CHINESE LITERATURE

CONTENTS

4

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CONTENTS

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CHINESE LITERATURE

QUARTERLY

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THE LIVES OF THE SCHOLARS

Wu Ching-tzu

Chapter I

Men in their lives
Go on different ways;
Generals, statesmen,
Saints and even immortals
Begin as ordinary people.
Dynasties rise and fall,
Mornings change to evenings;
Winds from the river
Bring down old trees
From a former reign;
And fame, riches, rank
May vanish without a trace.
Then aspire not for these,
Wasting your days;
But drink and be merry,
For who knows
Where the waters carry the blossom
Cast over them.

This verse says nothing new. It simply means that in human life riches, rank, success and fame are external things. Men will risk their lives in the search for them; yet once they have them within their grasp, the taste is no better than chewed tallow. But from ancient times till now, how many have realized this?

However, at the end of the Yuan Dynasty* a really remarkable man was born. His name was Wang Mien, and he lived in a village of Chuchi County in Chekiang. When he was seven his father died, but his mother took in sewing so that he could study at the village school. Soon three years had passed and Wang Mien was ten. His mother called him to her and said, "Son, I don't want to stand in your way. But since your father died and left me a widow, I have had nothing coming in. Times are

* Also known as the Mongol Dynasty (1279-1368).

hard, and fuel and rice are expensive. Our old clothes and our few sticks of furniture have been pawned or sold. We have nothing to live on but what I make by my sewing. How can I pay for your schooling? There's nothing for it but to set you to work looking after our neighbour's buffalo. You'll be making a little money every month, and you'll get your meals there too. Tomorrow's the day you start."

"Yes, mother," said Wang Mien. "Sitting in school I've often felt bored. I'd rather look after buffaloes. If I want to study, I can take a few books along to read." That very night the matter was decided.

The next morning his mother took him to the Chin family next door. Old Chin gave them some breakfast, and when they had finished he led out a water buffalo and made it over to Wang Mien. "Two bow shots from my gate is the lake," he said, pointing outside. "And by the lake is a belt of green where all the buffaloes of the village browse. There are a few dozen big willows there too, so that it is quite shady and cool; and if the buffalo is thirsty it can drink at the water's edge. You can play there, son, but don't wander off. I shall see that you get rice and vegetables twice a day; and each morning I shall give you two coppers to buy a snack to eat while you're out. Only you must work well. I hope that's fair."

Wang Mien's mother thanked Old Chin and turned to go home. Her son saw her outside the gate, and there she straightened his clothes for him. "Mind now, don't give them any reason to find fault with you," she charged him. "Take the buffalo out early and bring it back at dusk. I don't want to have to worry about you."

Wang Mien nodded assent. Then, with tears in her eyes, she left him.

From this time onwards, Wang Mien looked after Old Chin's buffalo, and every evening he went home to sleep. Whenever the Chin family gave him salted fish or meat, he would wrap it up in a lotus leaf and take it to his mother. He also saved the coppers he was given each day to buy a snack with, and every month or so went in his off time to the village school to buy some old books from the bookseller there. Every day, when he had tethered the buffalo, he would sit down beneath the willows and read.

So three or four years passed, as in a flash. Wang Mien studied and began to see things clearly. One sultry day in early summer, tired after leading the buffalo to graze, he sat down on the grass. Suddenly dense clouds gathered, and there was a heavy shower of rain. Then the black storm clouds fringed with fleecy white drifted apart, and the sun shone through, bathing the whole lake in crimson light. The hills by the lake were blue, violet and emerald. The trees, freshly washed by the rain, were a lovelier green than ever. Crystal drops were dripping from a dozen lotus buds in the lake, while beads of water rolled about the leaves.

As Wang Mien watched, he thought, "The ancients said, 'In a beautiful scene a man feels he is part of a picture.' How true! What a pity there is no painter here to paint these sprays of lotus. That would be good." Then he reflected, "There's nothing a man can't learn. Why shouldn't I paint them myself?"

Just then, he saw in the distance a fellow carrying two hampers over his shoulder and a bottle of wine in his hand. Hanging from one hamper was a rug. The man spread the rug under the willows, and opened the hampers. Behind him came three men in scholars' square caps, all some forty to fifty years old. Two were dressed in dark grey, and the third in a blue linen gown. Fanning themselves with white paper fans, they advanced slowly. The one in blue was fat. When he reached the willows he asked one of the men in grey, with a big moustache, to take the seat of honour, and another, a thin one, to sit on the rug opposite. He himself was evidently the host, for he sat in the lowest place and poured the wine.

When they had fallen to, the fat man said, "Mr. Wei has come back. His new house is even bigger than the one in Bell Tower Street in the capital. The price was two thousand taels of silver, but in view of the honour of selling to such a distinguished customer as Mr. Wei, the owner of the house knocked several dozen taels off the price. On the tenth of last month Mr. Wei moved in. The prefect and the county magistrate called to congratulate him, and stayed there feasting until nearly midnight. There is nobody who does not respect him."

"The magistrate used to be Mr. Wei's pupil,"* said the thin man. "It was only right for him to pay his respects."

"My son-in-law's father is an old pupil of Mr. Wei's too," said the fat man. "He has a post as magistrate now in Honan Province. The day before yesterday my son-in-law came to visit me, bringing two catties of dried venison—that's it on this dish. When he goes back, he's going to ask his father to write a letter of introduction so that I can call on Mr. Wei. Then, if Mr. Wei condescends to come to the village to return the visit, the villagers won't dare to turn their donkeys and pigs loose to eat the grain in our fields any more."

"Mr. Wei is certainly a scholar," said the thin man.

"Recently, when he left the capital," said the man with whiskers, "I hear the emperor himself escorted him out of the city, taking his hand and walking nearly twenty steps with him. Mr. Wei bowed again and again, and begged him to go no further; then the emperor mounted his sedan-chair and returned to the city. Judging by this, Mr. Wei will probably soon become a great official." The three men talked on and on, but Wang Mien saw that it was growing late, and led the buffalo back.

After that, Wang Mien no longer spent his savings on books, but asked someone to buy paints for him in the city, and learnt to paint lotus

* A candidate who passed a civil service examination considered himself the "pupil" of the examiner who had passed him, and called the examiner his "patron."

flowers. At first he did not do too well, but after three months he succeeded in capturing the very essence and shades of colour of the lotus. Though he painted on paper, his flowers seemed to be growing in the water, or as if freshly plucked from the lake and placed on a scroll. When the villagers saw how well he painted, some even bought his pictures. And when Wang Mien had money he bought good things for his mother. One person told another, until the whole of Chuchi County knew that he was a famous flower painter, and people vied with each other in their eagerness to buy. By the time he was eighteen he had stopped working for Old Chin, and spent every day painting or reading old poems and essays. By degrees he no longer had to worry about his livelihood, and his mother was happy.

Wang Mien had genius. While still in his teens, he mastered the whole field of astronomy, geography, the classics and history. He was, however, eccentric. He did not look for an official post, and did not even have any friends. All day he studied behind closed doors, and when he saw in an edition of the poems of Chu Yuan a picture of the poet's costume, he made himself a very high hat and a loose flowing gown. In the fresh and flowering spring he would take his mother out in a buffalo cart, and, dressed in his high hat and loose gown, flourishing the whip and singing songs, would drive all over the countryside and around the lake. Small groups of village children would tag after him, laughing; but he did not mind them. Only his neighbour, Old Chin, realized how remarkable he was, for Old Chin was an intelligent man, though a peasant, and he had seen Wang Mien grow up. He respected and loved Wang Mien, and often asked him to his thatched cottage to talk with him.

One day Wang Mien was sitting in Old Chin's cottage when a man wearing a bailiff's cap and blue cloth gown came in. Old Chin welcomed him, and after an exchange of courtesies they sat down. This newcomer's name was Chai. He was a county runner and also a bailiff, but since Old Chin's son was his godchild he often came to the village to visit their family. Old Chin hastily called his son to make tea, kill a chicken and cook some meat to entertain the bailiff, and asked Wang Mien to accompany them.

When Bailiff Chai heard Wang Mien's name, he asked, "Is this Mr. Wang the flower painter?"

"Yes," said Old Chin. "Have you heard of him?"

"Is there anyone in the county who hasn't?" retorted the bailiff. "The other day the county magistrate commissioned me to get twenty-four paintings of flowers to send to a superior. Knowing Mr. Wang's great reputation, I've come straight here; and now I'm lucky enough to meet Mr. Wang himself." Then he turned to Wang Mien and said: "I must trouble you to do some paintings. In two weeks I shall come to fetch them, bringing the payment from Magistrate Shih."

Old Chin pressed Wang Mien to consent and, to please the old man, he agreed.

On the Way Home

By an unidentified painter of the Sung Dynasty (A.D. 960-1279)

He went home and painstakingly painted twenty-four pictures of flowers, each with a poem appended. Bailiff Chai reported this to the magistrate, who gave him twenty-four taels of silver. Of this sum Chai appropriated half. He took the flower album away with him, and then the magistrate sent it with some other presents to Mr. Wei.

When Mr. Wei picked out these paintings from among the gifts he received, he looked at them again and again, liking them so much that he could scarcely take his eyes off them. The next day he invited Magistrate Shih to a feast to thank him.

"Yesterday I received your gift of a flower album," said Mr. Wei. "Is it the work of an old master or of a contemporary?"

Not daring to conceal the truth, the magistrate told him, "It was painted by a peasant in one of the villages in my county. His name is Wang Mien, and he is quite young. I believe he has just learnt to paint; but his work is unworthy of your distinguished notice."

Mr. Wei sighed and said, "I left home so long ago that, though my native place has produced so great a man, I did not know it. I am ashamed. He shows not only remarkable skill but exceptional insight, and in future his fame and rank will certainly surpass ours. I wonder if you would invite him to pay me a visit?"

"What could be simpler?" replied Magistrate Shih. "When I leave I shall send a man to invite him. He will be only too pleased to come."

When Magistrate Shih had taken his leave of Mr. Wei, he returned to his yamen and ordered Bailiff Chai to take an invitation card to Wang Mien. Chai hurried down to the village to Old Chin's house, and sent for Wang Mien to step over. Then he told him what his business was.

Wang Mien smiled and said, "I must trouble you to inform the magistrate that Wang Mien is only a peasant and dare not accept such an honour."

The bailiff's face darkened. "When the magistrate invites, who dare refuse?" he demanded. "Look at the favour I've done you! If I hadn't recommended you, how would His Honour know you could paint? You ought by rights to be thanking me! Instead, after coming all this way, I don't see so much as a cup of tea, and you fob me off with excuses. And why won't you go, pray? Do you mean to say a county magistrate can't summon a common man? What am I to say to the magistrate when I get back?"

"It's not that, sir," said Wang Mien. "If I receive a summons from the magistrate, how dare I refuse? But you have brought an invitation, which means I am under no compulsion. I don't want to go. His Honour must excuse me."

"That doesn't make sense!" exclaimed the bailiff. "Served with a summons, you go. Asked by invitation, you don't. You simply don't know what's good for you."

"Mr. Wang," put in Old Chin, "if the magistrate sends an invitation,

he must mean well. So why not go? The proverb says, 'Magistrates can ruin families.' Why ask for trouble?"

"The bailiff doesn't understand, uncle," said Wang Mien, "but haven't you heard me tell the stories of the two ancient sages who refused to see their superiors? No, I'm not going."

"You are making it very difficult for me," said the bailiff. "What can I say to the magistrate when I go back?"

"In fact, it is difficult for you both," said Old Chin. "Mr. Wang doesn't want to go. But if he doesn't go, that'll be very embarrassing for Bailiff Chai. Now I have a plan. When you go back to the yamen, bailiff, don't say that Mr. Wang refuses the invitation, but just that he is ill and can't go. He will go in a few days when he is better."

"If he were ill," objected the bailiff, "I should have a signed statement to that effect from the neighbours."

They argued for some time. Then Old Chin prepared supper for the bailiff, and while he was eating told Wang Mien secretly to ask his mother for a little silver as messenger's fee. Only then did Chai consent to go back.

When Magistrate Shih heard the bailiff's report, he thought, "How can the fellow be ill? It's all the fault of this rascal Chai. He goes down to the villages like a donkey in a lion's hide, and he must have scared this painter fellow out of his wits. Wang Mien has never seen an official before in his life. He's afraid to come. But my patron charged me personally to get this man, and if I fail to produce him, Mr. Wei will think me incompetent. I had better go to the village myself to call on him. When he sees what an honour I'm doing him, he'll realize nobody wants to make trouble for him and won't be afraid to see me. Then I'll take him to call on my patron, and my patron will appreciate the smart way I've handled it."

Then, however, it occurred to him that his subordinates might laugh at the idea of a county magistrate calling on a mere peasant. Yet Mr. Wei had spoken of Wang Mien with the greatest respect. "If Mr. Wei respects him, I should respect him ten times as much," Magistrate Shih reflected. "And if I stoop in order to show respect to talent, there's bound to be a chapter in my praise in the local chronicles. Then my name will be remembered for hundreds of years. Why shouldn't I do it?" His mind was made up.

The next morning the magistrate called for his chair-bearers. Taking only eight runners in red and black caps, and with Bailiff Chai in attendance, he went straight down to the village. When the villagers heard the gongs, young and old flocked round to see the chair. Then the procession reached Wang Mien's house, a thatched cottage of seven or eight rooms. The door, of unvarnished wood, was firmly fastened. Bailiff Chai hurried forward to knock at the door, and after some time an old woman came out, leaning on a stick.

"He is not at home," she said. "Early this morning he took the buffalo out to water it, and he has not come back."

"The magistrate himself is here to speak with your son," said the bailiff. "How can you be so offhand? Tell me quickly where he is, so that I can go and find him."

"He is really not at home," answered the old woman. "I don't know where he is." This said, she went in closing the door behind her.

During this conversation the magistrate's chair had come up. Bailiff Chai knelt before the chair and said, "I asked for Wang Mien and found he is not at home. Won't Your Honour go to the local office to rest for a little, while I make further inquiries?" Then he escorted the chair past the back of Wang Mien's house.

Behind the house were a few strips of arable land and a big lake, its banks thickly grown with elms and mulberry trees. Then more fields could be seen, stretching to the horizon. There was a hill too, covered with fresh green trees, only a few hundred yards away. If you shouted, your voice would carry there. And round the foot of this hill, as the magistrate's chair advanced, came a little cowherd riding back to front on a water buffalo.

Hurrying over, Bailiff Chai called, "Little Chin! Did you see where Mr. Wang from next door went to water his buffalo?"

The small boy replied, "Uncle Wang has gone to Wang Market, seven miles away. He went to a feast with a relative there. This is his buffalo that I'm bringing home for him."

When Magistrate Shih heard this, he flushed angrily and said, "In that case, I need not go to the local office. Let us go back to the yamen." Thoroughly annoyed, his first impulse was to have his attendants arrest Wang Mien and punish him. Afraid, however, that Mr. Wei would call him hot-headed, he decided to swallow his anger and go back to explain to his patron that Wang Mien did not deserve to be honoured. He could punish the fellow later. Having reached this decision, he left.

Wang Mien had not gone far. He came back presently and was reproached by Old Chin, who said, "You really are too obstinate. He is the head of a county; how can you show such disrespect?"

"Please sit down, uncle," said Wang Mien, "and I will explain. This magistrate relies on Mr. Wei's authority to tyrannize over the common people here, and do all kinds of bad things. Why should I have anything to do with such a man? Now that he has gone back, he will certainly tell Mr. Wei; and if Mr. Wei becomes angry he may want to make trouble for me. So now I shall pack up my things, leave my mother, and go into hiding for a time. The only thing that worries me is leaving my mother here by herself."

His mother said, "Son, all these years, thanks to the poems and paintings you have sold, I have saved nearly fifty taels of silver. I don't have to worry about fuel and rice; and, old as I am, I'm hale and hearty.

There's no reason why you shouldn't leave home to lie low for a time. You haven't committed any crime. The officers can't arrest your mother."

"She's right," agreed Old Chin. "Besides, if you bury yourself in this village, who will recognize your talents? Go to some big place, and who knows but what you may meet with recognition. I'll keep an eye on everything here for you, and see that your mother is all right."

Wang Mien bowed his thanks to Old Chin, who went home to fetch food and wine for his friend. They feasted late into the night. The next day Wang Mien got up before dawn, packed his belongings, and had breakfast; and then Old Chin arrived. Wang Mien bowed to his mother and to Old Chin; then, in tears, son and mother bade each other farewell. Wang Mien was wearing hempen sandals and carrying his possessions on his back. Old Chin, holding a small white lantern in his hand, saw him to the end of the village and, shedding tears, bade him good-bye. Then he stood, lantern in hand, gazing after Wang Mien until he could see him no more.

Braving the wind and dew, Wang Mien travelled day after day past large posting stations and small, till he came to the city of Tsinan. Although Shantung is a northern province, its chief city was rich and populous, packed with buildings. By the time Wang Mien arrived here, his money was spent, and he had to rent a small front room in a temple and tell fortunes there. He also painted pictures of flowers, and posted up a couple to sell to passers-by. Every day he told fortunes and sold paintings, and customers flocked to him. In this way six months flew by.

Now there were some rich men in Tsinan who took a fancy to Wang Mien's paintings and became regular customers. They did not come to buy themselves, but sent rough servants who shouted and wrangled and gave Wang Mien no peace. Finally, in exasperation, he painted a picture of a big ox and pasted it up in his shop, appending some satirical verses. After that he knew he could expect trouble, and planned to remove to another town. One morning, as he was sitting in his room, his attention was attracted by a number of men and women, many of them in tears, passing down the street. Some were carrying pans, others had children in baskets suspended from a pole over their shoulders. Group after group passed, haggard, half-starved, their clothes in rags. They filled the streets, and some of them sat on the ground to beg. When Wang Mien asked where they were from, he found that they came from the villages by the Yellow River. Their fields and homes had been flooded, so now they were refugees; and since the government would do nothing for them, they were reduced to beggary.

Distressed by this sight, Wang Mien sighed and said, "Now the river has left its course again, there will be another period of great confusion. Why should I stay here?" Putting together his money and belongings, he started for home. When he reached Chekiang Province, he heard that Mr. Wei had gone back to the capital and Magistrate Shih had been promoted to another post. He could, therefore, feel easy in his mind about going home.

He bowed before his mother, and was happy to see that she was as healthy as ever. She told him that Old Chin had been very good to her, whereupon Wang Mien hastily unpacked a whole bolt of silk and a package of dried persimmons which he gave to Old Chin to express his thanks. And Old Chin prepared a feast for his homecoming. After that Wang Mien lived as before, chanting poetry, painting pictures and taking good care of his mother.

Six years later, his mother, weak from old age, took to her bed. Every means was tried to cure her, but in vain. One day she called him to her and said, "I am near the end. The last few years everybody has been telling me that as you are so learned, I should advise you to go out and become an official. Of course, being an official would reflect credit on your forefathers. But the officials I have seen have all come to a bad end. And you are so proud that if you got into trouble it would be serious. Listen, son, to my dying wish: Marry, have children and care for my grave; but don't become an official. Promise me this and I shall die in peace."

In tears, Wang Mien assented. Then his mother breathed her last. Wang Mien mourned and wept so bitterly that all the neighbours shed tears. Old Chin helped him prepare the burial clothes and coffin, while he himself carried earth to make the grave. For three years he mourned —there is no need to go into the details.

A year after the period of mourning was over, the whole empire was plunged into confusion. Fang Kuo-chen occupied Chekiang, Chang Shih-cheng occupied Soochow, and Chen Yiu-liang occupied Hunan and Kwang-tung. They were mere rebels. But at the same time, Chu Yuan-chang, who later became the first emperor of Ming, raised soldiers in Anhwei, took Nanking, and established himself as Prince of Wu. His was a kingly army. He led his troops to defeat Fang Kuo-chen, and ruled over the whole province of Chekiang, so that villages and towns were at peace once more.

One day at noon, just as Wang Mien was returning from his mother's grave, he saw a dozen horsemen entering the village. The leader of the band wore a military cap and a flowered silk battle dress. His face shone, his beard was fine, he looked every inch a king. When this man reached Wang Mien's door, he alighted from his horse, saluted and said, "May I ask where Mr. Wang Mien lives?"

