as if by travelling quickly they could more easily put complicated problems out of their minds. Turning off the road, they followed a path that led to a hamlet on an estate. The surroundings were lovely. Dismounting, they walked along the dyke of a small stream. The water was crystal clear. You could see the beautiful coloured pebbles that paved the stream bed. Birds called, cicadas droned, there were small bridges and fields — it was remarkably like the countryside south of the Yangtse. Yet only a few months ago, here and south of the Yangtse were two different worlds. Today the people of this former slave society were spanning the gap of centuries in a mighty leap.

It was mid-summer. The noon sun was directly overhead, but a cool breeze swept down the lane of weeping willows. The green freshness of the dykes was enchanting. All three men seemed wrapped in the same spell.

The political instructor noticed Liu's silence and to distract his attention, asked:

"Can you tell the difference between wheat and barley?"

"That's easy," the propaganda-section head inserted. "Barley beard is much longer."

"Not always. Ask Liu. At Shigatse Farm, we saw barley with beard the same size as wheat. Isn't that right, Liu?"

"What's the difference? They're both grain. You can eat them both."

Liu's surly reply didn't disturb the instructor. He only smiled.

Crossing a plank bridge over a rivulet, they left the dyke and walked up a slope into a grove. In the centre was a clean grassy sward. Surrounded by a dense growth of trees with only a small path at either end, it was secluded and quiet.

"Rest a while," said the section head. He sat down.

The political instructor lay down on the grass. "Wonderful," he cried. "This is better than the lawn in Chungshan Park in Peking. The grass is so thick even if you dropped a sticky cake, it wouldn't touch the ground."

"Maybe," said Liu disagreeably. "But if you spilt barley flour you'd never be able to pick it up again."

The political instructor burst out laughing.

"What's so funny? It's true," Liu argued.

"Just look at him. What's wrong with Liu today? He's as cranky as an old bear."

Liu blushed. He knew he was behaving badly. He made an effort, and gradually became more cheerful.

Beyond the lushly growing crops they could see a *mani* flag on high, and then a tall building. Square and solidly built, it was five stories high, with a dozen or so windows on each side, shaded by multi-coloured awnings. A wall with ramparts and battlements surrounded the courtyard. The *mani* flag flew from a pole in the centre of the yard forty or fifty feet above the ground. Outside the compound wall were serfs' hovels, looking like match-boxes beside the tall building. Their smoke-grimed appearance was in marked contrast to the white walls and gold roof of the mansion.

"The lord of this manor lived in fine style," the political instructor remarked.

"The serfs say that every brick in that building cost one of their bones," said the propaganda-section head.

Although he had fought many battles in Tibet, Liu had never seen such a rich manor house before. He silently pondered what he should do when he met the owner of his horse.

All the inhabitants of the hamlet seemed to know of their coming. They were surrounded by a drove of children as soon as they entered the manor compound. The big Tibetan extended both arms in welcome. Little Black whinnied and pranced at the sight of its master, just as it did with Liu. The young trooper understood all at a glance. The Tibetan tied the horse to a tree at the compound gate, then led his guests into his own dark little shack. The doorway was so low they had to stoop to enter.

The hovel clearly bespoke its owner's status. He greeted the People's Liberation Army men respectfully. From time to time, he wiped a tear from his eye with the sleeve of his tattered sheepskin robe. As he prepared the tea, he placed his only clean cushion in the centre of the floor and insisted that his guests take the seats of honour.

His name was Jampa. Originally a poor corvée labourer in the Khampa district, he was conscripted during the second campaign against the English invaders. After the Tibetans' defeat, he drifted to this region and became a house serf to the local lord. The horse was compensation the lord forced upon him after taking his beautiful wife. He gradually developed a deep affection for the animal, cared for it as a friend and trained it to be a good mount. But the lord still used the horse in his travels, and raced it. At the time of the reactionary rebellion, the lord's steward compelled Jampa to ride with him as a member of the bandit forces. During the fighting, the steward took a liking to his horse, and simply confiscated it. Jampa became the steward's groom. When the horse ran, he ran along behind. When they camped, he had to feed it. In the battle of Black Water, the steward fled with the horse, and Jampa was left alone. After his capture and a period of education, he was allowed to return home.

Liu had been secretly hoping he would be able to persuade the big Tibetan to give up Little Black in exchange for another horse which we would give him. But when he heard Jampa's story he was overcome with sympathy. He knew that it was this Tibetan who had trained the horse so well. He observed that the political instructor also had tears in his eyes. Liu was ashamed that only today did he fully understand the misery of the Tibetan people. How selfish his idea had been. He would have been completely disgraced had he voiced it aloud.

When it was Liu's turn to speak, he told only of Little Black's exploits and how the horse had been captured in a battle against the bandits.