"I am he," said Wang Mien, "and this is my humble house."

"I am in luck then," said the stranger, "for I have come specially to pay my respects." He ordered his followers to dismount and wait outside, and they tethered their horses beneath the willows by the lake.

The stranger took Wang Mien's hand and went into the house with him. They sat down in the positions of guest and host, and Wang Mien

asked, "May I know your honourable name and what has brought you to this village?"

"My name is Chu. I raised troops in Chiangnan and was known as the Prince of Chuyang; but now, because I hold Nanking, I am called the Prince of Wu. I have defeated Fang Kuo-chen and now I have come to pay my respects to you."

"I am an ignorant villager," said Wang Mien, "and did not recognize Your Highness. Clod that I am, what have I done to deserve the honour of a visit from the prince?"

"I am a rough and ready fellow," answered the Prince of Wu, "but at the sight of your scholarly bearing, my thirst for fame and wealth has vanished. When I was still in Chiangnan your fame reached my ears, and now I have come to consult you—how, after such a long war, can I win the love of the people?"

"Your Highness is far-sighted," said Wang Mien. "There is no need for a humble person like myself to say much. If you use goodness and justice to win the people, you will win them all—not only those in Chekiang. But if you try to conquer them by force, they will not submit however weak they are. Look at the case of Fang Kuo-chen."

The prince nodded and expressed approval; and sitting face to face they talked till evening. The prince's followers had brought rations, and Wang Mien went to the kitchen to make bread and fry leeks for the prince, sharing the meal with him. The prince then thanked him for his advice, mounted his horse and rode away.

That day Old Chin had been to the county seat. When he came back he asked Wang Mien who his visitors had been; but instead of telling him that it was the Prince of Wu, Wang Mien only said, "It was a general I knew when I was in Shantung."

In a few years the Prince of Wu pacified the country and ascended the throne, according to the will of heaven, so that once more the empire was united. His dynasty was called Ming, and his reign Hung Wu. Once more the villagers could live at peace, enjoying the fruits of their labour. During the fourth year of the reign Old Chin went to the county seat again, and on his return told Wang Mien, "Mr. Wei has been sentenced to exile in Hochou. I have brought a bulletin to show you."

Wang Mien read it, and discovered that, since his surrender, Mr. Wei had continued to indulge in foolish display, calling himself a senior statesman even in the imperial presence, until the emperor in anger had banished him to Hochou to look after the grave of Yu Chueh. This decree was followed by the rules of the Board of Ceremonies for the civil service examinations. Candidates would be tested every three years, and required only to write essays on the Confucian classics.

Pointing this out to Old Chin, Wang Mien said, "These rules are not good. Future candidates, knowing that there is an easy way to high position, will look down on real scholarship."

By now dusk had fallen. It was early summer and the weather was

turning warm. Old Chin set a table on the threshing floor, and they drank wine. Soon the moon came up from the east, and shone so brightly that everything seemed made of glass. The water-birds had gone to their nests, and all was quiet. Holding his cup in his left hand, Wang Mien pointed to the stars with his right, and said, "Look! The Chains have invaded the Scholars.* That shows that scholars of this generation have hard times ahead."

As he spoke, a strange wind sprang up. It soughed through the trees, and made the waterfowl take wing, crying in alarm, while Wang Mien and Old Chin hid their faces in their sleeves for fear. Soon the wind dropped, and when they looked again they saw about a hundred small stars in the sky, all falling towards the southeast horizon.

"Heaven has taken pity on the scholars," said Wang Mien. "These stars have been sent down to maintain the literary tradition. We shan't live to see it, though." Then they cleared away the things and went to bed.

Later on, many rumours were heard to the effect that the government had ordered the Chekiang authorities to offer Wang Mien an official appointment. At first he ignored these rumours; but, when more and more people began to talk of it, he secretly packed his belongings and, without telling Old Chin, slipped away by night to Kuaichi Mountain. After another six months an envoy with an imperial decree, followed by retainers carrying silk and brocade, did actually come to Old Chin's door. They saw an old man of more than eighty, with a white beard and white hair, leaning on a stick. The envoy greeted him, and Old Chin invited him into his cottage to take a seat.

"Does Mr. Wang Mien live in this village?" asked the envoy. "His Majesty has appointed him Commissioner of Records. I have brought the imperial decree."

"He belongs to this village," replied Old Chin, "but he disappeared long ago."

After Old Chin had served tea, he led the envoy to Wang Mien's house, and pushed open the door. The rooms were filled with cobwebs and the yard with weeds, so they knew it was true that Wang Mien had been gone for a long time. The envoy expressed regret, and went back to report to the emperor.

Wang Mien lived as a hermit in Kuaichi Mountain, and never disclosed his real name. When later he fell ill and died, his neighbours there collected some money and buried him at the foot of the mountain. During the same year, Old Chin died of old age in his home. Curiously enough, writers and scholars nowadays refer to Wang Mien as the Commissioner of Records, though actually he never served as an official for a single day. This is a point I have tried to make clear. The foregoing is only the introduction to the story which I shall now begin.

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* Chinese names for certain constellations.

Chapter II

In Hsueh Market, a village of Wenshang County, Shantung, there lived over a hundred families, all of whom worked on the land. At the entrance to the village was a Buddhist temple which had three halls and about a dozen empty rooms. Its back door overlooked the river. Peasants from all around contributed to the upkeep of this temple, and only one monk lived there. Here the villagers would come to discuss public business.

It was the end of the Cheng Hua period (1465-1487) of the Ming Dynasty, when the country was prosperous. One year, on the eighth of the first month, just after New Year, some of the villagers were summoned to the temple to discuss the dragon lantern dance for the fifteenth. At breakfast time the man who usually took the lead, Shen Hsiang-fu, walked in followed by seven or eight others. In the main hall they bowed to Buddha, and the monk came to wish them a happy New Year. As soon as they had returned his greeting, Shen reproved him.

"Monk! At New Year you should burn more incense before Buddha! Gracious Heaven! You've been pocketing money from all sides, and you ought to spend a little of it. Come here, all of you, and take a look at this lamp: it's only half filled with oil." Then, pointing to an old man who was better dressed than most: "Not to mention others, Mr. Hsun alone sent you fifty catties of oil on New-Year's Eve. But you are using it all for your cooking, instead of for the glory of Buddha."

The monk waited until Shen had finished. Then he fetched a pewter kettle, put in a handful of tea leaves, filled the kettle with water, boiled it over the fire and poured out tea for them. Old Mr. Hsun was the first to speak.

"How much do we each have to pay for the lantern dance in the temple this year?" he asked.

"Wait till my relative comes," said Shen. "We'll discuss it together."

As they were speaking, a man walked in. Red-rimmed eyes, swarthy face, and sparse, dingy whiskers. His cap was cocked to one side, his blue cloth gown was greasy as an oil-vat, and he carried a donkey switch in one hand. After making a casual gesture of greeting to the company, he plumped himself down in the seat of honour. This was Hsia, the new village head for Hsueh Market.

Sitting there in the seat of honour, he shouted: "Monk! Take my donkey to the manger in the back yard, unsaddle it and feed it plenty of hay. After my business here I have to go to a feast with Bailiff Huang of the county yamen." Having given these orders, he hoisted one foot onto the bench, and started massaging the small of his back with his fists, saying, "I envy you farmers these days. This New Year I've got invitations from everybody in the magistrate's yamen, and I have to go to wish them the season's greetings. I trot about on this donkey to the

county seat and back until my head reels. And this damned beast stumbled on the road and threw me, so that my backside is still sore."

"On the third I prepared a small dinner for you," said Shen. "I suppose it was because you were so busy that you didn't come."

"You don't have to remind me," said Village Head Hsia. "Since New Year, for the last seven or eight days, what free time have I had? Even if I had two mouths, I couldn't get through all the eating. Take Bailiff Huang, who's invited me today. He's a man who can talk face to face with the magistrate. And since he honours me like this, wouldn't he be offended if I didn't go?"

"I heard that Bailiff Huang had been sent out on some business for the magistrate since the beginning of the year," said Shen. "He has no brothers or sons, so who will act as host?"

"You don't understand," said Hsia. "Today's feast is given by Constable Li. His own rooms are small, so he is using Bailiff Huang's house."

Eventually they started discussing the dragon lanterns. "I'm tired of managing it for you," said Village Head Hsia. "I took the lead every year in the past, and everyone wrote down what contribution he would make, and then failed to pay up. Heaven knows how much I had to pay to make good the deficit. Besides, all the officials in the yamen are preparing lanterns this year, and I shall have too much to watch. What time do I have to look at the lanterns in the village? Still, since you've mentioned it, I shall make a contribution. Choose someone to be responsible. A man like Mr. Hsun, who has broad lands and plenty of grain, should be asked to give more. Let each family pay its share, and you'll get the thing going." Nobody dared disagree. They immediately came down on Mr. Hsun for half the money, and made up the rest between themselves. In this way they raised two to three taels of silver, a record of the contributors being made.

The monk then brought out tea, sugar wafers, dates, melon seeds, dried beancurd, chestnuts and assorted sweets. He spread two tables, and invited Village Head Hsia to sit at the head. Then he poured out tea for them.

"The children are growing up," said Shen again, "and this year we must find them a teacher. This temple can be used as a school."

The others agreed.

"There are a lot of families who have sons who should be in school," said one of them. "For instance, Mr. Shen's son is Village Head Hsia's son-in-law. Hsia is always getting notices from the magistrate, so he needs someone who can read. But the best thing would be to find a teacher from the county seat."

"A teacher?" said the village head. "Of course there is one. You know who? He's in our yamen, and he used to teach in the chief accountant Ku's house. His name is Chou Chin. He's over sixty. The former magistrate placed him first on the list of county candidates, but he's never yet been able to pass the prefectural examination. Mr. Ku

employed him as tutor for his son for three years; and his son passed the examination last year, at the same time as Mei Chiu from our village. The day that young Ku was welcomed back from the school he wore a scholar's cap and a broad red silk sash, riding a horse from the magistrate's stable while all the gongs and trumpets sounded. When he reached the door of his house, I and the other yamen officials offered him wine in the street. Then Mr. Chou was asked over. Mr. Ku toasted his son's teacher three times and invited him to sit in the seat of honour. Mr. Chou chose as entertainment the opera about Liang Hao, who won the first place in the palace examination when he was eighty; and Mr. Ku was not at all pleased. But then the opera showed how Liang Hao's pupil won the same distinction at seventeen or eighteen, and Mr. Ku knew that it was a compliment to his son. That made him feel better. If you want a teacher, I'll invite Mr. Chou for you." All the villagers approved. When they had finished their tea the monk brought in some beef noodles, and after eating these they went home.

The next day, sure enough, Village Head Hsia spoke to Chou Chin. His salary would be twelve taels of silver a year. And it was arranged that he should eat with the monk, whom he would pay two cents a day. It was settled that he should come after the Lantern Festival, and begin teaching on the twentieth.

On the sixteenth the villagers sent in contributions to Shen Hsiang-fu, who prepared a feast for the new teacher to which he also invited Mei Chiu, the new scholar of the village. Mei Chiu arrived early, wearing his new square cap, but Chou Chin did not turn up till nearly noon. When dogs started barking outside, Shen Hsiang-fu went out to welcome the guest; and the villagers stared as Chou Chin came in. He was wearing an old felt cap, a tattered grey silk gown, the right sleeve and seat of which were in shreds, and a pair of shabby red silk slippers. He had a thin, dark face, and a white beard. Shen escorted him in, and only then did Mei Chiu rise slowly to greet him.

"Who is this gentleman?" asked Chou.

They told him, "He is Mr. Mei, our village scholar."

When Chou Chin heard this, he declared it would be presumptuous on his part to allow Mei to bow to him. And although Mei Chiu said, "Today is different," he still refused.

"You are older than he is," said the villagers. "You had better not insist."

But Mei Chiu rounded on them, "You people don't understand the rule of our school. Those who have passed the prefectural examination are considered senior to those who have not, regardless of age. Today happens to be exceptional, and Mr. Chou must still be honoured."

Ming Dynasty scholars called all those who passed the prefectural examination "classmates," and those who only qualified for this examination "juniors." A young man in his teens who passed was considered senior to an unsuccessful candidate, even if the latter were eighty years

old. It was like the case of a concubine. A woman is called "new wife" when she marries, and later "mistress"; but a concubine remains "new wife" even when her hair is white.

Since Mei Chiu spoke like this, Chou Chin did not insist on being polite, but let Mei Chiu bow to him. When all the others had greeted him too, they sat down. Mei and Chou were the only two to have dates in their teacups—all the others had plain green tea. After they had drunk their tea two tables were laid, and Chou Chin was invited to take the seat of honour, Mei Chiu the second place. Then the others sat down in order of seniority, and wine was poured. Chou Chin, cup in hand, thanked the villagers and drained his cup. On each table were eight or nine dishes—pig's head, chicken, carp, tripe, liver and other dishes. At the signal to begin, they fell to with their chopsticks, like a whirlwind scattering wisps of cloud. And half the food had gone before they noticed that Chou Chin had not eaten a bite.

"Why aren't you eating anything?" asked Shen. "Surely we haven't offended you the very first day?" He selected some choice morsels and put them on the teacher's plate.

But Chou Chin stopped him and said, "To tell you the truth—I have sworn off meat for life."

"How thoughtless we have been!" exclaimed his hosts. "May we ask why you are fasting?"

"On account of a vow I made before the shrine of Buddha when my mother was ill," said Chou Chin. "I have been fasting now for more than ten years."

"Your fasting reminds me of a joke I heard the other day from Mr. Ku in the county town," said Mei Chiu. "It is a one character to seven character verse about a teacher." The villagers put down their chopsticks to listen, while he recited:

A
Foolish scholar
Fasted so long,
Whiskers covered his cheeks;
Neglecting to study the classics,
He left pen and paper aside.
He'll come without being invited next year.

After this recitation he said, "A learned man like Mr. Chou here is certainly not foolish." Then, putting his hand over his mouth to hide a smile, he added, "But he should become a scholar soon, and the description of the fasting and the whiskers is true to life." He gave a loud guffaw, and everybody laughed with him, while Chou Chin did not know which way to look.

Shen Hsiang-fu hastily filled a cup with wine and said, "Mr. Mei

should drink a cup of wine. Mr. Chou was the teacher in Mr. Ku's house."

"I didn't know that," said Mei Chiu. "I should certainly drink a cup to apologize. But this joke was not against Mr. Chou: it was about a scholar. However, this fasting is a good thing. I have an uncle who never ate meat either. But after he passed the prefectural examination, his patron sent him some sacrificial meat, and my grandmother said, 'If you don't eat this, Confucius will be angry, and some terrible calamity may happen. At the very least, he will make you fall sick.' So my uncle stopped fasting. Now, Mr. Chou, you are bound to pass the examination this autumn. Then you will be offered sacrificial meat, and I'm sure you will stop fasting."

They all said this was a lucky omen, and drank a toast to congratulate Chou Chin in advance, until the poor man's face turned a mottled red and white, and he could barely stammer out his thanks. While they still had winecups in their hands, soup was carried in from the kitchen with a big dish of dumplings and a plate of fried cakes. They assured Chou Chin that there was no animal fat in the cakes, and pressed him to eat some. But he was afraid the soup was unclean, and asked for tea instead.

While they were eating the dessert, someone asked Shen, "Where is the village head today? Why hasn't he come to welcome Mr. Chou?"

"He has gone to a feast with Constable Li," said Shen.

"These last few years, under the new magistrate, Mr. Li has done very well," said someone else. "In one year he must make about a thousand taels of silver. Only he is fond of gambling. It's a pity he's not like Bailiff Huang. Bailiff Huang used to play too, but later he turned over a new leaf and was able to build a house just like a palace—it's grand."

"Since your relative became the village head," said Mr. Hsun to Shen Hsiang-fu, "he's been in luck. Another year or two, and I suppose he will be like Bailiff Huang."

"He's not doing badly," said Shen. "But it'll be several years before his dream of catching up with Bailiff Huang comes true."

With his mouth full of cake, Mr. Mei put in: "There *is* something in dreams." And turning to Chou Chin: "Mr. Chou, these past years, during the examinations, what dreams have you had?"

"None at all," replied Chou Chin.

"I was fortunate," said Mei Chiu. "Last year on New-Year's Day, I dreamed that I was on a very high mountain. The sun in the sky was directly above me, but suddenly it fell down on my head! Sweating with fright, I woke up and rubbed my head, and it still seemed hot. I didn't understand then what the dream meant, but later it came true!"

By this time all the cakes were finished, and they had another round of drinks. By then it was time to light the lamps, and Mei Chiu and all the others went home, while Shen Hsiang-fu produced blue bedding and

escorted Mr. Chou to the temple, where he settled with the monk that the two empty rooms at the back should be used for the school.

When the day came to start school, Shen Hsiang-fu and the other villagers took their sons, large and small, to pay their respects to the teacher. And Chou Chin taught them. That evening, when he opened the envelopes containing their school fees, he found there was one tenth of a tael of silver from the Hsun family with an extra eight cents for tea, while the others had given only three or four cents or a dozen coppers apiece; so altogether he had not enough for one month's food. He gave what he had to the monk, however, promising to settle his account later.

The children were a wild lot. And the moment Chou Chin took his eyes off them, they would slip outside to play hopscotch or kick balls. They got up to mischief every single day, yet he had to sit there patiently and teach them.

Soon more than two months had passed and it began to grow warm. One day after lunch, Chou Chin opened the back gate and went out to stroll on the river bank. It was a small country place, with some peach trees and willows beside the stream, their pink and green beautifully intermingled. Chou Chin enjoyed the scenery until it began to drizzle, when he went back to his doorway to watch the rain falling on the river and mist shrouding the distant trees, making them look even lovelier than before. The rain was falling more heavily when a boat came downstream—a small craft with a matting roof which could not keep out the wet. As it approached the bank, he saw a man sitting in the middle of the boat and two servants in the stern, while in the bow were two hampers. They reached the bank and the man ordered the boatman to moor the boat, then stepped ashore followed by his servants. He was wearing a scholar's cap, a sapphire blue gown and black slippers with white soles. His beard was combed into three tufts, and he looked over thirty. Coming to the temple gate he nodded to Chou Chin, then entered saying to himself, "This seems to be a school."

"Yes," said Chou Chin, accompanying him in and greeting him.

"And you, I suppose, are the teacher?"

"That is correct."

"How is it we don't see the monk?" the stranger asked his servants.

But just then the monk hurried in, saying, "Please take a seat, Mr. Wang, while I make tea for you." Then he told Chou Chin, "This is Mr. Wang, a new provincial scholar. Please sit down and keep him company while I go to make tea."

The newcomer showed no false modesty. When the servants drew up a bench he promptly plumped himself down in the middle of it, leaving the teacher to squeeze himself onto one end.

"What is your name?" he demanded.

Knowing that this man was a provincial scholar, Chou Chin replied, "Your pupil is called Chou."

"Where did you teach before?"

"In the family of Mr. Ku of the county yamen."

"Aren't you the man who came first in that test my patron, Mr. Pai, supervised? He said that you were teaching in Mr. Ku's family. That's right. That's right."

"Do you know my former employer, Mr. Ku, sir?"

"Mr. Ku is one of the secretaries in our office. He is one of my sworn brothers too."

Presently the monk brought in tea, and when they had drunk it Chou Chin said, "I read your examination essay over and over again, sir. The last two paragraphs were particularly fine."

"Those two paragraphs were not by me."

"You are too modest, sir. Who else could have written them?"

"Although not by me, they were not by any human being," said the scholar. "It was the first day of the examination, getting on for dusk, but I had still not finished the first essay, and I said to myself, 'Usually I write very quickly. What makes me so slow today?' As I was racking my brains, I dozed off on the desk. Then I saw five green-faced men leaping into the cell. One of them made a mark on my head with a big brush which he had in his hand, then darted away. Then a man in a gauze cap, red robe and golden belt came in, who shook me and said, 'Mr. Wang, please get up!' I woke up, trembling, bathed in icy sweat, and taking the pen into my hand began to write without knowing what I was doing. From this one can see that there are spirits in the Examination School. When I made this statement to the Chief Examiner, he said that I ought to pass the very highest examination."

He was speaking with great gusto, when a small boy came in with a written exercise. Chou Chin told him to put it down, but Mr. Wang said, "You go ahead and correct it. I have other things to see to." Then the teacher went to his desk while Mr. Wang ordered his servants, "Since it is dark and the rain has not stopped, bring the hamper here and tell the monk to cook a pint of rice. Order the boatman to wait. I shall leave tomorrow morning." He told Chou Chin, "I have just come back from visiting my ancestral graves, and did not expect to run into rain. I shall spend the night here."

While he was speaking, he caught sight of the name Hsun Mei on the little boy's exercise, and gave an involuntary start. He pursed his lips and his face was a study, but Chou Chin could not very well question him. When Chou Chin had finished correcting the exercise and sat down again as before, Mr. Wang asked, "How old was that boy just now?"

"Seven."

"Did he start school this year? Did you choose that name for him?"

"I didn't choose the name. At the beginning of the term his father asked the new village scholar, Mei Chiu, to choose a name for him. And Mr. Mei said, 'My own name seems to be an auspicious one, so I will give it to him and hope that he will turn out like me.'"

"This is certainly a joke," said Mr. Wang with a short laugh. "On the first day of this year I dreamed that I was looking at the list of metropolitan examination results. My name was on it—that goes without saying. But the third name was that of another man from Wenshang County called Hsun Mei, and I wondered if there could be a provincial scholar from my county called Hsun. Fancy it's turning out to be this little student's name! As if I could be on the same list as he!" He burst out laughing, then went on, "It's obvious that dreams are unreliable. Fame and achievement depend upon study, not upon any supernatural forces."

"Some dreams do come true, though," said Chou Chin. "The day that I arrived here, Mr. Mei told me that one New-Year's Day he dreamed that a great red sun fell on his head, and that year, sure enough, he passed the prefectural examination."

"That doesn't prove anything," retorted Mr. Wang. "Suppose he does pass the prefectural examination and have a sun falling on his head—what about me? I have passed the provincial examination. Shouldn't the whole sky fall on my head?"

As they were chatting, lights were brought in, and the servants spread the desk with wine, rice, chicken, fish, duck and pork. Mr. Wang fell to, without inviting Chou Chin to join him; and when Mr. Wang had finished, the monk sent up the teacher's rice with one dish of cabbage and a jug of hot water. When Chou Chin had eaten, they both went to bed. The next day the weather cleared. Mr. Wang got up, washed and dressed, bade Chou Chin a casual good-bye and went away in his boat, leaving the schoolroom floor so littered with chicken, duck, and fish bones and melon-seed shells, that it took Chou Chin a whole morning to clear them all away, and the sweeping made him dizzy.

When the villagers heard about Mr. Wang's dream that Mr. Hsun's son had passed the metropolitan examination in the same year as himself, they thought it a great joke, and Hsun Mei's classmates took to calling him Dr. Hsun. But their fathers and elder brothers were not amused. They went to congratulate Mr. Hsun on being the father of a metropolitan graduate, until he was so angry that he could hardly speak.

And Shen Hsiang-fu told the villagers secretly, "Mr. Wang could never have said such a thing. It's all made up by that fellow Chou. He saw that the Hsun family was the only one in the village with money, so he spun this yarn to flatter them, in the hope that they would send him more food during festivals. Only the other day I heard that the Hsuns sent some dried beancurd to the temple; and they have often sent him dumplings and cakes too. Depend on it, this is the reason."

Everyone was indignant, and Chou Chin's position became precarious. But since he had been introduced by the village head, they could not dismiss him; and he went on teaching as best he could for a year. At the end of that time, however, Village Head Hsia also became

convinced that the teacher was a fool, because Chou Chin did not come often enough to flatter him. Accordingly, Hsia allowed the villagers to dismiss him.

Having lost his job, Chou Chin went home. He could barely keep body and soul together. One day his brother-in-law, Chin Yin-yu, came to see him and said, "Don't take offence at what I say, brother. But it seems to me you'll never win success or fame through studying. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and a bad job is better than none. I am going to the provincial capital with some other merchants to buy goods, and we need someone to keep accounts. Why don't you come with us? You are all on your own, and in our group you won't want for food or clothes."

"I can hardly be worse off than I am now," thought Chou Chin. So he consented.

Chin chose an auspicious day, and they set off with a party of merchants to the provincial capital, where they stayed in a merchants' guild. Since Chou Chin had nothing to do, he strolled through the streets until he saw a group of workmen who said that they were going to repair the Examination School. He followed them to the gate of the school and wanted to go in, but the gateman cracked his whip and drove him away.

That evening he told his brother-in-law how much he wanted to look over the Examination School, and Chin had to tip the gateman to get him in. Some of the other merchants decided to go too, and asked the guild head to act as their guide. This time they simply sailed through the gate of the school, because the gateman, whose palm had been greased, made no attempt to stop them. When they reached the Dragon Gate, the guild head pointed to it, and said, "This is the gate for scholars." They went into a corridor with examination cells on both sides, and the guild head told them, "This is Number One. You can go in and have a look." Chou Chin went in, and when he saw the desk set there so neatly, tears started to his eyes. He gave a long sigh, knocked his head against the desk, and lost consciousness.

Chapter III

When Chou Chin fell senseless to the ground, his friends were greatly taken aback, thinking he must be ill.

"I suppose this place has been shut up so long that the air is bad," said the guild head. "That must be why he has collapsed."

"I'll hold him up," said Chin to the guild head, "while you go and get some hot water from the workmen over there to bring him to."

When the guild head brought back the water, three or four of the others raised Chou Chin up and poured water down his throat until he gave a gurgle and spat out some phlegm. "That's better," they said,

and helped him to his feet. But when Chou Chin saw the desk he beat his head against it again. Only, instead of falling unconscious, this time he burst into loud sobbing. Not all their entreaties could stop him.

"Are you out of your mind?" demanded Chin. "We came to the Examination School to enjoy a bit of sightseeing. Nobody has died in your family. Why take on like this?" But Chou Chin paid no attention. He just leaned his head against the desk, and went on crying. After crying in the first room, he rushed over to cry in the second and then the third, rolling over and over on the floor till all his friends felt sorry for him. Seeing the state he was in, Chin and the guild head tried to prop him up, one on each side; but he refused to budge. He cried and cried, until he was spitting blood. Then all the others lent a hand to carry him out and set him down in a tea-house in front of the Examination School. They urged him to drink a bowl of tea. But he just went on sniffing and blinking away his tears, looking quite broken-hearted.

"What's your trouble, Mr. Chou?" asked one of them. "What made you cry so bitterly in there?"

"I don't think you realize, gentlemen," said Chin, "that my brother-in-law is not really a merchant. He has studied hard for scores of years, but never even passed the prefectural examination. That's why the sight of the Provincial Examination School today upset him."

Touched on the raw like this, Chou Chin let himself go and sobbed even more noisily.

"It seems to me you're the one to blame, Old Chin," said another merchant. "If Mr. Chou is a scholar, why did you bring him on such business?"

"Because he was so hard up," said Chin. "He had lost his job as a teacher; there was no other way out for him."

"Judging by your brother-in-law's appearance," said another, "he must be a very learned man. It's because nobody recognizes his worth that he feels so wronged."

"He's learned all right," said Chin, "but he's been unlucky."

"Anybody who buys the rank of scholar of the Imperial College can go in for the examination," said the man who had just spoken. "Since Mr. Chou is so learned, why not buy him a rank so that he can take the examination? If he passes, that will make up for his unhappiness today."

"I agree with you," rejoined Chin. "But where's the money to come from?"

By now Chou Chin had stopped crying.

"That's not difficult," said the same merchant. "We're all friends here. Let's raise some money between us and lend it to Mr. Chou, so that he can go in for the examination. If he passes and becomes an official, a few taels of silver will mean nothing to him—he can easily

repay us. Even if he doesn't pay us back, we merchants always fritter away a few taels one way or another, and this is in a good cause. What do you all say?"

The others responded heartily:

"A friend in need is a friend indeed!"

"A man who knows what is the right thing to do, but doesn't do it, is a coward!"

"Of course we'll help. We only wonder if Mr. Chou will condescend to accept."

"If you do this," cried Chou Chin, "I shall look on you as my foster-parents. Even if I become a mule or a horse in my next life,* I shall repay your kindness." Then he knelt down and kowtowed to them all, and they bowed to him in return. Chin thanked them too. They drank a few more bowls of tea, and Chou Chin no longer cried, but talked and laughed with the others until it was time to return to the guild.

The next day, sure enough, the four merchants raised two hundred taels of silver between them. This they gave to Chin, who promised to be responsible for any expenses over and above that sum. Chou Chin thanked them again; and the guild head prepared a feast for the merchants on Chou Chin's behalf. Meantime Chin had taken the silver to the Provincial Treasury. As luck would have it, it was just the time for the preliminary test for the provincial examination. Chou Chin took the test and came first of all the candidates from the Imperial College. On the eighth of the eighth month he went to the Examination School for the provincial examination, and the sight of the place where he had cried made him unexpectedly happy. As the proverb says, "Joy puts heart into a man." Thus he wrote seven excellent examination papers, then went back to the guild, for Chin and the others had not yet completed their purchases. When the results were published, Chou Chin had passed with distinction, and all the merchants were delighted.

They went back together to Wenshang County, where Chou Chin paid his respects to the magistrate and the local examiner, and officials sent in their cards and called to congratulate him. Local people who were no relations of his claimed relationship, and perfect strangers claimed acquaintanceship. This kept him busy for over a month. When Shen Hsiang-fu heard the news, he got the villagers in Hsueh Market to chip in to buy four chickens, fifty eggs and some rice balls, then went to the county seat to congratulate Chou Chin, who kept him to a feast. Mr. Hsun, it goes without saying, came to pay his respects too.

Soon it was time to go to the examination in the capital. Chou Chin's travelling expenses and clothes were provided by Chin. He passed the metropolitan examination too; and after the palace examination he was given an official post. In three years he rose to the rank of censor and was appointed commissioner of education for Kwangtung Province.

Now though Chou Chin engaged several secretaries, he thought, "I had bad luck myself so long, now that I'm in office I mean to read all the papers carefully. I mustn't leave everything to my secretaries, and suppress real talent." Having come to this decision, he went to Canton to take up his post. The day after his arrival he burnt incense, posted up placards, and held two examinations.

The third examination was for candidates from Nanhai and Panyu counties. Commissioner Chou sat in the hall and watched the candidates crowding in. There were young and old, handsome and homely, smart and shabby men among them. The last candidate to enter was thin and sallow, had a grizzled beard and was wearing an old felt hat. Canton has a warm climate; still, this was the twelfth month; yet that candidate only had on a linen gown, and he was shivering with cold as he took his paper and went to his cell. Chou Chin made a mental note of this before sealing up their doors. During the first interval, from his seat at the head of the hall he watched this candidate in the linen gown come up to hand in his paper. The man's clothes were so threadbare that a few more holes had appeared since he went into the cell. Commissioner Chou looked at his own garments—his magnificent crimson robe and gilded belt—then he referred to the register of names, and asked, "You are Fan Chin, aren't you?"

Kneeling, Fan Chin answered, "Yes, Your Excellency."

"How old are you this year?"

"I gave my age as thirty. Actually, I am fifty-four."

"How many times have you taken the examination?"

"I first went in for it when I was twenty, and I have taken it over twenty times since then."

"How is it you have never passed?"

"My essays are too poor," replied Fan Chin, "so none of the honourable examiners will pass me."

"That may not be the only reason," said Commissioner Chou. "Leave your paper here, and I will read it through carefully."

Fan Chin kowtowed and left.

It was still early, and no other candidates were coming to hand in their papers, so Commissioner Chou picked up Fan Chin's essay and read it through. But he was disappointed. "Whatever is the fellow driving at in this essay?" he wondered. "I see now why he never passed." He put it aside. However, when no other candidates appeared, he thought, "I might as well have another look at Fan Chin's paper. If he shows the least talent, I'll pass him to reward his perseverance." He read it through again, and this time felt there was something in it. He was just going to read through it once more, when another candidate came up to hand in his paper.

* This refers to the Buddhist belief in transmigration. The worst thing that could happen to a man was to become an animal.

This man knelt down, and said, "Sir, I beg for an oral test."

"I have your paper here," said Commissioner Chou kindly. "What need is there for an oral test?"

"I can compose poems in all the ancient styles. I beg you to set a subject to test me."

The commissioner frowned and said, "Since the emperor attaches importance to essays, why should you bring up the poems of the Han and Tang Dynasties? A candidate like you should devote all his energy to writing compositions, instead of wasting time on heterodox studies. I have come here at the imperial command to examine essays, not to discuss miscellaneous literary forms with you. This devotion to superficial things means that your real work must be neglected. No doubt your essay is nothing but flashy talk, not worth the reading. Attendants! Drive him out!" At the word of command, attendants ran in from both sides to seize the candidate and push him outside the gate.

But although Commissioner Chou had had this man driven out, he still read his paper. This candidate was called Wei Hao-ku, and he wrote clearly. "I will pass him lowest on the list," Chou Chin decided. And, taking up his brush, he made a mark at the end of the paper as a reminder.

Then he read Fan Chin's paper again. This time he gave a gasp of amazement. "This was too deep for me to understand the first two times I read it!" he exclaimed. "But, after reading it for the third time, I realize it is the most wonderful essay in the world—every word a pearl. This shows how often bad examiners must have suppressed real genius." Hastily taking up his brush, he carefully drew three circles on Fan Chin's paper, marking it as first. He then picked up Wei Hao-ku's paper again, and marked it as twentieth. After this he collected all the other essays and took them away with him.

Soon the results were published, and Fan Chin's name was first on the list. When he went in to see the commissioner, Chou Chin commended him warmly. And when the last successful candidate—Wei Hao-ku—went in, Commissioner Chou gave him some encouragement and advised him to work hard and stop studying miscellaneous works. Then, to the sound of drums and trumpets, the successful candidates left.

The next day Commissioner Chou set off for the capital. Fan Chin alone escorted him for ten miles of the way, doing reverence before his chair. Then the commissioner called him to his side, and said, "Your essay showed real maturity, and you are certain to do well in the provincial examination too. After I have made my report to the authorities, I will wait for you in the capital."

Fan Chin kowtowed again in thanks, then stood to one side of the road as the examiner's chair was carried swiftly off. Only when the banners had passed out of sight behind the next hill did he turn back to his lodgings to settle his score. His home was about fifteen miles from the city, and he had to travel all night to reach it. He bowed to

his mother who lived with him in a thatched cottage with a thatched shed outside, his mother occupying the front room and his wife the back one. His wife was the daughter of Butcher Hu of the market.

Delighted by his success, Fan Chin's mother and wife lit the fire to prepare a meal. Then his father-in-law arrived, bringing pork sausages and a bottle of wine. Fan Chin greeted him, and they sat down together.

"Since I had the bad luck to marry my daughter to a scarecrow like you," said Butcher Hu, "heaven knows how much you have cost me. Now I must have done some good deed to make you pass the examination. I've brought this wine to celebrate."

Fan Chin assented meekly, and called his wife to cook the sausages and warm the wine. He and his father-in-law sat in the thatched shed, while his mother and wife prepared food in the kitchen.

"Now that you have become a gentleman," went on Butcher Hu, "you must do things in proper style. Of course, men in my profession are decent, high-class people; and I am your elder too—you mustn't put on any airs before me. But these peasants round here, dung-carriers and the like, are low people. If you greet them and treat them as equals, that will be a breach of etiquette and will make me lose face too. You're such a fine, good-for-nothing fellow, I'm telling you this for your own good, so that you won't make a laughing-stock of yourself."

"Your advice is quite right, father," replied Fan Chin.

"Let your mother eat with us too," went on Butcher Hu. "She has only vegetables usually—it's a shame! Let my daughter join us too. She can't have tasted lard more than two or three times since she married you a dozen years ago, poor thing!"

So Fan Chin's mother and wife sat down to share the meal with them. They ate until sunset, by which time Butcher Hu was tipsy. Mother and son thanked him profusely; then, throwing his jacket over his shoulders, the butcher staggered home bloated. The next day Fan Chin had to call on relatives and friends.

Wei Hao-ku invited him to meet some other scholars who had passed the examination when he did, and since it was the year for the provincial examination they held a number of literary meetings. Soon it was the end of the sixth month. Fan Chin's fellow candidates asked him to go to the provincial capital for the examination with them, but he had no money for the journey. He went to ask his father-in-law to help.

Butcher Hu spat in his face, and poured out a torrent of abuse. "Don't be a fool!" he roared. "Just passing one examination has turned your head completely—you're like a toad trying to swallow a swan! And I hear that you scraped through not because of your essay, but because the examiner pitied you for being so old. Now, like a fool, you want to pass the higher examination and become an official. But you can't be an official unless it's in your stars. Look at the Chang family in the city. All those officials have pots of money, dignified faces and big ears. But

your mouth sticks out and you've a chin like an ape—you should look at your face in a puddle on the ground. You look like a monkey, yet you want to become an official. Come off it! Next year I shall find a teaching job for you with one of my friends so that you can make a few taels of silver to support that old, never-dying mother of yours and your wife—and it's high time you did! Yet you ask me for travelling expenses! I kill just one pig a day, and only make ten cents per pig. If I give you all my silver, my family will have to live on air." The butcher went on cursing at full blast, till Fan Chin's head spun.

When he got home again, he thought to himself, "Commissioner Chou said that I showed maturity. And, from ancient times till now, who ever passed the first examination without going in for the second? I shan't rest easy till I've taken it." So he asked his fellow candidates to help him, and went to the city, without telling his father-in-law, to take the examination. When the examination was over he returned home, only to find that his family had had no food for two days. And Butcher Hu cursed him again.

The day that the results came out there was nothing to eat in the house, and Fan Chin's mother told him, "Take that laying hen of mine to the market and sell it; then buy a few measures of rice to make gruel. I'm faint with hunger."

Fan Chin tucked the hen under his arm and hurried out.

He had only been gone an hour or so, when gongs sounded and three horsemen galloped up. They alighted, tethered their horses to the shed, and called out: "Where is the honourable Mr. Fan? We have come to congratulate him on passing the provincial examination."

Not knowing what had happened, Fan Chin's mother had hidden herself in the house for fear. But when she heard that he had passed, she plucked up courage to poke her head out and say, "Please come in and sit down. My son has gone out."

"So this is the old lady," said the heralds. And they pressed forward to demand a tip.

In the midst of this excitement two more batches of horsemen arrived. Some squeezed inside while the others packed themselves into the shed, where they had to sit on the ground. Neighbours gathered round, too, to watch; and the flustered old lady asked one of them to go to look for her son. The neighbour ran to the market-place, but Fan Chin was nowhere to be seen. Only when he reached the east end of the market did he discover the scholar, clutching the hen tightly against his chest and holding a sales sign in one hand. Fan Chin was pacing slowly along, looking right and left for a customer.

"Go home quickly, Mr. Fan!" cried the neighbour. "Congratulations! You have passed the provincial examination. Your house is full of heralds."

Thinking this fellow was making fun of him, Fan Chin pretended not

to hear, and walked forward with lowered head. Seeing that he paid no attention, the neighbour went up to him and tried to grab the hen.

"Why are you taking my hen?" protested Fan Chin. "You don't want to buy it."

"You have passed," insisted the neighbour. "They want you to go home to send off the heralds."

"Good neighbour," said Fan Chin, "we have no rice left at home, so I have to sell this hen. It's a matter of life and death. This is no time for jokes! Do go away, so as not to spoil my chance of selling this hen."

When the neighbour saw that Fan Chin did not believe him, he seized the hen, threw it to the ground, and dragged the scholar back by main force to his home.

The heralds cried, "Good! The newly honoured one is back." They pressed forward to congratulate him. But Fan Chin brushed past them into the house to look at the announcement, already hung up, which read: "This is to announce that the master of your honourable mansion, Fan Chin, has passed the provincial examination in Kwangtung, coming seventh in the list."