Jampa listened, enthralled. Even before Liu finished, he grasped his arm and asked: "What was the name of the gang's leader?"

"Tsering."

"A fellow with a very big head?"

"That's right."

"With a gold-inlaid turquoise ear-ring?"

"No. But there was a hole in his ear lobe, and it was bloodstained."

"Eyes like a wolf?"

"Anyway they were all bloodshot."

"A wide mouth, practically up to his ears?"

"That's right. Did you know him?"

"Is he still alive?" Jampa persisted.

"He ran and I followed. Soon, the bullets of both of us were gone. I caught up, and we fought on horseback. We fell to the ground. He was stronger, and he pressed me down. I nearly suffocated. But then Little Black — I mean your horse — hit him on the head with its hoofs and dashed his brains out."

Jampa threw his arms around Liu. "That was the steward," he shouted. "You and my horse have avenged me."

Holding Liu at arm's length, he gazed at his face, then again embraced him tightly. With tears in his eyes he said: "They fooled me into fighting. I have nothing against the People's Liberation Army. They're very good people. On my way home I saw them do many fine things. And now, they've given me land. I wanted my horse so that I could trail that steward to the ends of the earth and get my revenge. But you've already done that for me. The horse should belong to you." He rose and walked out of the shack. Pointing to the horse tied at the gate, he said: "Take it. It's yours."

"Impossible," Liu and the political instructor said together. "That would be a breach of discipline of People's Liberation Army."

Jampa rushed back inside and knelt down on the cushion. Hands above his head, he told forcefully what was in his heart, in the strong rhythmic cadences of the Tibetan tongue. He would brook no refusal.

"I'm a Khampa man. When I was a little child my parents taught me: If it's an enemy, don't let him strike the first blow; if it's a friend, give him the best you have. I've disobeyed the first part of that instruction. You can't make me go against the second."

The argument over who should have the horse went on for a long time. Finally Jampa completely reversed himself. He agreed with Liu, and respectfully saw the three PLA men off down the road.

But our story isn't ended. That same night, when Liu went to feed the horses, a warm hairy head pushed itself against his. Little Black had been returned.

Before dawn, Jampa heard the sound of horses' hoofs outside his window.

Thus, for two days and two nights, Little Black ate fodder in two different stables.

The succeeding night, very late, the troop was given an emergency assignment and set out at once. At day-

light, Jampa discovered Little Black tied to a tree not far from his door.

Three days later, the troop's advance guard spotted a rider on the mountain slope to the left. As the troop was fanning out into battle formation, the rider charged down the slope. The troop held its fire. A short distance ahead, the rider leaped from the horse. It was Jampa. The big Tibetan ran up to the political instructor and saluted. Panting, he said:

"I know you won't accept the gift of my horse. But please accept it and me together as a soldier in your People's Liberation Army cavalry troop."

After Jampa's application was approved by the higher authorities, he was assigned to the squad commanded by young Liu, its new leader.

During the march Jampa said to Liu in a low voice: "Today I'm a member of your squad. You can't reject the friendship of a fellow soldier. Now about this horse. . . ."

Long Flows the Stream

LIU CHEN

At the age of thirteen, what a child I was.

My family lived in a little village on the Hopei plain. No matter where you looked, the land was flat. I often wondered what a mountain was like. Was it taller than a poplar? If you stood on the highest peak, how far would you be from the sky?

In spring of 1943 I was sent to our revolutionary base on Mount Taihang. Only then did I discover that mountains were made of stone. Taihang had ancient temples and fresh green woods. A long stream meandered down from its heights. Where did it flow to? I felt as if I was in a dream world.

The day after I arrived, Comrade Wang of the organization section said to me: "We're having a rectification movement* here, and running a regular school. Which do you want to join?"

I thought a moment. "What are the grown-up comrades who came with me doing?"

"They're joining the movement."

* An educational campaign conducted in 1942-43 throughout the Communist Party.

"Then I will too," I said promptly. The most useful and glorious things were always being done by the big comrades. Could I lag behind?

A woman in her late twenties who was seated off to one side interrupted. "You're just a kid. What do you want with a rectification movement? School's the place for you."

I glared at her. She had a few freckles on her face. By the look of her, she too had just come up from the plain. "Oh, so only you can join the rectification but not me?" I retorted. "Well, I insist; what are you going to do about it?"

Comrade Wang laughed. "All right, all right, you can join." He turned to the young woman. "She may be small, but she's been in the revolution since she was nine. She's worked as a propagandist and as a messenger. The enemy arrested her twice. Let her take part in the rectification. It will improve her understanding."

I felt like saying to the young woman: "What about it? That will shut your mouth." Smilingly, she rose and took me by the hand: "Let's go."

I twisted away. "Who do you think you are?"