Fan Chin feasted his eyes on this announcement, and, after reading it through once to himself, read it once more aloud. Clapping his hands, he laughed and exclaimed, "Ha! Good! I have passed." Then, stepping back, he fell down in a dead faint. His mother hastily poured some boiled water between his lips, whereupon he recovered consciousness and struggled to his feet. Clapping his hands again, he let out a peal of laughter and shouted, "Aha! I've passed! I've passed!" Laughing wildly he ran outside, giving the heralds and the neighbours the fright of their lives. Not far from the front door, he slipped and fell into a pond. When he clambered out, his hair was dishevelled, his hands muddied and his whole body dripping with slime. But nobody could stop him. Still clapping his hands and laughing, he headed straight for the market.

They all looked at each other in consternation, and said, "The new honour has sent him off his head!"

His mother wailed, "How could such a dreadful thing happen? Why should passing an examination do this to him? Now he's mad, goodness knows when he'll get better."

"He was all right this morning when he went out," said his wife. "What could have brought on this attack? What *shall* we do?"

The neighbours consoled them. "Don't be upset," they said. "We will send a couple of men to keep an eye on Mr. Fan. And we'll all bring wine and eggs and rice for these heralds. Then we can discuss what's to be done."

The neighbours brought eggs or wine, lugged along sacks of rice or carried over chickens. Fan Chin's wife wailed as she prepared the food in the kitchen. Then she took it to the shed, neighbours brought tables and stools, and they asked the heralds to sit down to a meal while they discussed what to do.

"I have an idea," said one of the heralds. "But I don't know whether this can be done or not."

"What idea?" they asked.

"There must be someone the honourable Mr. Fan usually stands in awe of," said the herald. "He's only been thrown off his balance because sudden joy made him choke on his phlegm. If you can get someone he's afraid of to slap him in the face and say, 'It's all a joke. You haven't passed any examination!'—then the fright will make him cough up his phlegm, and he'll come to his senses again."

They clapped their hands and said, "That's a fine idea. The only man Mr. Fan's afraid of is Butcher Hu. Let's hurry up and fetch him. He's probably still in the market, and hasn't heard the news."

"If he were selling meat in the market, he would have heard the news by now," said a neighbour. "He went out at dawn to the east market to fetch pigs, and he can't have come back yet. Someone had better go quickly to find him."

One of the neighbours hurried off in search of the butcher, and presently met him on the road, followed by an assistant who was carrying seven or eight pounds of meat and four or five strings of cash. Butcher Hu was coming to offer his congratulations. Fan Chin's mother, crying bitterly, told him what had happened.

"How could he be so unlucky!" exclaimed the butcher. They were calling for him outside, so he gave the meat and the money to his daughter, and went out. The heralds put their plan before him, but Butcher Hu was loath to fall in with it.

"He may be my son-in-law," he said, "but he's an official* now—one of the stars in heaven. How can you hit one of the stars in heaven? I've heard that whoever hits the stars in heaven will be carried away by the King of Hell. given a hundred strokes with an iron rod, and shut up in the eighteenth hell, never to become a human being again. I dare not do a thing like that."

"Mr. Hu!" cried a sarcastic neighbour. "You make your living by killing pigs. Every day the blade goes in white and comes out red. After all the blood you've shed, the King of Hell must have ordered the judge to sentence you to several thousand strokes by iron rods, so what does it matter if he adds a hundred more? Quite likely he won't get round to beating you for this, anyway. Or maybe, if you cure your son-in-law, the King of Hell may consider that as a good deed, and promote you from the eighteenth hell to the seventeenth."

"This is no time for joking," protested one of the heralds. "This is the only way to handle it, Mr. Hu. There's nothing else for it, so please don't make difficulties."

Butcher Hu had to give in. Two bowls of wine bolstered up his

* A scholar who passed the provincial examination was sometimes eligible to such posts as that of a county magistrate.

courage, making him lose his scruples and start rampaging again. Rolling up his greasy sleeves, he strode off toward the market, followed by small groups of neighbours.

Fan Chin's mother ran out after him to call, "Just frighten him a little! Mind you don't hurt him!"

"Of course," the neighbours reassured her. "That goes without saying."

When they reached the market, they found Fan Chin standing in the doorway of a temple. His hair was tousled, his face streaked with mud, and one of his shoes had come off. But he was still clapping his hands and crowing, "Aha! I've passed! I've passed!"

Butcher Hu bore down on him like an avenging fury, roaring, "You blasted idiot! What have you passed?" And fetched him a blow. The bystanders and neighbours let out a roar of laughter. But although Butcher Hu had screwed up his courage to strike once, he was still afraid at heart, and his hand was trembling too much to strike a second time. The one blow, however, had been enough to knock Fan Chin out.

The neighbours pressed round to rub Fan Chin's chest and massage his back, until presently he gave a sigh and came to. His eyes were clear and his madness had passed! They helped him up and borrowed a bench from Apothecary Chen, a hunchback who lived hard by the temple, so that Fan Chin might sit down.

Butcher Hu, who was standing a little way off, felt his hand begin to ache; when he raised his palm, he found to his dismay that he could not bend it. "It's true, then, that you mustn't strike the stars in heaven," he thought. "Now Buddha is punishing me!" The more he thought about it, the worse his hand hurt, and he asked the apothecary to give him some ointment for it.

Meanwhile Fan Chin was looking round and asking, "How do I come to be sitting here? My mind has been in a whirl, as if in a dream."

The neighbours said, "Congratulations, sir, on having passed the examination! A short time ago, in your happiness, you brought up some phlegm; but just now you spat out several mouthfuls and recovered. Please go home quickly to send away the heralds."

"That's right," said Fan Chin. "And I seem to remember coming seventh in the list." As he was speaking, he fastened up his hair and asked the apothecary for a basin of water to wash his face in, while one of the neighbours found his shoe and helped him put it on.

The sight of his father-in-law made Fan Chin afraid that he was in for another cursing, but Butcher Hu stepped forward and said, "Worthy son-in-law, I would never have presumed to slap you just now if not for your mother. She sent me to help you."

"That was what I call a friendly slap," said one of the neighbours. "When Mr. Fan washes his face, he can easily wash off half a basin of lard."

"Mr. Hu!" said another. "This hand of yours won't be able to kill pigs any more."

"No indeed," replied the butcher. "Why should I go on killing pigs? My worthy son-in-law will be able to support me in style for the rest of my life. I always said that this worthy son-in-law of mine was very learned and handsome, and that not one of those Chang and Chou family officials in the city looked so much the fine gentleman. I have always been a good judge of character, I don't mind telling you. My daughter stayed at home till she was more than thirty, although many rich families wanted to marry her to their sons; but I saw signs of good fortune in her face, and knew that she would end up by marrying an official. You see today how right I was." He gave a great guffaw, and they all started to laugh.

When Fan Chin had washed and drunk the tea brought him by the hunchback, they all started back, Fan Chin in front, Butcher Hu and the neighbours behind. The butcher, noticing that the seat of his son-in-law's gown was crumpled, kept bending forward all the way home to tug out the creases for him.

When they reached Fan Chin's house, Butcher Hu shouted: "The master is back!" The old lady came out to greet them, and was overjoyed to find her son no longer mad. The heralds, she told them, had already been sent off with the money that Butcher Hu had brought. Fan Chin bowed to his mother and thanked his father-in-law, making Butcher Hu so embarrassed that he muttered, "That bit of money was nothing."

After thanking the neighbours too, Fan Chin was just going to sit down when a smart-looking retainer hurried in, holding a big red card, and announced, "Mr. Chang has come to pay his respects to the newly successful Mr. Fan."

By this time the sedan-chair was already at the door. Butcher Hu dived into his daughter's room and dared not come out, while the neighbours scattered in all directions. Fan Chin went out to welcome the visitor, who was one of the local gentry, and Mr. Chang alighted from the chair and came in. He was wearing an official's gauze cap, sunflower coloured gown, gilded belt and black shoes. He was provincial graduate, who had served as a magistrate. His full name was Chang Chin-chai. He and Fan Chin made way for each other ceremoniously, and once inside the house bowed to each other as equals and sat down in the places of guest and host. Mr. Chang began the conversation.

"Sir," he said, "although we live in the same province, I have never been able to call on you."

"I have long respected you," replied Fan Chin, "but have never had the chance to pay you a visit."

"Just now I saw the list of successful candidates. Your patron, Mr. Tang, was a pupil of my grandfather; so I feel very close to you."

"I did not deserve to pass, I am afraid," said Fan Chin. "But I am delighted to be the pupil of one of your family."

After a glance round the room, Mr. Chang remarked, "Sir, you are certainly frugal." He took from his servant a packet of silver, and stated, "I have brought nothing to show my respect except these fifty taels of silver, which I beg you to accept. Your honourable home is not good enough for you, and it will not be very convenient when you have many callers. I have an empty house on the main street by the east gate, which has three courtyards with three rooms in each. Although it is not big, it is quite clean. Allow me to present it to you. When you move there I can profit by your instruction more easily."

Fan Chin declined many times, but Mr. Chang pressed him. "With all we have in common, we should be like brothers," he said. "But if you refuse, you are treating me like a stranger." Then Fan Chin accepted the silver and expressed his thanks. After some more conversation they bowed and parted. But not until the visitor was in his chair did Butcher Hu dare to emerge.

Fan Chin gave the silver to his wife. When she opened it, and they saw the white ingots with their fine markings, he asked Butcher Hu to come in and gave him two ingots, saying, "Just now I troubled you for five thousand coppers. Please accept these six taels of silver."

Butcher Hu gripped that silver tight, but thrust out his clenched fists, saying, "You keep this. I gave you that money to congratulate you, so how can I take it back?"

"I have some more silver here," said Fan Chin. "When it is spent, I will ask you for more."

Butcher Hu immediately drew back his fists, stuffed the silver into his pocket and said, "All right. Now that you are on good terms with that Mr. Chang, you needn't be afraid of going short. His family has more silver than the emperor, and they are my best customers. Every year, even if they have no particular occasions to celebrate, they still buy four or five thousand pounds of meat. Silver is nothing to him."

Then he turned to his daughter and said, "Your rascally brother didn't want me to bring that money this morning. I told him, 'Now my honourable son-in-law is on quite a different footing. There will be people sending him presents of money. I am only afraid he may refuse my gift.' Wasn't I right? Now I shall take this silver home and curse that dirty scoundrel." After a thousand thanks he made off, his head thrust forward and a broad grin on his face.

True enough, many people came to Fan Chin after that and made him presents of land and shops; while some poor couples came to serve him in return for his protection. In two or three months he had menservants and maidservants, to say nothing of money and rice. When Mr. Chang came again to urge him, he moved into the new house; and for three days he entertained guests with feasts and operas. On the morning of the fourth day, after Fan Chin's mother had got up and had breakfast, she went to the rooms in the back courtyard. There she found Fan Chin's wife with a silver pin in her hair. Although this was the middle

of the tenth month, it was still warm and she was wearing a sky-blue silk tunic and a green silk skirt. She was supervising the maids as they washed bowls, cups, plates and chopsticks.

"You must be very careful," the old lady warned them. "These things don't belong to us, so don't break them."

"How can you say they don't belong to us, madam?" they asked. "They are all yours."

"No, no, these aren't ours," she protested with a smile.

"Oh yes, they are," the maids cried. "Not only these things, but all of us servants and this house belong to you."

When the old lady heard this, she picked up the fine porcelain and the cups and chopsticks inlaid with silver, and examined them carefully one by one. Then she went into a fit of laughter. "All mine!" she crowed. Screaming with laughter she fell backwards, choked, and lost consciousness.

Chapter IV

When Fan Chin's mother realized that everything in the house was hers, overcome with joy she fell senseless to the ground. The maids, thrown into confusion, hastily summoned their master. Fan Chin hurried in, calling his mother, but she did not answer. At once he had her laid on the bed and sent for a doctor.

"The old lady's vital organs have been affected," said the doctor. "She is beyond saving."

Fan Chin called in several more physicians, but their diagnosis was the same, and he was in despair. As he and his wife watched by the bedside, weeping, he gave orders for the funeral; and when evening came the old lady breathed her last, so that the whole household was in a ferment all night.

The next day they called in a diviner, and found that the seventh was the old lady's unlucky number. On the third seventh day (the twenty-first), therefore, they must invite monks to say masses. Balls of white* cloth were hung over the front gate, and the new scrolls in the halls were pasted over with white paper. All the local gentry came to offer their condolences, and Fan Chin asked his fellow candidate Wei Hao-ku, in scholar's dress, to receive guests in the front hall. Butcher Hu was not up to appearing in public, but he bustled about between the kitchen and his daughter's room, helping to measure the white cloth or weigh meat.

When the second seventh day had passed, Fan Chin gave his father-in-law a few taels of silver and told him to go to the temple in the market to ask a monk whom he knew there to invite other monks from the big

* White used to be the colour used in mourning in China.

monastery to recite the Buddhist scriptures, chant intercessions and say masses so that Mrs. Fan's soul might go to heaven.

Butcher Hu took the silver and went straight to the temple in the market where Monk Teng lived. There he found Abbot Huei Ming from the monastery, too; for the abbot, who owned land nearby, often dropped in at the temple.

Monk Teng invited Butcher Hu to sit down, and said, "Mr. Fan was taken ill in front of my temple just after he passed the examination, but I was out that day and could not look after him. Luckily Mr. Chen the apothecary looked after him, made tea for him and acted as host in my place."

"That's right," said the butcher. "And very grateful I was too for his ointment. He's not here today, is he?"

"He hasn't come today," said the monk. "Mr. Fan soon got over his disorder; but the old lady's seizure was very unexpected. You must have been busy at home recently, Mr. Hu. We haven't seen you doing any business in the market."

"Yes. Since the sad death of Mr. Fan's mother, all the local gentry have called, and my former customers, the honourable Mr. Chang and Mr. Chou, have been in charge of the ceremonies. They sit there the whole day long with nothing to do, just making conversation with me, the three of us eating and drinking together. Whenever a guest comes I have to bow and greet him—I'm sick and tired of it all. I'm an easy-going man, and I've no patience with all that. I'd like to keep out of the way. My son-in-law wouldn't mind, but those gentlemen would probably think it strange. 'What use is a relative like this?' they might say."

Then he told the monk that Mr. Fan wanted to invite him to say masses. The moment the monk heard this, he hurried off to make tea and prepare noodles for Butcher Hu. And then, in the butcher's presence, he asked the abbot to notify the other monks and to prepare incense, candles, paper horses and all that was necessary.

When Butcher Hu had finished his noodles and left, the abbot took the silver and set off for the city. Before he had gone half a mile, however, he heard someone calling: "Abbot Huei Ming! Why don't you come to our village?" Turning his head, he saw that it was his tenant farmer, Ho Mei-chih.

"You seem to be very busy nowadays," said Ho. "Why don't you ever drop in to see us?"

"I would like to come," said the abbot. "But Mr. Chang in the city wants that field behind my house, and won't pay a fair price for it. I have had to refuse him several times. If I go to your village, his tenants there will start making no end of trouble, while if he sends men to the monastery to look for me, I can simply say that I am out."

"Never mind that," said Ho. "He may want the land, but he can't force you to sell. You're not busy today. Come to the village for a chat. That half leg of ham we cooked the other day is hanging in the

kitchen waiting to be eaten, and the wine we brewed is ready to drink too. We might as well finish them up. You can sleep in the village tonight. What are you afraid of?"

The abbot's mouth watered at these words, and his legs carried him along of their own volition. When they reached the village, Ho told his wife to cook a chicken, slice the ham and heat the wine. The abbot was warm after his walk, and sitting down in the yard pulled open his clothes to cool his chest and belly. His face was glistening with grease. Soon the food was ready. Ho Mei-chih carried out the dishes and his wife the wine. The abbot sat at the head of the table, Mrs. Ho at the foot and Ho at the side to pour out wine. And, as they ate, the abbot told them how in a few days' time he was going to Mr. Fan's house to say masses for the old lady's soul.

"I knew Mr. Fan's mother when I was a child," said Mrs. Ho. "She was an old dear. But his wife—the daughter of Butcher Hu of the south end of this village—with her dingy hair and red-rimmed eyes was a regular slattern. She never wore proper shoes, just shuffled about in straw sandals all summer. Yet now she will wear furs and be a fine lady. Fancy that!"

They were enjoying their meal when they heard a violent knocking on the gate.

"Who is it?" called Ho Mei-chih.

"Go and have a look, Mei-chih," said the abbot.

But no sooner had Ho opened the gate when seven or eight men rushed in. At the sight of the woman and the abbot drinking together at one table, they shouted, "Having a good time, aren't you? A monk carrying on with a woman in broad daylight! A fine abbot you are—knowing the law but breaking it."

"Stow that nonsense!" cried Ho Mei-chih. "This is my landlord."

Then they all cursed him. "Your landlord, eh? Does he have the run of your wife as well as your land?"

Without listening to the others' protests, they took a hempen rope and tied up the abbot, half-naked as he was, with the woman. Then they haled them off, together with Ho Mei-chih, to Nanhai County court. There, the abbot and the woman, still tied together, were pushed up to a stage in front of a temple to wait for the magistrate, while Ho was thrown out. The abbot, however, had asked him in a whisper to go to Mr. Fan's house to report what had happened.

Because the abbot was to say masses for his mother, Fan Chin was impatient of any delay. He immediately wrote a letter to the magistrate, who sent a runner to release the abbot, let Ho Mei-chih take his wife home, and order the men who had accused them to appear in court the next day. These men took fright, and asked Mr. Chang to put in a word for them with the magistrate. Accordingly, the next morning when their case came up, the magistrate simply gave them a brief warning and drove them out. And the upshot of the whole matter was that

the abbot and his friends had to bribe the yamen officials with several dozen taels of silver.

The abbot went to Fan Chin's house to thank him, and the next day took all the other monks there. They prepared an altar, on it set an image of Buddha, and on each side ranged the kings of Hell. After eating noodles they clashed cymbals and chanted a chapter of the sutra. Then they sat down to their midday meal. The monks and Mr. Wei, who was master of ceremonies, were sitting at two tables eating when a servant announced that guests had arrived. When Mr. Wei put down his bowl and went out to welcome them, he found that they were Mr. Chang and Mr. Chou, wearing gauze caps, light-coloured gowns and black shoes with white soles. Mr. Wei took them to bow before the shrine, after which they went inside.

One of the monks said to the abbot, "That was Mr. Chang who went in just now. You and he own land next to each other, so you ought to have greeted him."

"Not I," said the abbot. "It's better not to cross Mr. Chang's path. My trouble the other day wasn't the work of any gang, but of his tenants. Mr. Chang had put them up to it. It was all a plot to squeeze so much silver out of me that I'd have to sell the land behind my house. But Mr. Chang only injured himself in the end; because when the magistrate wanted to beat his tenants, he lost his head and went, shame-faced, with his visiting card to beg them off. The magistrate was not at all pleased."

"Mr. Chang has done many unprincipled things," the abbot went on. "For instance, the daughter of Mr. Chou, who used to be magistrate of Chao County, is Mr. Chang's niece. The Chou family asked me to arrange a match for her, and I spoke to the Feng family in the next village—a very wealthy family. But then Mr. Chang insisted on giving the girl to this penniless young Mr. Wei, just because he has passed the prefectural examination and is supposed to be able to write poems. But a few days ago he wrote an intercession for the departed for Mr. Fan, and when I showed it to people they said he had written three characters wrongly; it was disgraceful. Soon the second daughter is to be married. Heaven knows what kind of husband they will get her."

Just then the monks, hearing footsteps, winked to the abbot to stop talking. The two gentlemen came out, nodded in farewell, and were seen out by Mr. Wei. Then the monks finished eating, washed their faces, and all together blew trumpets, clashed cymbals, bowed before Buddha, burnt incense, lit tapers, spread rice, scattered flowers and performed their other rites. They kept this up for three days and three nights. After that the forty-nine days of mourning passed very quickly, and Fan Chin came out to thank those who had taken part.