Comrade Wang hastily stood up. "I haven't introduced you two yet. This is Comrade Li Yun-feng, leader of the Tsaonan County Women's Association. In the rectification movement she heads one of the study groups. I'm assigning you to her group. You must listen to her."

Of all the luck, I thought to myself.

She went right into action when we reached the women's quarters. She borrowed a big basin from the owner of the house, carried in two buckets of hot water, handed me her own soap and towel, and ordered: "Off with your clothes. Wash."

Hah, a big basin of steaming hot water. What was that for? We weren't going to slaughter a pig. I didn't move. She gave me a shove: "Wash your hair first."

I had shaved all my hair off when I was a messenger, for convenience' sake. I felt quite put upon. "What am I going to wash? I haven't a hair on my head."

"Maybe not, but you've got plenty of dirt."

"Without dirt how would the crops grow?"

"You're as unhygienic as you are fresh."

She didn't waste another word, but pushed my head into the water. From head to foot she scrubbed me, with such vigour she nearly took my skin off. When she was finished, breathing hard she said: "There, that's much better than looking like a little pig."

"I brought that earthy odour all the way from the plain," I pouted. "Now there's not a whiff of the old countryside left."

"After you've finished your studies, you can go home and sniff it all you like."

Just then the compound gate opened and a dozen or so women came in. Some with cropped hair, some in long braids, they were laughing, talking and singing. As soon as they saw me, they gathered round.

"Another new member for our group? How small she is."

"Is it a boy? Where's your hair?"

"You're going to join our rectification session? If you made no improvement and anyone criticizes you, will you cry?"

"Just because you're a crybaby, you needn't think everyone else is the same," I retorted, and broke out of their encirclement. I didn't want to listen to their silly chatter.

Another woman who looked liked a peasant came in with a tray of food. She had a matronly air. With a smile she said to me: "We're in the same group. My name is Yu-chen. I've brought some supper for you and Yun-feng."

As we ate, Yu-chen stared at me, unblinking. If I had been thin-skinned, she would have embarrassed me. Though no one asked her, she announced: "I'm from the

third sub-district's women's association. I came to Mount Taihang carrying my baby on my back. A local peasant family is looking after him for me now." She spoke as if she just had to get it out of her system.

At night, the twelve women slept on a long *kang* — a brick platform that was heated from underneath. They squeezed together to make room for me. On my left was Yu-chen, on my right Yun-feng. Yu-chen was stitching clothes for her baby in the light of a lamp. Yun-feng went into the house-owner's room. Pointing to her empty place I softly asked Yu-chen: "Is she a good person?"

"Very," Yu-chen replied with a motherly gesture. "A senior middle-school graduate. Before the war, she led the student movement in Tsinan. The provincial warlord put her in jail three times. Each time, her father bought her out. He's a merchant. 'Aren't you ashamed?' he asked her. 'A big girl like you, always running around. You don't have to work for a living. The next time you're arrested, I'm not going to waste my money.' 'That's all right with me,' said Yun-feng. 'If you think what I'm doing is shameful, next time they nab me just keep on stuffing yourself with food at home. I wouldn't want your precious money to be spent in vain.' Her father's beard stuck straight up, he was so mad. Crash, he threw a big teapot on the floor. From that day on, Yun-feng left home and never returned. Today, she's a member of our county's Communist Party committee."

2

Yun-feng was the oldest woman in our group, and she had the most experience, so everyone called her Big Sister. Often I saw her sitting with one or another of the women on a large stone outside the compound gate, conversing in low tones. Sometimes they talked half the night before coming back to sleep.

But for some reason with me she was particularly strict. Others read one thick book after the next, but she gave me nothing but primary-school grammar and math texts, volumes one through eight. "When you're not reading rectification campaign material, I want you to use all your spare time on these. Don't miss a single period or comma. You must also learn to add, subtract, multiply and divide," she told me brusquely. "I won't tolerate any sloppiness."

The village we were living in was in the middle of a drive against tyrannical landlords. Tenant peasants with problems all came to her. She always helped them. If a family couldn't make ends meet, she would sit on their *kang*, and they'd talk it over. If a married couple had a fight, if the mother-in-law was bad to the wife, Yun-feng was sure to intervene. And she spoke straight from the shoulder, like one of the family.

Whenever the peasants saw her, their eyes lit up. Two women are a pair of cymbals, three of them make a band—when Yun-feng and the other women got together, they were as noisy and gay as a stage full of opera actors. Only with me was her face serious, her eyes stern. It was as if I had borrowed two hundred dollars from her in some previous life and still hadn't paid it back. Leafing through my copybook, she said: "You write too fast. Make each stroke carefully. You haven't learned to walk yet, there's no sense in trying to run."