One day Mr. Chang called, and asked to speak to Mr. Fan. He was invited into a small library in front of the shrine. Presently Mr. Fan came out in his mourning clothes, and began by thanking him for all his assistance during the mourning.

"Closely connected as we are, it was my duty to attend to your mother's funeral," said Mr. Chang. "Since your mother had a long life, she must have gone happily to heaven. Only this has delayed you in taking the final examination. No doubt you will have her buried by your ancestral tombs. Have you fixed on a date?"

"This year is not propitious," said Fan Chin. "We shall have to wait for next autumn. But I haven't got enough money."

Mr. Chang reckoned on his fingers. On the funeral banner they could use Commissioner Chou's name as donor. Mr. Wei could write the epitaph—but whose name should they use for it? Then there would be the cost of the funeral. Feasts, pipes, drums and all the rest, with the food, grave-digging and offerings to the gods, would mount up to over three hundred taels of silver. While he was still counting, tea was served.

Presently Mr. Chang brought the subject up again. "Of course, the proper thing is to remain in retirement for three years," he said. "But on account of the funeral expenses, I think you would be justified in trying to raise some money. There is no need to be too scrupulous. Since your great success, you have not yet been to see your honourable patron; and Kaoyao County is extremely rich—we may be able to borrow some money there. I want to visit him too, so why don't we go together? I'll be responsible for all the expenses on the road and see that you're not troubled with them."

"This is exceedingly kind of you," said Fan Chin. "But I am not sure whether it is the correct procedure."

"The correct procedure varies according to circumstances," replied Mr. Chang. "I see no reason why you shouldn't go." Then Fan Chin thanked Mr. Chang again, and they settled a date for the journey.

They hired horses and, accompanied by attendants, set off for Kaoyao County. On the road they decided to make use of this visit to their patron to borrow his name for the epitaph. In a few days they reached the city of Kaoyao; but since the magistrate happened to have gone into the country to make an investigation, they were unable to enter the yamen and had to sit down in a temple to wait. The central hall of that temple was under repair, and the county foreman was there supervising the work. When he heard that friends of the magistrate had come, he hastily invited them into the guest room. Nine plates of refreshments were served, and the foreman poured tea for them. Presently a man came in wearing a scholar's cap, wide gown and black shoes with white soles. He had bulging eyes, a prominent nose and a beard.

As soon as this man came in, he ordered the attendants to clear away the tea things. Then, after greeting Mr. Fan and Mr. Chang, he sat down and asked them their names. When they had introduced themselves, the stranger said, "My name is Yen, and I live nearby. Last year, when my patron came to supervise the examination, I was lucky

enough to be chosen senior licentiate. I am a good friend of Magistrate Tang's. No doubt you are both old friends of his?"

Fan Chin and Mr. Chang mentioned their relation to Magistrate Tang, and Senior Licentiate Yen appeared overwhelmed with respect. The foreman excused himself and left, while one of Yen's servants brought in a hamper and a bottle of wine which he placed on the table. In the hamper were nine varieties of chicken, duck, salted fish and ham.

Senior Licentiate Yen invited them to take the seats of honour, and offering them wine said, "I should have invited you to my poor home, but I felt it was unworthy of you; and, since you have to go to the yamen presently, I wanted to avoid unnecessary delay. So I have just provided a simple meal, in order that we may enjoy some conversation here. I hope you won't take this amiss."

Taking the wine cups from him, the two scholars said, "We have never called on you, yet we are accepting your hospitality." Senior Licentiate Yen protested politely and remained standing until they had drunk, but Fan Chin and Mr. Chang did not dare drink much for fear their faces turn red. They put down their cups half full.

"Magistrate Tang is kind and benevolent," said Yen. "He is a great blessing to the county."

"Yes, he seems to have accomplished much here," said Mr. Chang.

"Gentlemen," said Yen, "human life is ordained by fate, and cannot be changed. When Magistrate Tang first came here, all the gentlemen of the county erected a pavilion three miles from the city to welcome him. I was standing at the pavilion door. After group after group of gongs, banners, canopies, fans, trumpets and runners had passed by, the magistrate's sedan-chair approached; and as soon as I saw His Honour's arched eyebrows, big nose, square face and large ears, I knew he must be a true gentleman. The remarkable thing, however, was that though there were dozens of people there to welcome him, he had eyes only for me. A scholar who was standing by looked from the magistrate to me and whispered, 'Did you know His Honour before?' I answered truthfully that I did not. Then he was fool enough to think that it was at him the magistrate was looking, and hastily stepped forward hoping to be spoken to. But when Magistrate Tang got down from the chair, greeted us all and looked past him, he realized that he had been mistaken and was most mortified. The next day I called at the yamen, and although His Honour had just returned from the county school and had a great deal of business to attend to, he immediately set it all aside and invited me in. He offered me tea twice, as if we had known each other for years."

"It must be because of your integrity that my uncle respects you so much," said Mr. Chang. "Recently, no doubt, he has frequently asked your advice."

"As a matter of fact, I haven't been to his office much lately," said Yen. "Frankly, I'm a straightforward fellow. Because I don't know how to cheat the villagers of an inch of silk or a grain of rice, all the

magistrates have liked me. So though Magistrate Tang doesn't care for visitors as a general rule, he and I have a good understanding. For example, in the county examination the other month, when my son was placed tenth, His Honour called him in, questioned him carefully as to who his tutor was and whether he were engaged to be married or not, and took a great interest in him."

"My patron is exceedingly perspicacious," put in Fan Chin. "If he praised your son's composition, the young man must be a genius. I congratulate you."

"Not at all," disclaimed the senior licentiate. He continued, "Kaoyao is one of the most famous counties in Kwangtung. In one year the taxes on grain, coloured cloth, buffaloes, donkeys, fishing-boats, land, houses and so on come to more than ten thousand taels." Then, tracing figures on the table with his finger, he added in a low voice, "It seems Magistrate Tang's methods only produce eight thousand taels, whereas Magistrate Pan who was here before him made ten thousand taels. He still has certain lines in which he could use some of us leading citizens."

Fearing someone might be listening, he turned to the door. Just then a tousled, barefoot servant boy walked in and said, "Master, they want you to go home."

"What for?" asked the senior licentiate.

"That man has come to ask for the pig we shut in this morning. He's wrangling with everyone in the house."

"If he wants the pig, let him buy it."

"He says it's his."

"All right," snapped the senior licentiate. "You go first, and I'll come presently."

But the boy was unwilling to go back without him, and Mr. Chang and Mr. Fan said, "Since you have business at home, don't let us detain you."

"You gentlemen may not realize it," said Yen, "but that pig is really mine."

At that moment they heard the sound of gongs and stood up, exclaiming, "His Honour has come back!"

The two scholars adjusted their clothes and caps, called their attendants to take their cards, thanked Yen again, and went straight to the yamen. Magistrate Tang received their cards, on one of which was written "Your nephew Chang Chin-chai" and on the other "Your student Fan Chin."

"Chang has come time and again to get money: he is a confounded nuisance," he thought. "Still, since he has come with my newly successful student today, I had better not send him away." He ordered them to be invited in.

First Mr. Chang paid his respects, and then Fan Chin saluted his patron. Magistrate Tang invited them most ceremoniously to sit down and drink tea. After exchanging some remarks with Mr. Chang, he

praised Fan Chin's essay and asked, "Why did you not sit for the higher examination?"

"My mother has died," Fan Chin explained, "and I am in mourning."

Magistrate Tang gave a start, and hastily called for a plain gown to change into, then bowed them into an inner room. Wine was brought and the table spread with bird's-nests, goose, duck and two dishes of local fish and vegetable cooked in the Cantonese manner. They took their places at the table; but the cups and chopsticks were inlaid with silver, and Fan Chin hesitated to use them. The magistrate was puzzled, until Mr. Chang told him with a laugh, "On account of his mourning, Mr. Fan thinks he should not use these cups and chopsticks." The magistrate at once ordered them to be changed for a porcelain cup and ivory chopsticks, but still Fan Chin would not eat.

"He does not use these chopsticks either," said Mr. Chang.

Finally plain bamboo chopsticks were produced, and all was well.

Seeing how strictly Fan Chin observed the rules of mourning, Magistrate Tang was afraid he would not eat meat, and there was nothing else prepared. But to his relief, the magistrate saw Fan Chin pop a large shrimp ball from the dish of bird's-nests into his mouth.

"I have been very remiss," said Magistrate Tang. "We Moslems have no good dishes, only this simple fare. Our religion only allows us to eat beef and mutton, but we dare not offer these to guests for fear they may not like them. Now we have received an imperial decree forbidding the slaughter of cows, and our superiors have ordered us to see that this rule is strictly enforced. So even in the yamen there is no beef." Candles were brought, and they read these orders.

Just then an attendant whispered something into the magistrate's ear, at which he got up and excused himself, saying he would be back presently. In a few minutes they heard him order, "Put it there!" Then he came in and sat down again at the table, apologizing for his absence.

"Mr. Chang, you have held official posts," said Magistrate Tang. "I would like your opinion on this. It's in connection with the prohibition of the sale of beef. Just now several Moslems got an old man to bring me fifty catties of beef, to plead with me, saying that if I stop the sale of beef they will be forced out of business, and begging me to be more lenient. They want me, in fact, to shut my eyes to an illegal transaction. And they have sent this beef here. Should I accept it or not?"

"I should say certainly not, sir," replied Chang. "We officials owe allegiance only to the emperor, not to friends of the same faith. This reminds me of Mr. Liu in the reign of Hung Wu."

"Which Mr. Liu?" asked the magistrate.

"Liu Chi. He passed the palace examination in the third year of the reign, coming fifth on the list."

"I thought he came third," put in Fan Chin.

"No," Chang contradicted him, "fifth. I read his essay. Later he entered the Imperial Academy. One day Emperor Hung Wu went to his

house in disguise, just like the emperor in the old story who called on his friend one snowy night. But that same day Prince Chang of Chiangnan sent Liu a pitcher of pickled vegetables, and Liu opened it in the emperor's presence only to find that it was full of gold. The emperor was very angry and said, 'He seems to think scholars are indispensable.' The next day he degraded Liu Chi to the post of Magistrate of Chingtien, and had him poisoned. No, no, you can't accept the beef!"

When the magistrate heard Chang talk so glibly about something supposed to have happened during the same dynasty, he could not but believe him. "How would you deal with the situation then?" he asked.

"In my humble opinion, this may enable you to win fame," said Chang. "Keep the old man here tonight. Tomorrow morning bring his case before the court, and give him thirty strokes; then have him pilloried and pile the beef on him, posting up a notice by his side making his guilt clear. When your superiors see how incorruptible you are, your promotion will be assured."

The magistrate nodded. "Quite right," he said. Then the feast came to an end, and he lodged them in the library.

The next morning in court the first culprit called was a hen thief.

"You wretch!" said Magistrate Tang. "You have been found guilty several times, yet you are a hardened offender, not afraid of being beaten. What shall I do with you today?" With vermilion ink he wrote on the man's face, "Hen Stealer." Then he pilloried him, tied a hen back to front on his head, and threw him out. The man had just got outside the yamen gate when the hen's droppings fell onto his forehead and dripped down over his nose and moustache onto the pillory, sending all who saw it into a fit of laughter.

The next to be called was the old Moslem. Magistrate Tang stormed at him for his wicked presumption, and gave him thirty strokes. After that he put him in a large pillory, packing the fifty catties of beef so tightly around the man's neck and face that only his eyes could be seen. He was pilloried in front of the court as a public example.

The weather was hot. By the next day the meat was crawling with maggots, and the day after that the old man died. Several hundred Moslems were up in arms immediately.

Sounding gongs and stopping the market, they went clamouring to the yamen to protest.

"Even if it was wrong to send the beef, he shouldn't have received a death penalty!" they cried. "This is all the fault of that scoundrel Chang from Nanhai County. Let's break into the yamen, drag him out and beat him to death! One of us will be willing to pay for it with his own life."

Chapter V

The Moslems were out for blood. They besieged the yamen gate so closely that not a drop of water could have trickled through, threatening to drag Mr. Chang out and beat him to death. The magistrate was thoroughly frightened. After a careful investigation he discovered that one of his subordinates had told the Moslems of Mr. Chang's part in the business. "After all, I am head of the county and they dare not touch me," he told Mr. Chang and Fan Chin. "But if they break in and find Mr. Chang here, there's no knowing what may happen. I must think of a way to get you out of here. Once you have left, all will be well."

He immediately summoned his most reliable men to discuss the question. Luckily, the back of the yamen was hard by the north gate of the city, and after several men had slipped outside the city wall, Mr. Chang and Mr. Fan were lowered to them by ropes. Then Chang and Fan changed into blue cloth gowns, straw hats and sandals, and, stealthily as stray dogs, swiftly as fish escaping from the net, fled back to the provincial capital.

Meantime examiners and officials had gone to the yamen gate to pacify the people and speak them fair, until gradually the Moslems dispersed. Magistrate Tang sent a detailed report of the whole business to the provincial commissioner of justice, who summoned him to the provincial capital. On entering the presence of the commissioner, Magistrate Tang took off his gauze cap and kowtowed again and again.

"You have blundered," said the commissioner. "To pillory the culprit would have been punishment enough. Why did you pile the beef on the pillory? What sort of penalty is that? However, this insubordination must be nipped in the bud. I shall have to punish the ringleaders. Go back to your yamen, and take care not to act so rashly in future."

Magistrate Tang kowtowed again. "I bungled this affair," he confessed. "Since you have overlooked my fault, I owe you the same gratitude that I do to heaven and earth or to my parents. In future I promise to do better. But when your decision is made, Your Excellency, I hope you will allow me to punish the ringleaders in my own county, to recover some of the face I have lost." When his superior gave his consent, Magistrate Tang thanked him and left.

Some time later, five of the Moslem leaders in Kaoyao were found guilty of insubordination and sentenced to be pilloried in their own county. When Magistrate Tang received this order he issued a notice summoning his officers, and the very next morning swaggered into the court and punished the offenders.

He was just about to leave, when two men came in to appeal to him, and he ordered them to approach for questioning. The first was called Wang Erh, and he lived next door to Senior Licentiate Yen. In the third month of the previous year the Yen family's sucking pig had strayed into the Wangs' yard, but the Wangs had returned it immediately. Yen

said, "To take a pig back like this means very bad luck." He forced the Wangs to buy it for eighty cents of silver. They had fattened it up till it weighed over a hundred pounds, when it wandered into the Yens' yard by mistake. The Yen family shut it up, and when Wang's elder brother went to ask for it, Senior Licentiate Yen said, "It's my pig, and if you want it you must pay me the market price for it." Wang was a poor man—how could he find the money? But when he started to argue, Yen's sons took the bolt of the door and a rolling pin and beat him within an inch of his life. He was lying at home now with a broken leg, so his younger brother had come to lodge a complaint.

The magistrate turned to the other plaintiff, who was between fifty and sixty years old, and asked, "What is your name?"

"Huang Meng-tung," was the answer. "I live in the country. In the ninth month last year I came to the city to pay my taxes. But I didn't have enough money, so I asked a go-between to borrow twenty taels of silver for me from Senior Licentiate Yen at three per cent monthly interest. I signed a contract with Senior Licentiate Yen, but I didn't take the money, for on the road I met a relative from the country who said he could lend me part of the amount and I should borrow the rest from friends in the country. He advised me not to borrow from Senior Licentiate Yen. After paying my taxes, I went back with this relative. That was more than six months ago. Just lately I remembered the agreement I had signed, and came back to town to ask Senior Licentiate Yen to give it back to me. But he demanded that I pay the interest for all these months. 'I didn't borrow the money, so why should I pay interest?' I asked. Senior Licentiate Yen said if I had taken the agreement back at once, he could have lent the money to someone else. As it was, I had prevented his using those twenty taels, and made him lose half a year's interest. Now I must pay it. I realized I was in the wrong, and asked the go-between to speak for me, promising to take Senior Licentiate Yen presents of pork and wine if he would give me back the contract. But he still insisted on having the money. Now he has seized my donkey and my grain as a fine, yet he still hasn't returned that contract. I ask you, sir, to judge such underhand dealings!"

"A man who is a senior licentiate ranks among the scholars," declared Magistrate Tang. "Yet instead of doing good deeds, he cheats poor people like this. Disgraceful!" He approved both plaintiffs' petitions, and told them to wait outside.

Now somebody had already reported this to Yen. He was panic-stricken, and thought, "Both complaints are true, and if I have to appear in court I shall lose face. Better make myself scarce." He bundled some things together and fled to the provincial capital.

The magistrate signed a warrant and sent runners to Yen's house to arrest him, but he had flown. Then they went to his younger brother Yen Ta-yu. These two brothers did not live together. Yen Ta-yu had bought himself the rank of a scholar of the Imperial College and had more

than one hundred thousand taels of silver. But, rich as he was, he was timid. When the runners showed him the warrant and he learned that his brother was not at home, he dared not offend them. He entertained them to a meal, gave them two thousand coins and sent them off. Then he hurriedly ordered a servant to ask his two brothers-in-law over to discuss the matter.

One of the brothers-in-law was called Wang Teh, and the other, Wang Jen. They were scholars, one of whom drew subsidy from the prefectural school and the other from the county school. Both of them made a very good thing out of teaching, and were famous as tutors. When they received Yen Ta-yu's message, they came at once.

Yen Ta-yu told them all that had happened. "There's even a warrant out for his arrest. What's to be done?" he asked.

Wang Jen laughed and said, "Your brother is always saying how friendly he is with Magistrate Tang. How could he be frightened away by a little thing like this?"

"Never mind that," said Yen Ta-yu. "The fact is that my brother has gone, while runners from the yamen have been to my house looking for someone to arrest. I can't drop my own business to go and look for him. And he wouldn't come back anyway."

"His private affairs have nothing to do with you," said Wang Jen.

"That's where you're wrong," protested Wang Teh. "Because our brother-in-law is rich, the runners will consider him as lawful prey. If nothing is done, they can make things hot for him. I suggest that we go to the root of the matter by sending mediators to satisfy the plaintiffs. Then we can address an appeal to the magistrate and avoid further trouble."

"If mediators are needed," said Wang Jen, "we two can call on Wang Erh and Huang Meng-tung, and talk them round. We'll return the pig to the Wang family along with some silver to compensate for the elder brother's broken leg. And we'll look for Huang's contract and return it to him. Then we shouldn't have any more trouble."

"Yes," said Yen Ta-yu. "But my sister-in-law is a silly woman and my nephews are like young wolves—they never listen to reason. They'll refuse to return the pig and the contract."

"This is a serious matter," said Wang Teh. "If your sister-in-law and nephews are stubborn, that will be your bad luck. Because then *you* will have to pay the Wangs for the pig. As for the contract, in our capacity as mediators we will draw up a statement for Huang Meng-tung to the effect that the old contract is null and void. That's the only thing to do. Then you'll hear no more about it." They decided at once that this was the only solution, and handled the whole business very competently. And when Yen Ta-yu had spent over ten taels of silver on the plaintiffs and yamen officials, the case was closed.

A few days later, Yen Ta-yu invited the two Wang brothers to a feast to express his gratitude. When they made excuses and would not

come, he ordered his servant to tell them that their sister was unwell and wanted to see them too. On hearing this, the two scholars came. Yen Ta-yu invited them into the front hall and offered them tea, then told a servant to inform his wife that they had arrived. Presently a maid invited them to Mrs. Yen's room, and they went in. Their sister had grown very pale and thin. She looked too frail to walk, yet she was preparing melon seeds, chestnuts and other sweetmeats for them. When she saw her brothers, she left her work and stepped forward to welcome them; and the nurse brought in the concubine's three-year-old son, in a silver necklet and red suit, to see his uncles.

While they were sipping tea, another maid announced, "The new wife asks permission to pay her respects."

"We won't disturb her," the Wang brothers responded politely. Then they sat down for a chat and asked after their sister's illness, urging her, since she was so weak, to take more cordials. While they were talking, a feast was laid in the front hall and they were invited to the table.

In the course of conversation Senior Licentiate Yen's name came up. Wang Jen said to Wang Teh with a laugh, "I can't understand, brother, how anyone who writes so badly ever passed the examination."