That annoyed me. All the women scribbled at a great rate. Why should I be the only one to write slowly? Big or small, I was a cadre just like the rest of them. How could I take notes at a political talk if I just crawled along? Big Sister had an answer to everything. "You can write a little faster when you're taking notes," she said. "But when you come home, be sure to copy them over again clearly."

Behind our house was a long stream. Along both banks were many pretty pebbles—oval, round, pink, snowy

white. Every day I collected so many of them, my pockets bulged like frogs' bellies, and they made a delightful hissing noise when I ran. After the evening meal I used to hurry down to the stream and pick pebbles until it was dark. Big Sister already had my textbooks laid out when I returned. "Well," she would say as I entered the door, "had enough of running wild? Start studying."

To tell the truth I had got used to acting on my own when I was living in enemy-occupied territory. When I felt like studying, I studied; when I didn't I played. Every two or three days, the enemy came to our village, and we hid in our underground tunnels. No one was always watching me, like Big Sister. Others in the rectification movement just stuck to rectification. I had to be different. I had to have a whole load of extra trouble. But there was no way out—I had to study. That Big Sister certainly burned me up.

"Your tongue is too sharp," I told her. "It slashes like a knife."

"Her tongue may be like a knife," Yu-chen put in, "but her heart is like beancurd. It's soft and good."

"Naturally, you would say that," I retorted. "When your baby didn't have any clothes, she cut up her tunic and made him some. Of course you think she's wonderful."

Yu-chen chuckled. "Just wait. When your clothes wear out, she'll give you some too, if she's got any."

"I'm not a nursing infant. I don't want any."

Big Sister couldn't suppress a smile. She patted my text books. "I'm giving you these. You've got to take them whether you want them or not."

Oh, I studied all right, but I always pouted and pulled a long face and tried to make some noise to irritate her. Whenever I finished for the day, she would gaze at me and say with a sigh: "When you grow up you'll understand."

I gave her a tough look out of the corners of my eyes. "I'm not so small. Three years ago, I was already of platoon-leader rank in my propaganda unit."

"Hah, you make me so dizzy I don't know whether to laugh or cry."

I pointed right between her eyes. "And what about you? Half the time I don't know whether to laugh or cry either."

Big Sister burst out laughing. Grabbing me, she pummelled my arm.

Once, for no reason at all, I asked her: "How many kids do you have?"

"Two."

"Who's looking after them?"

"My mother."

That night, as I lay wrapped in my quilt, she patched my torn padded tunic. Autumn was nearly over and winter was on the way. Persimmon leaves were falling, dropping into the stream. The water was already chilly. As she stitched, Big Sister sang a lovely song. She said it was a lullaby. At that moment I thought she was charming. "Do you miss your children?" I asked her. She only smiled. "Don't worry about them," I advised. "Their grandma will treat them fine."

The other women laughed. Yu-chen said to me in a whisper: "Silly girl, she's not married."

"Are you married or not?" I angrily demanded of Big Sister.

She giggled. "I was only teasing."

Yanking the covers over my head, I puffed indignantly: "If you have no sense of shame that's your affair, not mine."

Yu-chen put her head close to mine and said in a low voice: "She had a very nice sweetheart. The year before last, just as they were about to get married, he was killed by the enemy."

Oh. My heart sank. I stole a glance at Big Sister. Her face was expressionless. But in the faint light of the oil lamp, her eyes glistened.

3

After that, I began to like Big Sister. Even her freckles looked better to me.

Whenever she made me angry I would remember that her sweetheart had been killed, and immediately I would quit pouting. But one day, at a meeting, I couldn't control myself. In making suggestions to others or criticizing them, she always politely addressed them as "comrade". But I was only "Little Liu", and she ticked me off directly, as if I were some melon-swiping kid and not a cadre at all.

"Little Liu is flighty and she doesn't work hard. She can't even do simple arithmetic, but she's still a bit conceited and doesn't look ahead. The revolution needs us to do many more things, yet we know so little."

When the meeting ended, she told me to do my lessons. Still raging inside, I said to her nastily: "One Japanese soldier plus two equals three. What's the good of knowing that? It doesn't kill any invaders."

Also angry, she laughed in spite of herself. "Is that how you see it? Never mind studying, then. Just wait."

"That's exactly what I'm going to do," I said mockingly. "I'll wait till tomorrow morning, then eat four bowls of millet and drink five bowls of wild vegetable soup. I'll eat and sleep and take life easy." I ran out of the room, not caring whether she liked it or not.

I ran all the way to the stream. There I took off my shoes, sat down on a big rock, dabbled my feet in the clear water, and sang.

A little bird cocked its head and peered at me from between the boulders, as if to say: "You sing very well."