"That was thirty years ago," Wang Teh answered. "In those days the examiners were all censors—what did they know about compositions?"

"He's been growing more and more peculiar," said Wang Jen. "Since we are related, we invite him to several feasts each year, but he never offers us so much as a cup of wine. It was only the year before last, when he became a senior licentiate that he invited me to a feast."

"I did not go," said Wang Teh with a frown. "He made that senior licentiate rank a pretext to extract presents from everybody. County runners—even village heads—all had to fork out. He pocketed more than two hundred strings of cash altogether. But he never paid his cook, nor the butcher—even now he still owes them money. Every month or so they make a scene in his house. It's shocking."

"I am really ashamed of him," said Yen Ta-yu. "Though I have a little land, I don't mind telling you, our family of four usually feel it would be extravagant to buy pork. When my son is hungry, we just buy four cash of cooked meat for him. But although my brother has no land and so many mouths to feed, every other day he buys about five catties of pork and insists on having it cooked to a turn. Then they finish it all in one meal, and in the evening he buys fish on credit again. We inherited the same amount of land, but he has just eaten up his property; and now he exchanges the family's ebony chairs at the back door, on the sly, for pork dumplings. It's too bad!"

The Wang brothers burst out laughing, then said, "We've been so busy talking about that fool, we've forgotten to drink. Let's have the dice. Whoever wins first place among the palace scholars shall drink a cup." Wang Teh and Wang Jen became palace scholars in turn, and drank a dozen cups apiece. Strangely enough, the dice seemed to know

human affairs; because Yen Ta-yu did not become a palace scholar even once. Wang Jen and Wang Teh clapped their hands and roared with laughter, drinking until after midnight when they were carried home.

Mrs. Yen's illness went from bad to worse. Every day four or five doctors came to prescribe cordials for her, but in vain. Soon she was completely bed-ridden, and Concubine Chao, the mother of the little boy, stayed by her bedside, giving her draughts of medicine and waiting on her hand and foot. After it became clear that the mistress was not going to recover, the concubine brought her child to the foot of the bed every evening and sat there weeping. And one night she said:

"All I pray for now is that Buddha will take me away in your place and let you get well."

"That's a silly way to talk," said Mrs. Yen. "Everyone's span of life is fixed. How can you change with someone else?"

"Don't say that," begged the concubine. "What does my death matter? But if anything happened to you, ma'am, he would certainly marry again; because he is over forty but has only one son. And if he married again, the new wife would care only for her own children. A stepmother is always cruel. Then my son wouldn't live to grow up, and that would be the death of me. I'd rather die now, instead of you, to save this child's life."

Mrs. Yen said nothing.

Every day, with tears in her eyes, Concubine Chao nursed the sick woman and would not leave her. One evening, however, she left the room and did not come back for some time.

"Where is the new wife?" asked Mrs. Yen.

A maid told her, "Every evening the new wife burns incense in the courtyard and cries, praying to heaven and earth to let her die in your place, ma'am. This evening she thought you seemed worse, so she went out earlier to pray."

Still Mrs. Yen looked rather sceptical.

The next evening, however, when the concubine cried as she poured out all her fears again, the wife said, "I will tell the master that when I die he should make you his wife."

At once Concubine Chao called Yen Ta-yu in, and told him what the mistress had said.

"In that case," said Yen, who had been hoping for this, "I must invite my brothers-in-law tomorrow morning to settle the matter, in order that we may have witnesses."

"Do as you think best," said his wife, with a weary wave of her hand.

Accordingly, Yen Ta-yu sent to invite the Wang brothers to come early the next day.

When they had seen the doctor's prescriptions and discussed what other famous physicians could be called, Yen took the brothers into his wife's room and told them their sister's wish, saying:

"Ask her yourselves."

They went up to the bed. Mrs. Yen was too weak to speak, but she pointed at the child and nodded her head. The two brothers pulled long faces and said nothing. Presently they were invited into the library to eat, but still they made no reference to the matter.

After they had eaten, Yen Ta-yu took them into a private room; and after speaking about his wife's illness, he said with tears, "Since your sister married me twenty years ago, she has been a true helpmate. But now that she is dying, what am I to do? The other day she mentioned that your parents' tombs needed repairing, and that she had a little gift to leave you as a memento." Having sent the servants out of the room, he opened a chest and took out two packets of silver, each containing a hundred taels. These he gave to Wang Teh and Wang Jen, saying, "Please don't take me amiss."

The Wang brothers took hold of that silver with both hands.

"Please don't have any scruples," Mr. Yen went on. "When you need money for sacrifices I'll be responsible for all expenses. Tomorrow I will send sedan-chairs to fetch your wives. Your sister has some trinkets to give them as souvenirs."

They had just gone back to the outer room when some guests arrived, and Mr. Yen went out to entertain them. By the time he came back, the Wang brothers' eyes were red with weeping, and Wang Jen said, "I was telling my brother that our sister truly does credit to our family. For I doubt if even you, sir, ever conceived such a noble scheme. If you still hesitate, then you are no true man."

"Do you realize," demanded Wang Teh, "that the perpetuation of your line depends on whether or not you make Concubine Chao your wife? For if our sister dies and you marry another, the new wife may torture our nephew to death. Then not only will your parents in heaven be ill at ease, but our ancestors also."

Striking his fist on the table, Wang Jen declared, "The great thing about us scholars is our adherence to principles. If we were writing a composition to speak for Confucius, we should take exactly the line that we are taking now. If you refuse to listen to us, we will never visit you again."

"I am afraid my relatives may object," said Mr. Yen.

"You can count on us," the brothers assured him. "But this thing must be done in a big way. Give us a few more taels of silver, and tomorrow we shall act as hosts and invite over a hundred of your relatives to a feast. While our sister's eyes can still see, you and Concubine Chao shall worship heaven and earth and the ancestors together, showing that she is your lawful wife. Then your relatives will have to hold their tongues."

Yen Ta-yu gave another fifty taels of silver to the Wang brothers, who then left, exuding righteousness from every pore.

The next day, accordingly, Wang Jen and Wang Teh came to Mr.

Yen's house and wrote scores of invitations to relatives from the various branches of the family. And all of them came, with the exception of Senior Licentiate Yen's five sons from next door. When the guests had breakfasted, they went to Mrs. Yen's bedside to witness her will, which her brothers drew up and signed. Meantime Mr. Yen put on a scholar's cap, a blue gown and red silk sash, while Concubine Chao dressed herself in crimson and put a gold chaplet on her head. As they worshipped heaven and earth and the ancestors, Wang Jen drew on his vast erudition to write a most moving announcement of this marriage to the Yen ancestors. And having informed the ancestors, they left the shrine.

Then Wang Jen and Wang Teh sent for their wives, and kowtowed together to the new husband and wife. All the relatives congratulated them in order of seniority, after which the stewards, menservants and maidservants did reverence to their master and mistress. The new wife went in alone to bow before the dying mistress, calling her "Elder Sister." But Mrs. Yen had already lost consciousness.

These ceremonies at an end, the guests crowded into the great hall, second hall, library and inner chambers to sit down to more than twenty tables. They feasted till midnight.

Mr. Yen was acting as host in the great hall when his son's wet-nurse burst in breathlessly, and cried, "The mistress has passed away!"

Weeping, Mr. Yen went to the bedroom and found his new wife beating her head against the bed. At his entry, she gave a cry and fainted. They helped her up, prized open her teeth and poured hot water down her throat. Then she came to herself and rolled on the floor, tearing her hair and sobbing as if her heart would break. Not even her husband could calm her. While the servants were in the hall and the guests in the other rooms, the two sisters-in-law took advantage of the confusion to whisk away the clothes, gold, pearls, and even the gold chaplet that the new wife had let fall. All these they stowed about their persons.

Mr. Yen told the nurse to bring in his son, and threw a coarse linen cloth over the child's shoulders as a sign of mourning—the coffin had been ready for some time. They placed the corpse in the coffin, which had been set in the central hall. It was now dawn. All the guests filed in, bowed before the coffin and went home.

The next day, white mourning was sent to all the relatives—two lengths of cloth for each house. The new wife insisted that she should wear heavy mourning, but on this point the Wang brothers were adamant. In unison they quoted one of the sayings of Confucius, and warned her, "You must conform to etiquette. Now you stand in the relationship of a sister to the dead woman, and a younger sister mourning for her elder sister should only wear mourning for one year—fine linen and a white cloth head-dress."

The ceremony to be used was agreed upon, and the date of the funeral announced. They fasted, held the funeral, and spent four or

five thousand taels of silver, observing the rites for half a year. We need not dwell on the details.

The new Mrs. Yen felt very much indebted to the Wang brothers. After the harvest she sent them two piculs of rice apiece, two piculs of pickled vegetables, and four hams, to say nothing of chickens, ducks and other delicacies.

Soon New-Year's Eve came round. Mr. Yen worshipped heaven and earth and the ancestors, then sat down to a feast with his new wife opposite him and the nurse and child sitting at one side of the table.

After drinking several cups of wine, tears rolled down Mr. Yen's cheeks as he pointed to a chest and said, "Yesterday the pawn shop sent three hundred taels of interest over. That was my first wife's private property. It used to come every year just before New-Year's Eve, and I always gave it to her and let her do what she liked with it. Now they have sent it again, but there is no one to take it."

"You can't say there is no use for her money," said the new wife. "I remember how she used to spend it. In the old days, at every festival the nuns would send her presents and the flower-girls would give her little trinkets, while those blind girls who often came to play the three-stringed lyre wouldn't budge from the door. She gave them all money, she was so kind. And when she saw poor relations she would feed them even if she had nothing to eat herself, and give them clothes even if it meant going without herself. The money was all too little for her. Even if it had been more, she would have used it all. Her two brothers were the only ones who did not take a cent from her. To my mind it would be better to keep the money to spend it on charity after New Year in her name. And what's left won't be much; it could be given to your two brothers-in-law for their travelling expenses when they go to take the examination next year. This would be only right and proper."

As she was speaking, a cat under the table crawled up Mr. Yen's leg, and he gave it a kick. The frightened cat shot into the bedroom and jumped onto the canopy of the bed. Then they heard a great crash. Something had fallen from the top of the bed and smashed the wine vat on the floor. Taking a candle they hurried in to look, and found that the silly cat had knocked off a piece of the bedstead, bringing down a big wicker basket full of dates which had fallen in the wine. Now the dates were scattered on the ground, the basket lying on its side; and it took the two of them to right it. Then, under the dates, they discovered paper packages containing five hundred taels of silver.

"I knew she couldn't have spent all that silver," said Mr. Yen with a sigh. "This must be what she saved over the years. She wanted to keep it in readiness for whenever I might need money in a hurry. But where is she now?"

He shed tears again, and called servants to sweep the floor while he and his new wife put a plateful of the dates on the table before the shrine and, kneeling there, wept again. Because of this, Mr. Yen did

not go out to pay New-Year visits, but stayed at home weeping from time to time, feeling out of sorts and in low spirits.

After the Lantern Festival, he felt stabs of pain in his heart. At first he just put up with them, doing his accounts as usual every night until midnight; but gradually he lost his appetite and wasted away till he was nothing but skin and bones. Yet he grudged the money to buy ginseng.

His wife begged him, "Don't trouble about all that business—you aren't well."

But he retorted, "My son is still small. Who else is there to see to things? As long as I live I must manage my affairs."

As spring wore on, however, he had a liver complaint and had to take to his bed, able only to drink a little gruel every day. When the weather became warmer, he forced himself to eat and made the effort to get up and walk about. But by autumn he was worse again and had to keep to his bed. When it was time to reap the early rice, he sent his stewards and menservants down to his estates; but he could not rest easy in his mind. One morning he had just taken his medicine when he heard the rustle of falling leaves against the window, and felt a fearful premonition. He heaved a long sigh, and turned his face to the wall.

The new wife brought the Wang brothers in to see how he was before they left for the provincial examination. Ordering a maid to help him, Mr. Yen struggled to a sitting position.

"We have not seen you for many days, and now you are thinner than ever," said the brothers. "It's good, though, that you look fairly well."

Mr. Yen asked them to be seated, wished them success in their coming examination, and offered them refreshments. He told them what had happened on New-Year's Eve, and asked his wife to bring in some silver. "This was her idea," he told them. "She suggested that this small sum of money that my wife left should be given to you for your trip. I am very ill, and don't know if I shall see you again. After my death, I beg you to watch over your nephew as he grows up. Help him to study and pass the prefectural examination, so that he need not be bullied as I have been all my life by my brother."

Wang Teh and Wang Jen accepted the silver, each taking two packets. They thanked Mr. Yen profusely, said all they could to comfort him, then took their leave. From that time onward Mr. Yen sank daily. All his relatives came to ask how he was, his five nephews taking it in turn to help the doctors administer cordials. But after the Mid-Autumn Festival the doctors stopped prescribing medicine, and all the stewards and servants were summoned back from the estates.

For three days Mr. Yen hovered between life and death, too weak to speak. On the evening of the third day an oil lamp was lit on his table, and the room was crowded with relatives. They could hear the

beginning of the death-rattle in his throat; but he refused to die. He took his hand from beneath the quilt and stretched out two fingers.

The eldest nephew stepped up to the bed and asked, "Do you mean that there are two relatives who haven't come, uncle?"

Yen shook his head.

The second nephew stepped forward and asked, "Do you mean there are still two lots of silver you haven't told us about, uncle?"

Yen stared hard at him, shook his head even more vehemently, and held out his fingers more earnestly than ever.

The wet-nurse, who was carrying his son, put in, "The master must be thinking of the two uncles who aren't here."

But when he heard this, he closed his eyes and shook his head. Only his fingers did not move.

Then the new wife hastily stepped forward, dabbing at her eyes. "They're all wide of the mark," she said. "I'm the only one who knows what you mean. You're worried because there are two wicks in the lamp—that's a waste of oil. If I take out one wick, it will be all right." Suiting her actions to her words, she removed one wick. All eyes were fixed on Mr. Yen, who then nodded his head, let fall his hand, and breathed his last.

Then all the family, great and small, began to wail and prepare for the funeral.

Chapter VI

Mr. Yen's coffin was put in the central hall of the third courtyard, and the next morning servants went through the town announcing the funeral. Yen Chen-hsien the leader of the clan came with the other relatives to mourn, and they were kept to a meal and given white linen for mourning. The widow had a brother who worked in a rice shop and a nephew who worked the bellows for a silver smith, and they brought mourning gifts too. Buddhists and Taoists hung up long banners, chanted their scriptures and performed the funeral rites; while the widow and her little son wailed morning and evening before the coffin. All the stewards, menservants and maidservants were in mourning, and the house and gate were draped in white.

Soon the first seven days passed, and Wang Teh and Wang Jen returned from the provincial examination and came to mourn. They stayed for one day. After another three or four days, Senior Licentiate Yen came back too from the provincial capital. All his sons were mourning in their uncle's hall, so Senior Licentiate Yen was sitting with his wife after his luggage had been unpacked. He was just going to have a wash, when the wet-nurse from his brother's house came in with a servant carrying a case and a package.

"The widow sends you her greetings on your return, sir," she said.

"Since she is in deep mourning, she can't come over to see you. It was our master's last wish that these two changes of clothing and this silver should be given you to remember him by. Please come over soon."

In the case Senior Licentiate Yen found two brand-new sets of silk clothes and in the package two hundred taels of silver. Very pleased, he immediately asked his wife for eighty cents, which he gave to the nurse, saying, "Convey my thanks to your mistress. I will come over right away."

Then the nurse and the servant left. As he put the clothes and silver away, Senior Licentiate Yen questioned his wife carefully as to what she and their sons had received. When he had made sure that they had all got something, and that this gift was for himself alone, he changed into a mourning cap and white cloth belt and went across to the other house. He called his brother's name before the coffin, wailed a few times without shedding tears and bowed twice. The widow came out in deep mourning to thank him, and called her son to kowtow to his uncle.

"Fate has been cruel to us and cut off his father in the prime of his life," she said, shedding tears. "We have no one but you to guide us."

"All men have their allotted span of life, ma'am," replied Yen. "My brother has gone to heaven, but you have a fine son. If you bring him up carefully, what have you to worry about?"

The widow thanked him, and invited him into the library for a meal, sending for the Wang brothers to keep him company. They greeted each other and sat down.

"Your younger brother seemed quite strong," said Wang Teh. "How was it that he died suddenly after one illness? Although we are such near relatives we were unable to see him before he died. We feel very bad about it."

"Even I, his elder brother," retorted Yen, "was unable to see him before his death. But as the proverb says, 'Public business comes before private affairs. The state comes before the family.' Our examinations are a great affair of state, and since we were busy on state business, even if we had to neglect our own relatives we need not feel uncomfortable."

"You were in the provincial capital for more than half a year, weren't you?" asked Wang Teh.

"I was," replied Senior Licentiate Yen. "Commissioner Chou, the last examiner, recommended me for the rank of senior licentiate. He has a relative in this province who used to be magistrate of Chao County, so I went to the provincial capital to pay my respects. We took to each other immediately, and he pressed me to stay for several months. In fact, he insisted on marrying his second daughter to my second son."

"Did you stay in his house in the provincial capital?"

"No, I stayed with Chang Chin-chai. He has been a county magis-

trate too, and is Magistrate Tang's nephew. I got to know him at a feast in Magistrate Tang's yamen. He arranged the match with the Chou family."

"Didn't he come that year with a certain scholar named Fan Chin?" asked Wang Jen.

"That's the man," said Senior Licentiate Yen.

Wang Jen shot a glance at his brother, and said, "You remember, that was when they had trouble with the Moslems."

Wang Teh gave a sarcastic laugh.

Just then the feast was spread. While eating they began to talk again.

"Magistrate Tang has not been appointed examiner this year," said Wang Teh.

"Don't you realize, brother," said Wang Jen, "it's because last year he passed candidates who wrote essays in an out-moded style? All the examiners this year are young palace graduates who can pick out brilliant compositions."

"I don't know about that," objected Yen. "Even if a man has genius, he must still follow the rules. If he pays no attention to the subject, and simply writes something showy, that can scarcely be called brilliant. My patron Commissioner Chou, for instance, who is most discriminating, always gives candidates who understand the tradition a first class. This year the same sort of men will still come first."

Yen said this because the two brothers had been ranked in the second class by Commissioner Chou. They took the hint, and dropped the subject of the examinations.

When the feast was nearly over, the brothers brought up the question of the lawsuit. "Magistrate Tang was really angry. It was lucky that your brother took steps to settle the matter."

"He made a mistake," said Yen. "If I had been at home, one word from me to Magistrate Tang, and we could have broken the legs of those bastards Wang and Huang. How dare those common people take such liberties with gentlemen?"

"It is always better to be generous," murmured Wang Jen.

Yen's face turned red.

When they had drunk a few more cups together, the nurse came in carrying the boy and said, "The mistress asks Senior Licentiate Yen when the burial should take place. She doesn't know if this is a propitious year. And should our late master be buried among the ancestors or should another site be chosen? She hopes you will discuss it, sir, with these two gentlemen."

"Tell your mistress that I shall not be at home long," replied the senior licentiate. "I have to go back to the provincial capital for my second son's marriage at Mr. Chou's house. All questions connected with the funeral can be decided by these gentlemen. My brother can't be buried among the ancestors, though. You will have to look for another

site. But wait till I come back to decide that." This said he got up, bid them a curt good-bye and went home. The Wang brothers also left.

A few days later, Senior Licentiate Yen went with his second son to the provincial capital, and the widow was left in charge of the household. With plenty of money, rice, servants and cattle, she lived in great comfort, little guessing the cruel fate heaven had in store for her. For her son caught small-pox and ran up a fever. The doctor said this was a dangerous disease, and used potent drugs to cure it, but the rash did not come out properly. And though the distracted mother offered prayers at many temples, it was all to no purpose—after one week the plump, white little fellow died. This time she wept more bitterly than at the death of the former wife, more bitterly, too, than at the death of her husband. For three whole days and nights she cried, crying until she had no more tears to shed. And then she buried her son.

She wanted to adopt Senior Licentiate Yen's fifth son, and invited the Wang brothers over to discuss the question. But they hummed and hawed. "We can't make any decision," they said. "Senior Licentiate Yen is not at home. And since it is his son, you should consult his wishes. How can we decide it for him?"

"My late husband had a little property," said the widow. "Now his son is dead and the servants have no master. The question of adopting an heir can't wait; but I don't know how long it will be before Senior Licentiate Yen comes back. The fifth son is not twelve yet, and if I adopt him they can trust me to love him and bring him up properly. When his mother knows what I want, I'm sure she will be only too glad to give him to me. And even Senior Licentiate Yen when he comes back will have nothing to say. Why can't you gentlemen take charge?"

"Well," said Wang Teh, "we can go over and speak to her."

"How can you suggest such a thing, brother?" protested Wang Jen. "The adoption of a son is an important matter—it can only be settled by the Yen family. However, since Mrs. Yen feels it so urgent, the best thing we can do is to write a letter which she can get a servant to take post-haste to the provincial capital, urging Senior Licentiate Yen to come back and talk it over."

"That's a good idea," said Wang Teh. "But I don't imagine he will raise any objections when he does get back."

"That remains to be seen, brother." Wang Jen shook his head with a smile. "But that's the only thing for us to do."

The widow was mystified by his manner. However, they wrote a letter putting forward her proposal, and charged one of the family servants, Lai-fu, not to rest day or night on his way to the provincial capital.

Lai-fu travelled post-haste to the capital, and learned that Senior Licentiate Yen was staying in Kaoti Street. But when he reached the house and saw four runners in red and black caps in the doorway holding whips, he was too frightened to go in. Presently, however, Yen's

servant Ssu Tou came out, and he took Lai-fu in. In the hall there was a decorated sedan-chair, and beside it a canopy inscribed with Senior Licentiate Yen's official rank. Ssu Tou went in and brought back his master, who was wearing a gauze cap, official dress and black shoes with white soles. Lai-fu stepped forward, kowtowed and delivered the letter.

When Yen had read it he said, "I understand. But my second son is getting married today. You can help to wait on the guests."

Lai-fu went down to the kitchen where cooks were preparing the feast. The bridal room on the first floor was decked out in scarlet and green, but he dared not go up.

Right up to sunset, not a single musician had arrived. In his new square cap and red sash, garlanded with flowers, the bridegroom was pacing anxiously up and down, demanding what had happened.

Yen shouted to Ssu Tou from the hall, "Hurry up and get those trumpeters!"

"Today's an auspicious day," said Ssu Tou. "Lots of people are getting married. Even if you gave the musicians eighty cents of silver they wouldn't come. But you only gave them twenty-four cents, less two cents, expecting the Chang family to force them to come. The musicians are very busy in other families—how can I get them here?"

"You dog!" roared Senior Licentiate Yen. "Hurry up and fetch them here! If they're late, you'll get a box on the ear too."

Ssu Tou scowled and slunk off, grumbling, "He hasn't given us a single bowl of rice since morning, yet he throws his damned weight about."

Dusk fell and lamps had to be lit, but Ssu Tou did not reappear; and the sedan-chair bearers and runners in red and black caps were impatient to be off.

"We had better not wait for the musicians," said the guests. "The auspicious hour has come. Let's go and fetch the bride."

The four runners in red and black caps led the way with the canopy, while Lai-fu followed the chairs to the Chou house. The Chou family lived in a great mansion, and although several candles had been lit it was still dark in the courtyard. In the absence of musicians, the four runners called out to announce their arrival in the dark courtyard. They went on shouting until Lai-fu felt quite embarrassed, and asked them to be quiet.

Someone from the Chou household ordered them, "Please tell Senior Licentiate Yen that the bride will leave when the musicians come, not before."

There was bawling and brawling until Ssu Tou came back with two musicians—one flute player and one drummer. They struck up feebly in the hall, but were unable to play in harmony, and the bystanders could not stop laughing. The Chou family raised some objections; but there was nothing they could do, and the bride had to be sent off in her chair. Of the marriage there is no need to speak.

When several days had passed, Senior Licentiate Yen ordered Lai-fu and Ssu Tou to hire two boats manned by boatmen from Kaoyao County to take them home, promising the boatmen twelve taels of silver to be paid on arrival. One boat was for the bride and bridegroom, the other for the senior licentiate. They chose an auspicious day and took leave of their relatives. A pair of golden and another pair of white placards and four spears, all emblems of the yamen, had been borrowed from the former Chao County magistrate, and placed on deck. And musicians were hired to pipe them to the boat. The overawed boatmen did their best to please these important passengers, and the journey passed without incident.

The last day of the trip, when they were less than ten miles from Kaoyao, Senior Licentiate Yen suddenly had a spell of faintness. He retched and vomited, while Lai-fu and Ssu Tou took his arms to prevent him from falling.

"I feel bad, I feel bad," he groaned. "Put me down, Ssu Tou, and boil some water."

He flopped down groaning and whimpering, while Ssu Tou and the boatmen hastily boiled water and took it to his cabin. Then the senior licentiate unlocked a case, took out a dozen small walnut wafers, ate a few of them, rubbed his stomach, and immediately felt better. He left a few wafers by the tiller, as if he had no further use for them. The steersman, who happened to have a sweet tooth, went on steering with his left hand while with his right he carried wafer after wafer to his mouth. Yen, however, pretended not to see what he was doing.

Presently their boats moored at Kaoyao wharf. Senior Licentiate Yen told Lai-fu to hire sedan-chairs and escort the young couple home first, while he called dockers to put all their luggage ashore. When the boatmen and dockers came to ask for tips, Yen went back to his cabin and made a show of looking round for something.

"Where has my medicine gone?" he asked Ssu Tou.

"What medicine?"

"That medicine I was eating just now. I put it by the tiller."

"Do you mean those walnut wafers you left by the tiller?" asked the steersman. "I thought you didn't want them, so I finished them up."

"Walnut wafers, indeed!" exclaimed Yen. "Do you know what those wafers were made of?"

"Just melon seeds, walnuts, sugar and flour, I suppose."

"You dog!" roared Yen. "Because I have these fits of dizziness I spent several hundred taels of silver to buy this medicine. Mr. Chang of the provincial capital bought the ginseng in it for me when he was an official in Shangtang, and Mr. Chou bought the gentian when he was magistrate in Szechuan. You had no business touching it, you bastard! Walnut wafers, indeed! Nearly a hundred taels' worth of medicine have disappeared down your throat! And what am I to take next time I have an attack? You've played me a dirty trick, you bastard!"

He ordered Ssu Tou to open his portfolio so that he could write a note to send this scoundrel to Magistrate Tang's yamen for a good beating.

With a scared, conciliatory smile, the steersman said, "It tasted very sweet. I didn't know it was medicine. I thought it was walnut wafers."

"You still call it walnut wafers!" the senior licentiate bellowed. "Call it walnut wafers again and I'll box your ears!" He had already written the note and now handed it to Ssu Tou who started to hurry ashore. The dockers helped the boatsmen to stop him. Both lots of boatmen were scared stiff.

"He was wrong, Your Honour," they said. "He shouldn't have eaten your medicine. But he's a poor man. Even if he sells everything he has, he won't be able to pay you anything like a hundred taels of silver. And if he's sent to court he'll be ruined. Please be generous, sir, and overlook it."

But Senior Licentiate Yen only flew into a worse rage.

Some of the dockers came aboard and said to the boatmen, "You brought this on yourselves. If you hadn't asked the gentleman for tips, he would have gone to his sedan-chair. But once you stopped him, he found out about his medicine. Since you know you're in the wrong, why don't you kowtow and ask Senior Licentiate Yen's pardon? Do you expect him to pay you if you don't make good his loss?"

Then they all forced the steersman to kowtow.

Yen softened a little, and said, "Very well. Since you've all pleaded for him, and I am busy with my son's wedding, I shall deal with this scoundrel later. He needn't think he can get away." After more curses he swaggered to his sedan-chair, followed by the servants and luggage. He left the boatmen gaping—for he had gone off without paying for the trip.

Once home, Yen ordered his son and daughter-in-law to worship the ancestors, and called his wife out so that they might bow to her. His wife was causing a fine commotion, moving furniture.

"What are you doing?" Yen asked.

"You seem to have forgotten how small this house is," she retorted. "There's only one decent room in it. Since the new daughter-in-law comes from a good family, we must give her the best room."

"Rubbish!" said her husband. "I've got it all worked out. There's no need to turn things upside down like this. My brother's house is big enough—they can stay there."

"It may be big, but what makes you think your son can move in?"

"Since that woman has no son living, one of our sons should inherit my brother's property."

"Yes, but it's our fifth son she wants."

"What right has she to decide?" demanded Yen. "Who does she think she is? I'm appointing an heir to my brother. It has nothing to do with her."

While his wife was still wondering what he meant, one of the widow's servants came to say, "Our mistress has heard that you are back, and invites you to go over for a discussion. The two Wang gentlemen are also there."

Senior Licentiate Yen accordingly walked over. After exchanging polite platitudes with Wang Teh and Wang Jen, he summoned the servants and ordered them to clean out the main suite, because the next day his second son would be moving in with his bride. When the widow heard that, she thought that he wanted her to adopt the second son.

She called in the Wang brothers and asked, "What did he say? When the daughter-in-law comes, she should stay in the back rooms while I stay in the front ones. That way I can look after them better. Why should I move to the back? It's unheard of that a daughter-in-law should live in the best rooms while her mother-in-law lives in the back."

"Don't get upset," said Wang Jen. "Let him say what he likes. Of course you have to be consulted."

They rejoined Yen, and after a little more conversation and a cup of tea, their servant came in to tell them that classmates were waiting for them to go to a literary meeting. Then they took their leave.

When Senior Licentiate Yen had seen them off, he sat down, summoned the dozen or so stewards and proceeded to issue orders. "My second son is coming here as your former master's heir tomorrow," he told them. "He will be your new master, and you must serve him well. Since Concubine Chao has no children, he will treat her as his father's concubine, and she has no right to stay in the front rooms. So tell the maidservants to sweep out the back rooms and move her things over; and clear the front rooms for your new master. Concubine Chao must keep her place. The new master will call her 'new wife,' and she should call him 'master' and his wife 'mistress.' In a day or so, when my daughter-in-law comes, Concubine Chao should pay her respects first, and then my son will greet her. We upper class families have to observe such etiquette scrupulously. As for your accounts for the fields, houses and money in your care, you must bring them up to date at once; and I will check them before passing them on to my son. You'll find things very different from under your old master, who left everything to his concubine and let you get away with anything. Anyone who tries to deceive me will get thirty strokes and be sent to Magistrate Tang's yamen to be forced to pay up."

Promising to obey him, the stewards withdrew; and Yen went back to his own house.

Acting on Senior Licentiate Yen's orders, the stewards went to the widow's rooms to move out her belongings. She cursed them so roundly that they dared not touch a thing. But because they had all along resented the airs she gave herself, they now banded together to say, "How dare we disobey the master's orders? For, after all, he is the rightful master. If he becomes angry, what shall we do?"

Calling upon heaven, the widow wept and stormed. She made a scene that lasted all night.

The next morning she took a sedan-chair to the yamen. Magistrate Tang was holding court, and she laid her case before him. After asking her for a written statement, the magistrate decreed that the matter should be decided by the clan.

Then the widow invited clan leader Yen Chen-hsien and all the other relatives to a feast. But of all the local gentry, Yen Chen-hsien feared Senior Licentiate Yen most, and all he would say was, "I may be clan leader, but this matter concerns the close relatives only, not the whole clan. That's all I have to say."

As for Wang Teh and Wang Jen, they sat there like wooden statues, and would not express any opinion.

The widow's brother, the rice-merchant, and the nephew who worked for a silversmith had never been in such high society before. Each time they opened their mouths to speak, Yen glared at them so ferociously that they dared not utter a word. Besides, they were telling themselves, "She always thought so highly of those Wang brothers, and treated us like dirt. Why should we offend Senior Licentiate Yen for her sake? Only fools catch flies on a tiger's head. Much better say nothing and offend nobody."

All this made the widow behind the screen as frantic as an ant on a hot furnace. And when she saw that nobody was going to speak up for her, she started to reproach Yen from behind the screen, bringing up old grievances, crying, abusing him, stamping her feet, beating her breast, and raising a great uproar.

Yen lost his temper. "It's obvious that this shrew comes from a low family," he growled. "What upper class person would behave like this? If she provokes me any more, I'm going to seize her by the hair and give her a good beating, then ask a go-between to take her away and marry her off."

The widow's storming and sobbing could have been heard half way up the sky. She wanted to rush out to scratch and claw at Yen, and it took several maidservants to restrain her. When the others saw the ugly turn things were taking, they hurried the senior licentiate home.

The next day, the clan head and the others met to discuss what reply they should send to the county magistrate. Wang Teh and Wang Jen declared that as scholars they could take no part in any lawsuit, and the clan head wrote a non-committal statement to the effect that although the widow had indeed been a concubine, she had been made the second wife. However, it was also true that Senior Licentiate Yen felt it would be wrong for his son to acknowledge her as step-mother. In all events, it was up to the magistrate to make a decision.

Now Magistrate Tang happened to be the son of a concubine, and when he read the statement he thought, "Laws are one thing, but the human factor has to be taken into account too. And this Senior Licentiate

Yen is a pain in the neck." He decreed, "Since the widow was made a wife, she should not be considered as a concubine. If Senior Licentiate Yen does not wish his son to be adopted, she may choose somebody else to adopt."

When Yen read this decree, he nearly went up in smoke. He straightway sent a petition to the prefectural government. But the prefect had concubines too, and he felt that the senior licentiate was causing unnecessary trouble. Having asked the Kaoyao yamen for details of the case, he issued a decree endorsing Magistrate Tang's decision.

Yen was furious. He appealed to the provincial commissioner of justice. But the provincial commissioner of justice ruled, "This is a trivial matter which should be settled by the prefect and the county magistrate."

Balked at every turn, Yen did not know how to save his face. Then it occurred to him, "Commissioner Chou belongs to the same rank as my daughter-in-law." He decided to go to the capital and beg Commissioner Chou to file in a petition there, in order that he might have his rights.

Chapter VII

Senior Licentiate Yen travelled post-haste to the capital, deciding to claim relationship with Commissioner Chou, in the hope that the latter would plead his case for him. Arrived at the capital, Yen found that Commissioner Chou had been promoted to the post of warden of the imperial college; but he boldly sent in his card, claiming kinship.

When the card was presented, Warden Chou was puzzled, for he was unable to remember any such relative. While he was considering the question, his attendant brought in another card with the name Fan Chin on it, unadorned by any title. Chou Chin remembered that this was the student he had examined in Canton, who had now passed the provincial examination and come to the capital for the final test.

"Show him in!" he ordered.

Pouring out respectful greetings as he entered, Fan Chin kowtowed again and again. The warden raised him up, and asked him to be seated. His first question was:

"Do you know a Senior Licentiate Yen in your county? Just now he sent in a card, professing to be my relative. He told my man that he was a Cantonese; but I have no such relative."

"I saw him just now," said Fan Chin. "He is from Kaoyao County, and is related to a Mr. Chou there. I don't know whether Your Excellency belongs to the same Chou family."

"Although we have the same surname, we are not related; so this senior licentiate can be no relative of mine," declared Chou Chin. He called in his servant and ordered him: "Tell Senior Licentiate Yen that

I am busy with public affairs, and it is not convenient to see him. Give him back his card."

When the servant had left, Warden Chou said, "I saw from the Canton list that you had distinguished yourself in the provincial examination there; so I have been looking forward to your arrival at the capital. How is it you delayed so long?"

Fan Chin told him about the death of his mother.

Unable to suppress a sigh, Warden Chou said, "Your scholarship is profound. Even if you have been delayed for a few years, you will certainly pass the metropolitan examination now. Besides, I have recommended you frequently to influential officials, and they are all eager to have you as their pupil. Just stay quietly in your lodgings to revise your studies thoroughly. If you are short of money, I shall be glad to help you."

"I shall never forget your great kindness," said Fan Chin.

After they had talked for some time, the warden entertained him to dinner. Then Fan Chin took his leave.

When the result of the metropolitan examination came out, Fan Chin had indeed passed. He was given an official post as censor, and a few years later was made commissioner of education of Shantung. On the day that this decree was issued, he went to see Warden Chou.

"Although Shantung is my native place, I have no commissions to trouble you with," said Chou Chin. "I do remember, though, that when I was teaching in Hsueh Market there was a student there called Hsun Mei. He was just seven at that time, but after all these years he must have grown up. He comes of a farmer's family, and I don't know if he has completed his studies; but if he takes the examination, I hope you will read his paper carefully. And if he shows any talent at all, I would be very much obliged if you would let him pass."

Fan Chin bore this in mind when he went to Shantung. But he had been supervising examinations for over half a year before he went to Yenchou prefecture, where three temporary buildings had been put up for the prefectural examination; and Warden Chou's request slipped his mind. He only remembered it the night before the results were to be published.

"What could have come over me?" he thought. "My patron asked me to look out for Hsun Mei in Wenshang County; but I have done nothing about it! This is dreadful!"

In a flurry, he looked through the list of scholars who had taken the preliminary test for the provincial examination; but Hsun Mei's name was not there. Then he asked his secretaries for the list of those who had failed in the prefectural examination, and carefully checked their names and cell numbers. He looked through more than six hundred papers, but could not find one by Hsun Mei. Fan Chin was very worried.

"Is it possible he didn't sit for the examination?" he wondered. "But

if he did sit for it, how dare I face Warden Chou in future? I must make another careful search, even if it means postponing the results."

At a feast with his secretaries, he was so worried that he infected them with his own uneasiness.

"Sir," said a young secretary called Chu Chin-yu, "this reminds me of a story. Several years ago, an old scholar was appointed commissioner for Szechuan. One day he was feasting with Mr. Ho Chin-ming, when Mr. Ho got drunk and shouted, 'In Szechuan, essays like Su Shih's* only deserve the sixth rank!' The old gentleman made a mental note of this; and three years later, when he left Szechuan and met Mr. Ho again, he told him, 'I have been in Szechuan for three years, and checked the papers extremely carefully, but I did not find one by Su Shih. He can't have entered.'" Laughing up his sleeve, the young man continued, "In what connection did the warden bring up Hsun Mei's name, sir?"

Commissioner Fan was too simple to realize that he was being made a fool of. With a worried frown, he said, "Since Su Shih's essays were no good, it did not matter if he was not found. But Warden Chou wants me to help this Hsun Mei; and if I can't find him, it will be rather embarrassing."

At that, Niu Pu-yi, an old secretary, suggested, "If he is from Wenshang County, why not look through the records of the dozen or so who have already passed the prefectural examination? If he has talent, he may have passed some days ago."

"Quite right! Quite right!" said the commissioner. Hastily checking through the entries, he found that the first name on the list was Hsun Mei. His face lit up in a smile, as the anxiety he had felt all day vanished.

The next morning, having graded the scholars who took the preliminary test for the provincial examination, he issued the results and dispatched the first, second and third ranks of candidates for the provincial examination. The first on the list of the fourth rank was Mei Chiu, who knelt down while the examiner read his essay.

"Literary composition is a scholar's chief duty," said Fan Chin angrily. "How could you write such rubbish? Obviously you must be a troublesome busybody. I ought to place you last; but I will be lenient and simply punish you with the rod according to the rule."

"I was unwell that day, sir," said Mei Chiu. "That is why my writing was confused. I beg Your Excellency to overlook it!"

"This is the order of the Imperial Court, which I cannot change. Attendants! Drag him to the bench, and punish him according to the rule!"

As the examiner's attendants were dragging Mei Chiu away to be beaten, the desperate candidate pleaded, "Sir! Have pity for my patron's sake."

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* Su Shih is the other name of the famous Sung Dynasty poet Su Tung-po. A scholar should have known this name.

"Who was your patron?"

"The present Warden of the Imperial College, Chou Chin."

"So you were Warden Chou's student? In that case, I will let you off." And Fan Chin ordered his attendants to free Mei Chiu.