Let's have another." I needed no encouragement. I sang one tune after the next, my voice growing stronger and louder by the minute. I felt as if I were leading a big chorus, and the shining ripples whipped up by the breeze in the stream were like many eyes, watching me.

I sang until it was dark. I was still singing when I returned to the women's quarters and began laying out my bedding for the night.

Big Sister nabbed me. "It's not as easy as all that, my girl. You haven't done your lessons yet."

There was no way out, I opened my text. As she started the lesson, Big Sister asked me with a smile: "You can eat so much millet and drink so much soup — that's quite an accomplishment. Why bother about studying?"

I promptly began unbuttoning my clothes. "You're right. I'm off to bed."

She laughed and punched me on the shoulder. "We're not feeding you up so nice and plump for nothing. You can't be eaten; the least you can do is study."

In the eighth month of the rectification Big Sister developed tuberculosis in the lymph glands of her neck. The doctor ordered her to the infirmary. As she was leaving, she told Yu-chen: "Help Little Liu finish her primary-school studies. She's bright enough, but she's too flighty. Be strict with her."

To me she said: "Sometimes I'm impatient, and say harsh things. You can curse me, hate me if you want, but you simply must study hard."

This time I didn't try to irritate her, for I remembered that in my home town we called Big Sister's ailment "anger bumps". You got it from constant aggravation. The more I thought about it, the worse I felt. I didn't even hear Big Sister go out the door. Suddenly realizing that she was gone, I chased after her for more than two *li*. When she heard my running footsteps on the mountain path, she turned and waited for me to catch up.

Staring tensely at the swellings in her neck, I asked: "Did you get those because I'm always making you mad?"

She took my hands in hers. "No." Her eyes were moist. She opened her bag and pulled out a new notebook with a black cover. "This can be your diary. Write in it every day. It will train your mind and improve your penmanship at the same time."

I nodded, too moved to speak. Bending close, she said lovingly: "Later on you'll understand. The revolution needs well-educated cadres."

This time I followed her advice. For my first diary entry I wrote: "Big Sister has gone away. She's ill. Tonight, seeing her empty space on the *kang*, I feel like crying. One thing I know — she's very good to me. . . ."

After the rectification ended, I went to middle school for half a year. During the last "mop-up" the enemy tried against Mount Taihang, I caught malaria. I too was sent to the infirmary. They put me in the same room with Big Sister.

"Little Liu," she cried, holding out her arms as I ran through the door. She was thinner. Due to lack of proper medicine, the T.B. had spread to all the glands in her body. One leg was completely useless. I flung myself on her bosom, unable to speak. How stupid I had been. For eight or nine months I hadn't thought of going to visit her.

From the very first day I could see it, watching her sit all day on her hard wooden bed — she had become quite kindly. She was delighted that I had come, and she spoke to me much more pleasantly than before.

I ran a high fever, and was sick to my stomach. My head ached so, I couldn't sleep. I was delirious and kept

saying crazy things to Big Sister: "Outside our house is a great big rock. . . . My mother makes delicious hot cakes. . . . In my aunt's yard there's an apricot tree with big red apricots." Of course I didn't know it, but I was thinking of home.

Whenever I had an attack, Big Sister would hobble over on her crutches and sit on my bed. She would give me drinks of water and sing to me softly.

At last, by needle treatment, the doctor cured my malaria. He told me to rest. Big Sister asked to see the black-covered notebook she had given me for a diary. Shyly and a bit frightened, I handed it to her. I had filled every page. Smilingly, she started to read, when a voice called: "Does Little Liu live here?"

"I'm in here," I replied. "Who is it?"

A man I didn't know entered the room. About thirty, he had a white towel cloth covering his head, like a peasant. "I'm on my way to Yen-an from the Hopei plain. Your ma asked me to bring you a few things."

As soon as he said "your ma", tears gushed from my eyes. I hadn't seen her in three years. The man opened his bundle and gave me two pairs of fine white cloth socks. "Your old comrades and the man whose house you used to live in send you their regards. They hope you finish your studies and get back in the fight again soon." He turned to go.

"Rest a while," Big Sister urged.

"No, I've got to push along."

"Did my ma say anything else?" I ran after him to ask.

"Oh . . . yes." He threw the words over his shoulder. "She said she was very well, that you shouldn't worry. Study hard and don't get sick."

Holding the socks, I slowly returned to the room, my head down. I felt awful.

"What was his rush?" Big Sister said disapprovingly. "It wouldn't have killed him to talk with us a few minutes more."

Suddenly, I remembered the socks. Because of the enemy blockade, plus bad harvests two years in a row, we hadn't been issued any clothing or subsidy money for the past three years. I had no towel. When I washed my face, I had to dry it with the edge of my tunic. The stuffing was all gone from my padded jacket, and my tunic was in shreds. Those two pairs of socks were a real windfall. I bounced up and lightly put one pair in Big Sister's hand.

"These are for you. You haven't worn any socks since last winter, and now your leg is bad."

Big Sister nodded, her eyes moist. She examined the socks carefully. Satisfied, she placed them by her side. Opening my diary again, she said: "You'll be going home soon. Let me take a good look at what you've been thinking this past half year."

She read, page by page. Then she frowned, and my heart skipped a beat. Pointing at the diary she said: "You've made rapid progress, but. . . ." I was most afraid of that "but". Relentlessly, she went on: "But, see what you've written here. I'll read it to you: 'Middle-school math is too hard. I don't want to be chief of a supply department or an accountant, why must I study this stuff? When I grow up, I'm going to find a job where you don't have to use your brain. . . .'" Big Sister looked at me and demanded sarcastically: "What kind of job would that be? Something outside the revolution? A fairy maiden, flying around in the sky?"

That proved it. I knew that temper of hers would never change. She was sounding off again. I hung my head. Whether I liked it or not, I had to listen.

She turned another page. "So, your teacher gives you a slight reprimand and you swear at her in your diary? If you can't take criticism, how do you expect to improve?"

Fine, I was covered with faults from head to foot. My toes were too short, my ears were stuck on wrong, the

calves of my legs shouldn't be facing backwards. The more I heard, the more irritated I felt. Nothing about me seemed to be any good.

Big Sister paid no attention to my exasperated expression. She concentrated on the diary. "Every day you confess: 'I'm not diligent, I don't make enough demands on myself.' What's the use of confessing if you don't change? Do you want to become a dog-faced loafer?"

I glared at her as if she had struck me. "Dog-faced loafers" was what we called the Kuomintang soldiers. They were always lounging around with their hats tilted over one eye. They smoked opium, robbed the peasants, and fought the people's forces instead of the Japanese invaders. They were a pack of rascals. How could she compare me to them?

Weeping with rage, I snatched back the socks I had given her. I would present them to Little Hsi. When we came to Mount Taihang together, Little Hsi's feet were bleeding with broken blisters. She was an honest quiet girl who never said a word against me.

Big Sister wanted to laugh, but she kept a straight face and continued correcting my diary and writing comments with her red pencil. She could do with it what she pleased. I didn't want the blasted thing.

When the call for the evening meal sounded, I brought the food in and thumped it down before her. Filling a bowl with millet and black beans she queried: "What's wrong? You're as touchy as a scorpion's tail? Must you have only favourable winds? Do you want to be put on pedestal and worshipped like an idol? Shall we carry you around in a sedan-chair? Is that going to help you grow up?"

"What business is it of yours how I grow up? I'm growing taller all the time anyway, not shorter," I retorted. In my heart I knew I was behaving badly, but for some reason the minute anybody criticized me I seemed

to burn all over. Right until lights out, neither of us talked to the other.

That night all Mount Taihang slumbered peacefully, but I couldn't sleep. There was no wind, and the leaves didn't rustle. A crescent moon watched silently from the horizon as if afraid that someone would steal the earth. In the distance a small waterfall gurgled and flowed endlessly. Suddenly, far off to the east, came the crump-crump of heavy artillery. There was fighting on our plain tonight. What county town was under attack? Could our soldiers get across the defense ditch? Could they scale the walls?

Big Sister sat up on her hard wooden bed, her shadow etched against the window pane. Three little stars blinked at us from the sky. She stared through the window and said quietly to herself: "Big guns, big guns. . . ."

Again a stifling silence. If only she would speak to me. But, no, she must still be angry. I turned over.

"Little Liu, aren't you asleep yet?" she asked softly. How lovely her voice sounded. I nearly cried.

"No," I replied.

"What are you thinking about?"

"About the plain."

After another long silence, she said: "In the Soviet Union there was a man named Gorky. When he was a child, he had a very hard time. One day his grandma brought him to a pier on the Volga River and put him on board a ship. . . ."

From then on, any night I couldn't sleep, Big Sister told me stories. Soviet ones like *Pavel Korchagin* and *The Iron Flood*, Chinese ones like *Hsiang Lin's Wife*. She knew all kinds of revolutionary tales. As I listened, something sweet and beautiful flowered in my heart. The stars in the sky were able to speak, Mount Taihang nodded and smiled, the leaves on the trees could sing.

I remembered many things about my own childhood. They took on a new significance, a new beauty.

5

During the day, when Big Sister read or thought of other things, I shook her shoulder and pestered her to tell me stories. Once, she looked me over, nodded, dug out a thick book and shoved it in my hand. "Here. Read for yourself."

It was called *Son of the Working People*, and I found it fascinating. When I finished, I borrowed a second book, a third. . . . Returning the fifth book, I flung it down in front of her. "No wonder you know so many stories," I said reproachfully. "They're all in these books. Why didn't you let me see them before, instead of a lot of old textbooks?"

She smiled. "Nobody stopped you. You just didn't have the foundation."

"Tell me, are there many books like these? How long would it take me to finish them all?"

She got out of bed and, standing on one leg, rolled back the mattress. Ho, Old Lord of the Sky, where did she get so many? The whole bed was covered with thick books. When I was still on the plain, sometimes I saw a comrade with one book here, another comrade with two books there. Had they all concentrated under Big Sister's mattress? She had political books by revolutionary leaders, Chinese classical novels — and for the first time I saw the name "Lu Hsun". I was stunned. A pitifully ignorant child from a little country village, in this remote mountain fastness I had entry to a vast beautiful world, and I hadn't even suspected it.

Big Sister replaced the mattress and sat down. She gazed at me for a long time. "Wait until Peking and Shanghai and those other big cities are liberated," she

said. "They've got whole buildings full of books, and they all belong to us. Now you tell me — how long will it take you to finish them?"

I threw my arms around her. "Big Sister, I'm such a simpleton."

That was in the autumn of 1944. Golden yellow persimmons and bright red crab-apples hung on the trees. The wild pepper, also ripe, blinked through dense green foliage at the blue sky, white clouds and ponderous mountains. There was good news in our little local newspaper — eight more county towns had been liberated on the Hopei plain. Happy over our victories, Big Sister was at the same time impatient with her slow recovery.

"Little Liu, call the doctor, quick."

I ran as fast as the wind. If only I could have given her some of my brimming energy so that she would be cured at once. Dr. Sun came. He had no antibiotics. What could he do? He gave her the usual treatment and brought her a few books. (Now I knew where she got them all.) He talked to her for a long time in a low voice, soothing her. Only after she quieted down did he leave.

Unable to get back to her job, she wrote letters to the county where she worked — to the secretary of the Communist Party committee, to the chairman of the district women's association, to the women and girls she knew, asking how they were getting on, inquiring after their children. She asked me to find out whether anyone was returning to the plain soon who could deliver the letters.

I was recovering rapidly. One day a messenger came in, shouting: "Pack your things, Little Liu, you're leaving right away. The last batch of rectification study comrades is starting for the Hopei plain today."

I let out a joyous whoop. But then I saw that Big Sister was biting her lips and trembling. I rushed to embrace her. How I wished I could carry her on my back and return to our jobs together. Controlling her-

self with an effort, she pushed me aside. "Throw those old rags of yours over here. I'll pack them for you."

Both happy and sad, I gave her all my things. I stood woodenly, not knowing what to do with myself.

Then I spied those two pairs of socks, gleaming like white pearls among my tattered old clothes. I blushed. Big Sister was about to pack them. I grasped her hand. "Keep one pair. Take that one."

"No." She gave me a shove. Again I stopped her. Weeping, I pleaded: "If a person makes a mistake, you can't hold it against her all her life."

Big Sister cupped my face in her hands. "Dear child, who knows where you'll be assigned after you get back? You might not see your mother again for a long time. Even after we beat the Japanese invaders, there's still bald-headed old Chiang Kai-shek, peering down at us with those wolfish eyes from his mountain hide-out in Szechuan. Small as you are, there's a long hard road ahead."

I hugged her tight, unable to speak for weeping.

Outside, a bugle sounded. Big Sister pushed me away and hastily helped me adjust my knapsack. She gave me a purple-covered notebook. "Keep your diary in this. During our counter-offensive make as detailed entries as possible, so that I can get some real impressions of it." Her face was pale, serious. Silently she waved me goodbye.

My eyes upon her, I withdrew from the slate-roofed little house with dragging steps.

All along the way, those two pairs of socks in my pack felt as heavy as a mountain.

After three days' march, from the top of the last peak we saw before us the wide Hopei plain. Paths wound towards the battlefield, towards my home on the river bank. Home, my plain. I looked back at dear Mount Taihang. Behind that lofty mountain was a deep valley, where a slate-roofed little house nestled in the shade of

persimmon and walnut trees. Big Sister must be sitting by the window, listening to the mountain waterfall that flows down endlessly day and night towards the villages and the distant forests.

I looked at myself, my hands, my feet and thought of my words and actions these past two years. Oh mountains, oh plain, what a stupid child I had been.

6

Back on the plain, I joined an army theatrical troupe. The next two years were tense but happy. I nearly forgot about Big Sister. Then Chiang Kai-shek started all-out civil war and we were ordered to the battle front on the central plain. The night before we left, an old man came to see me. Opening a small bundle, he handed me two pairs of new white socks and a heavy sleeveless pull-over.

"She spun the wool herself on Mount Taihang," he said, indicating the sweater.

My heart leaped. "When did she get back?" I asked quickly.

"A year ago. She's living in our village."

"Are her legs better?"

"Hai, how can I tell you — one of them was cut off."

I uttered a cry of dismay. I remembered the stockings my mother had sent me.

"Was it because she froze it, grandpa? It's very cold on Mount Taihang, and she didn't have any socks."

The old man shook his head. "There were more reasons than one. Life had been too hard during the last few years."

I sat down limply on my bed. Miserably, I said: "She's a cripple. She won't be able to work."

The old man laughed. His eyes shone. "She's still the chairman of our county women's association. She

self with an effort, she pushed me aside. "Throw those old rags of yours over here. I'll pack them for you."

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The old man laughed. His eyes shone. "She's still the chairman of our county women's association. She

gets around on crutches, and fast, too. Rain or shine, she's all over the village. Right now, she's got the women making shoes and socks for the army and the men forming stretcher teams. They'll go along as you move forward."

I grasped the old man's hand. I wanted to ask him to send my regards, but I couldn't say a word. All I could do was silently hand him my purple-covered diary. Its pages were written full.

In the three years that followed, we tasted the joys of victory at the front and endured many hardships. Whenever I saw some courageous stretcher team running through a rain of bullets, or old carters delivering grain to our soldiers, I thought of Big Sister. I could picture her, swinging along on her crutches through rain or shine, working together with the thousands and millions of old folks and youngsters in the countryside, working together with her fighting comrades at the front.

After the War of Liberation was won, I returned north. When I saw Mount Taihang in the distance, my heart beat wildly. Mount Taihang, beloved Mount Taihang. In the course of battle, while travelling life's road, I gradually came to understand what I had discarded and what I had gained while in its embrace.

By 1960, I hadn't seen Big Sister for fifteen years. Then one day I heard that she had arrived in the provincial capital, where I was living, for a Communist Party meeting. All these years she had never stopped studying and working. Now she was the principal of a Party school. I rushed over to her hotel, dashed up the stairs and flung open the door. Big Sister was standing by the window. As she turned quickly around, I ran up, threw my arms around her and burst into tears. Also weeping, she said: "Don't cry. I'm fine."

Lightly, I ran my fingers over her artificial leg, my heart trembling. Then I stood up and looked at her.

There was some grey in her hair, but her eyes, still lively and young, were deeper and more kindly than ever.

Pulling me to sit down beside her, she examined me from head to toe. "Remember that little house where we lived on Mount Taihang?" she asked, smilingly. "Ah, so you've grown up at last."

Again I recalled that pair of stockings. Torn between tears and laughter, I threw myself on her bosom. She patted my hand.

"Those small dirty hands have learned to write. Every time I read one of your stories, little imp, I remember our arguments. Do you still think it's possible to get along without using your brain?"

I laughed. "Literature is much harder than elementary grammar. You have to understand so much."

Big Sister rose and paced the floor. "It's not easy. When my leg was amputated I thought: I'll never be able to walk again. But I tried and tried until finally I could. That's why I believe if a person can take the first step, she can take the second. Let nothing impede your footsteps."

Her words made everything clear. Closing my eyes I could picture her, step by step, learning to walk, walk. . . .

Suddenly remembering something, she opened her portfolio and took out two small books. "Oh!" Delightedly I snatched them. My first two diaries — one with a black cover, one with a purple. Hastily I opened the first.

"I've been hoping to find you for a long time," said Big Sister, "and give these back. Are they of any use to you now? At least you can see what a mischievous little devil you used to be."

Laughing, I looked at that wobbly script, full of wrong words and mistakes in punctuation, and Big Sister's careful corrections in red pencil. I also found my very first

self-criticism: "I'm not modest or diligent. And my gabby mouth keeps going all day long. . . ."

I could just see her—that wild, ignorant little girl. Amid the lovely poplars of the plain, beside the long flowing stream of Mount Taihang, she had periods of struggle and periods of peace. But everything that was lasting and precious she learned from Big Sister.

Time had erased my childish vanity. I loved Big Sister's severity now, as well as her affection. Even more, I loved her faithfulness to the revolution, to the people, her eternally youthful heart.

Looking up at her, I again grew tense. In spite of being an adult, I still thought of myself too often and not enough of others.

"How are things with you, Big Sister?"

She smiled. "Do you remember Dr. Sun?"

I nodded.

"Not long after you left, he went to Yen-an, and from there to the northeast. Finally, several years later, he came back to me. We're very happily married."

I jumped to my feet. Hugging Big Sister tight, I whirled her around the room. . . .

野牛寨

中国短篇小说

艾蕪等著

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WILD BULL VILLAGE.

BY AI WU AND OTHERS



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