Then Mei Chiu knelt down, while the examiner admonished him: "Since you are Warden Chou's student, you should study hard; for when you produce a composition like this, you certainly disgrace his reputation. In future, mend your ways. If I find you writing like this at the next examination, I shall not pardon you again." He then told the attendants to drive Mei Chiu away.

Now the examiner came to the new scholars, and the first name he called from Wenshang County was that of Hsun Mei. A handsome young man answered from the crowd, and when he came forward the examiner asked him,

"Are you related to Mei Chiu who was here just now?"

Hsun Mei did not understand, and made no reply.

"Were you Warden Chou's student?" asked the examiner.

"Yes, he was my teacher in primary school."

"I was also Warden Chou's student," said Examiner Fan, "and when I left the capital he asked me to look out for your paper. I did not expect that, without any help, you would come first on the list. You are young and brilliant, and my patron did not teach you in vain. Go on studying hard, and you have a fine future before you."

Hsun Mei knelt down and thanked him.

When he had disposed of the other papers and sent off the new scholars to the accompaniment of gongs and trumpets, Commissioner Fan returned to the school and closed the doors.

As Hsun Mei was leaving the Examination School, he saw Mei Chiu standing by the door and could not resist asking, "When did you study with Warden Chou, Mr. Mei?"

"How would a youngster like you know?" said Mei. "It was before you were born. In those days he was a tutor in the family of one of our yamen officials; it was only later that he came to our village. But by the time you went to school, I had already passed the examination; so you did not know about our relationship. I was always a favourite with my patron, who said that my compositions showed genius although they were unconventional; and, since this is exactly the same criticism that Commissioner Fan made just now, it shows that all discriminating examiners have exactly the same criteria. You know, Commissioner Fan might easily have put me in the third rank; but, in that case, he would have had no chance to speak to me. He deliberately ranked me lower, in order that he could talk to me and mention his relationship to my patron, Warden Chou. It was for the same reason that he placed you first. We scholars should appreciate these niceties of behaviour." Then they spoke of other things, and went back to their rooms.

The next day, having seen Commissioner Fan off and hired horses,

LI HSIUNG-TSAI: Forest

they returned to Hsueh Market together. Hsun Mei's father was dead, and only his mother was at home. The young man bowed to his mother, who was a happy woman that day. "Since your father died, times have been hard and we have had to sell most of our land," she said. "But now that you have passed the examination and become a scholar, you will be able to support the family by teaching."

Shen Hsiang-fu was old now, and could not walk without a stick, but he came over to congratulate them and arranged with Mei Chiu to collect money from the villagers to celebrate Hsun Mei's success. They collected two dozen strings of cash, and borrowed the Buddhist temple for the feast.

Mei Chiu and Hsun Mei arrived first at the temple on the morning of the feast, and were greeted by the monk. They bowed before Buddha and nodded to the monk, who said, "Congratulations, Mr. Hsun, on becoming a scholar! This is a reward for all the good deeds your worthy father did to the glory of Buddha. You were just a child, with your hair in tufts, when you studied here."

He pointed out to them the shrine which the villagers had set up for Warden Chou. There were incense burners and candlesticks on the table, and above a memorial tablet on which was written in letters of gold an account of the warden's career. This had been presented by the villagers and the monk. When they saw their patron's shrine, the two scholars bowed reverently before it several times. Then they went with the monk to the rooms behind, where Chou Chin had taught. The double door was open, overlooking the river. Several feet of the opposite bank had been washed away, while this side had grown out a little. The three back rooms had been separated from the rest by matting, and were no longer used as a school. The room on the left was occupied by a man from Kiangsi, on whose door was written Mr. Chen the fortune-teller. Mr. Chen was out, however, and his door was locked.

On the central wall of the hall were still pasted two scrolls in Chou Chin's writing: "Rectify yourself to await the right season," and "Watch yourself and practise strict discipline." But the red paper had faded.

Pointing to these scrolls Mei Chiu told the monk, "Since this is the warden's calligraphy, you shouldn't leave it here. Sprinkle the scrolls with water, so that you can take them down and have them remounted. You must preserve them."

The monk immediately did as he was directed.

Soon Shen Hsiang-fu arrived with the villagers, and they feasted for a whole day.

Mrs. Hsun used a few dozen of the strings of cash presented to them to redeem some articles they had pawned and to buy several piculs of rice. The remainder was kept for Hsun Mei's travelling expenses when he took the next examination.

Next year he came first in the preliminary test for the provincial examination—truly brilliance shows itself in youth! Then, having passed

the provincial examination with distinction, he went to the office of the provincial commissioner of finance and took his share of caps, plates, canopies, banners, wooden placards and travelling expenses; then, without further delay, he went to the examination at the capital, and in this examination he won the third place.

According to Ming Dynasty regulations, a special seat was set in the room of a successful candidate, who sat down while attendants bowed to him. While this ceremony was being performed, it was announced, "Mr. Wang, a fellow graduate from Wenshang County, has come to greet Mr. Hsun."

Ordering the attendants to remove the seat, Hsun Mei went out to greet the guest.

A white-haired, white-bearded man came in, took Hsun Mei by the hand, and said, "Our friendship was ordained by heaven. We are not ordinary classmates."

When they had bowed to each other and sat down, Mr. Wang went on, "I had a dream about you long ago, which shows that our fortunes were determined by fate. In future, let us work together and help each other."

Hsun Mei dimly recollected hearing something about this dream when he was a child; thus, as soon as Mr. Wang mentioned it, he understood. "Young as I am, I am most fortunate to be on the same list as you, sir," he said. "Since we are from the same county, I shall always come to you for advice in future."

"Are these your lodgings?"

"Yes."

"They are small and far from the court; it cannot be very convenient for you to live here. I am quite comfortably off, and I have bought a house in the capital. Why not come and stay with me? It will be more convenient for the palace examination." After chatting a little longer, Mr. Wang left.

The next day, accordingly, Mr. Wang sent men to move Hsun Mei's luggage to his house in Chiangmi Lane, and they stayed together. At the palace examination, Hsun Mei was placed in the second rank, and Mr. Wang in the third. Both of them were made assistant secretaries of the Board of Works.

The Palace of Eternal Youth

Hung Sheng

SCENE II

THE PLEDGE

[*The emperor enters with two eunuchs.*]

EMPEROR:

Since I became Tang emperor I have ruled
This mighty realm, conferring royal favours
Like the gentle rain in spring.
Flowers in the palace are blooming and peace prevails,
Then why should I not spend my days in pleasure?
For then I need not envy
*The gods above the clouds.**
Now spring has come to the forbidden palace,
And trees are blossoming in a season of joy;
The affairs of men go well,
The government is good,
And subjects come to pay their homage at court.
But I mean to take my pleasure in women too,
For I have found a lady fair as a goddess.**

I am the Tang emperor. Since coming to the throne I have appointed able ministers to govern my empire. All is quiet along the frontiers, my people have had good harvests, and peace reigns throughout the world as in the Golden Age of old. I have spent my leisure lately enjoying music and women. I have noticed that one of the palace maids named Yang Yu-huan is gentle and beautiful, and choosing this

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* Verses in italics are sung.

** Verses not in italics are recited.

auspicious day I am making her my concubine. I have ordered her to be given a bath in Huaching Pool,* and told the maids Yung-hsin and Nien-nu to wait on her. My eunuch Kao Li-shih should be bringing her here soon.

[*The eunuch* KAO *comes in with two maids holding fans who are leading* LADY YANG.]

LADY:

How happy I am at this stroke of fortune!
I have bathed and been given a splendid retinue.

MAIDS:

All of the other concubines
Are enviously watching her from the steps of the court.

[*They walk forward, and the eunuch kneels before the emperor.*]

KAO: Your slave Kao Li-shih reports that the new imperial concubine, Lady Yang, is at the palace gate awaiting your pleasure, sire.

EMPEROR: Send her in.

KAO [*turning back*]: His Majesty orders Lady Yang to approach.

LADY [*advancing and kneeling before the emperor*]: Your slave Yang Yu-huan is here. Long live the emperor!

EUNUCH: You may rise.

LADY: Though poor and plain, I was fortunate enough to be chosen a palace maid; but now I am overcome by this new favour.

EMPEROR: You come of an illustrious family, and are as beautiful as you are virtuous. I am happy to have you serving in the palace.

LADY [*curtseying*]: Long live the emperor!

KAO: You may rise.

[*She gets up.*]

EMPEROR: Let the feast begin.

[*As* KAO *passes on the order, music is heard offstage.* LADY YANG *offers wine to the emperor, and the maids hand a goblet to her. The emperor takes his seat in the centre of the stage, and she sits beside him.*]

EMPEROR:

I have searched my realm for lovely girls,
But who is loveliest of them all?
Today the gods have given me
One truly matchless; she shall be
My favourite; with a lady's rank
She shall outshine the rest.

TOGETHER:

May love reign as long as the earth endures!

---

* At Lishan, near the Tang capital, there were warm springs; and the emperor had a pleasure palace built there, with a bathing pool. To be given a bath in this pool was a sign of imperial favour.

LADY:

I am overwhelmed by your praise,
For I cannot deserve such royal honour.
Raised to the skies by your sudden favour,
I can only imitate good queens of old,
Waiting faithfully on my lord,
And serving humbly at his side.

TOGETHER:

May love reign as long as the earth endures!

MAIDS:

She will be the most happy from now on,
Like the Lady Swallow of Han;*
All the emperor's love will be hers,
In a chamber of gold to live,
In a tower of jade to sing,
For ever and ever to hand him a brimming goblet of wine.

ALL:

May love reign as long as the earth endures!

EUNUCHS:

Like the sun that shines upon the dragon's scales,
Or coloured clouds around the pheasant feathers,
The emperor smiles as he looks at his new lady;
Cup after cup is drunk, the spring breeze blows,
The full moon gleams like silver, evening clouds
Make an embroidered tapestry, while night
At this auspicious hour falls easily.

ALL:

May love reign as long as the earth endures!

KAO: May it please Your Majesty, the moon has risen.

[*The table is cleared.*]

EMPEROR: I shall watch the moon from the courtyard with Lady Yang.

[*Music is heard offstage, while the emperor leads* LADY YANG *forward. The others remain in the background.*]

EMPEROR:

I leave the gilded hall
To gaze at her more raptly under the moon.
Even the flowers seem faded
Compared with her hair, her dress,
And her numberless charms.

[*He laughs gently.*]

So happy am I tonight,
With the breeze and the brilliant moon,

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* Lady Swallow, or Chao Fei-yen, was the favourite of Emperor Cheng Ti (B.C. 32-7) of the Han Dynasty. A great beauty, she was famous for her singing and dancing.

I no longer envy the king
*Who was loved by the nymph in his dream.**

LADY:

How happy I am to be with the emperor,
Following him in his pleasure and his feasts!
I stand on the marble steps while he speaks so kindly,
And fragrance floats from his train. My dress is moist
With chilly dew, but still I stand here. Birds
Are already nesting in the palace eaves.

EMPEROR: Attendants! Lanterns! Light the way to the west palace.

[KAO LI-SHIH *shouts assent. The eunuchs and maids carry lanterns to light the way.*]

ALL:

Now the blazing torches cast a thousand shadows,
Past the screen inlaid with pearl gleams the Milky Way;
Through corridors and terraces a perfumed breeze is blowing,
And high above the great bronze statue rides the moon.
Now is the night of all nights! The phoenix couple
Under canopies crimson and green seem to float on clouds;
Now every tree is jade, every flower is jasper;
Every moment is the best of this clear spring night.
As the bright moon sinks behind the palace wall,
Let the silken curtain be lifted;
And, intoxicated with love,
Let them enter their orchid-sweet bower.

KAO: May it please Your Majesty, we have reached the west palace.

EMPEROR: Attendants, leave us!

KAO:

A spring breeze has blown open the purple curtains.

EUNUCHS:

And heavenly music flows from the pearl-decked pavilion.

[KAO *and the other eunuchs retire.*]

EMPEROR:

Moonlight streams through the casement, and the shadows
Of flowers flicker in the candlelight.
A glorious night for love—let us forget
How slow time drags in the other palaces.

[*The maids bring fresh, informal clothes to the emperor and* LADY YANG, *then retire. The emperor and* LADY YANG *sit down.*]

EMPEROR:

The candles shed soft light on your silken garments.

LADY:

I am greatly favoured by the royal scent.

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* This is a reference to King Hsiang of Chu, who, according to a poem ascribed to Sung Yu of the third century B.C., dreamed that he met a nymph who loved him.

EMPEROR:

Tonight other beauties may frown,

TOGETHER:

But tomorrow all will sing of the new found jewel.

EMPEROR: This evening our love begins. [*He takes from his sleeve an ornamental pin for her hair and a jewel box.*] I have brought you this gold pin and this jewel box to pledge our love. Let us love each other as long as we live.

Studded with jewels, set with emeralds,
These treasures were always kept close to my heart.
Tonight I give you this phoenix pin for your hair,
And this box, wrapped in a fragrant scarf,
To put in your silken sleeve.
And may we two become
Like the phoenixes on the pin, always flying together;
Like the love knot on the box—two hearts as one.

[*He gives them to* LADY YANG, *who curtseys.*]

LADY:

I thank Your Majesty for this royal gift,
But fear my poor looks will not last as long
As your great kindness which is like the rain.

[*She looks at the gifts.*]

I steal a look at these carvings of dragon and phoenix;
How I love these twin heads and the curved lids fastened together!
May our love be as close and as firm,
May the phoenixes never be parted;
May the box never be divided!

EMPEROR:

The pale moonlight shines on the flowery bough,

LADY:

I am newly come into favour.

EMPEROR:

I shall always be drunk with love for this fair maid.

TOGETHER:

And we shall be happy together year after year.*

[*Exeunt.*]

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* It was customary in *kun chu* opera to round off each scene with four verses, each of which was taken from a different author. In this drama, all these lines are taken from poems of the Tang Dynasty.

SCENE III

THE BRIBE

[*Enter* AN LU-SHAN *wearing a military costume and felt hat.*]

AN:

My luck has been bad, my ambition thwarted,
And now I have fallen into a trap.
But still I aspire as high as ever,
My appetite is as great as ever;
Only I must be patient and bide my time.
Big is my belly and great my strength,
I have masterly tactics and boundless courage.
How long will a fiery dragon lie still?
When I stir up the ocean, then people will tremble!

I am An Lu-shan of Liucheng. My mother prayed to the Yalushan Mountain to give her a son; so when I was born she called me Lu-shan. At my birth our tent was flooded with light, and all beasts and birds fled in terror. Then my mother married An Yen-yen, and An became my surname. I enlisted under Military Governor Chang Shou-kuei, who struck by my uncommon appearance adopted me, appointed me a lieutenant and sent me to fight the tribesmen. Boasting of my courage I advanced recklessly, only to be badly defeated and forced to fly. Now Governor Chang has not had me executed, but has sent me to the capital for punishment. I only arrived yesterday, and do not yet know my fate. Fortunately I have a sworn brother named Chang Chien who is a steward in Prime Minister Yang's office. Having bribed the escort to break my fetters, I have sought out my sworn brother and through him sent presents to the prime minister. Now I am going to learn the outcome.

[*He walks round the stage.*]

Can this be the end of a brave fellow like me? Damnation!

I had intended, like the unruly dragon,
To flood the dykes and wreak great devastation;
But, out of my element, a captured turtle,
Brave as I am, I'm trapped!
Had I known that defeat meant I must lose my head,
I would sooner have died in battle
Than suffer the indignity of chains!
Now let me proceed with haste!
Relying on bribes given at dead of night,
I hope to make good my escape.
Did not Heaven will my birth?
Why allow myself, then, to be killed in mid-career?

I see this is the prime minister's court, where I am to wait for Chang.

[*Enter* CHANG CHIEN.]

CHANG:

As the emperor's relative, Yang has become a duke;
And I as his steward am as good as a magistrate!

[*He greets* AN.] So you have come. His Grace has accepted your gifts, and will give you an audience.

AN [*bowing*]: I must thank you for your help.

CHANG: His Grace has not yet entered the court. Let us wait in my office.

It is all in the hands of the minister.

AN:

May he save the poor fellow defeated at the frontier!

[*Exeunt.*]

[*The prime minister,* YANG KUO-CHUNG, *enters with his retinue.*]

YANG:

Related by marriage to the imperial house,
My cousin and I are His Majesty's favourites;
As prime minister I have absolute power at court.
Let all beware! For whoever tries to encroach
On my blazing splendour faces sure disaster!
Now the government is mine to control,
My position is most exalted;
When I leave the court in the evening,
The officers and courtiers bow before me.

I am Yang Kuo-chung, a cousin of Lady Yang. As prime minister I share the sovereign's glory and control his thunderbolt. [*He laughs sardonically.*] I live a life of luxury, for I believe a man should enjoy himself while he can. I accept bribes, for I have the power to shape the decisions of the emperor. Attendants, leave me!

[*His retinue goes out.*]

A short time ago Chang Chien reported to me that a frontier lieutenant, An Lu-shan, who lost his troops in battle, has been brought to the capital for court martial. But he has sent me presents, begging that his life be spared. I suppose there is always an element of luck in war, and to be defeated occasionally is excusable. [*He laughs.*] If I spare him, I shall be saving a useful officer for the state! I have already sent for him, and shall make up my mind when I see him.

[CHANG *enters.*]

CHANG: Your Grace, An Lu-shan is waiting outside.

YANG: Bring him in.

CHANG: I will, Your Grace.

[*He goes out, then leads in* AN LU-SHAN *who is now wearing a blue coat and cap.*]

This way.

[AN *advances on his knees.*]

AN: The wretched An Lu-shan salutes Your Grace.
YANG: Rise.
AN: I dare not, since I deserve to be sentenced to death.
YANG: Chang Chien has reported to me your purpose in coming here. Give me your own account of your offence.
AN: Your Grace, I was ordered to attack the tribesmen....
YANG: Rise and speak.
[AN *rises.*]
AN:

Relying on strength and boldness, I charged with my men,
And soon overran all the tribesmen who stood in our path.
But then I was careless. At night they surrounded our camp,
And we fought at close quarters, pitting our naked hands
Against the enemy's swords!

YANG: How did you escape?
AN: I fought my way out.

Fortunate to escape alone with my life,
On the strength of past services I hoped to be pardoned;
But now I find myself facing a court martial.

[*He kowtows.*]

Thus I have come to Your Grace, to beg for mercy!

[*The minister rises from his seat.*]
YANG:

To lose an army is a serious matter;
Though I have power at court; how can I show such leniency?
And I fear, when sentence has once been passed,
I have no authority to alter the verdict.

[*On his knees again,* AN *sheds tears.*]
AN: Your Grace can save me!
YANG [*laughs*]:

Even If I have a little influence,
I can hardly disclose what goes on behind the scenes!

AN [*kowtowing*]: My life is in your hands!
YANG: Very well. Tomorrow when I go to court—

I shall see what can be done
To release you from the net,
And to save your life.

AN [*kowtowing*]: I owe Your Grace such gratitude that I can only repay you by serving as your horse or your dog. Most humbly I take my leave!
YANG: Chang Chien, show him out.
CHANG:

Let us look for the messenger's flag
And wait for good news.

[CHANG *leads* AN *out.*]
YANG [*reflectively*]: This An Lu-shan is a junior officer at the frontier,

who has never distinguished himself. If I try to save him, the emperor will suspect something. [*Laughs.*] Ah, I have it! The other day Governor Chang stated in his memorial to the throne that An's knowledge of barbarian languages and military skill qualified him for the post of a frontier general. I shall drop a hint to the War Ministry to propose to the emperor that An be summoned to court to be tested by His Majesty. That will give me the opening I need. Yes, that is it!

Absolute is my power,
And I practise a thousand wiles.
If an offender bribes me well,
Private gain can be made to appear for the public good.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE XIII

A DISPUTE AMONG THE MIGHTY

[*Enter the prime minister with attendants.*]
YANG:

Who can judge the ambition of the wolf cub
That starts to snarl and glories in its power,
Forgetting the gratitude it owes?
My duty is to warn the emperor.

Now all the ministers and generals in the government bow before me, because I am prime minister and cousin of the emperor's favourite—all but that fellow An Lu-shan, who pretends to be naive but is really plotting mischief. Why should His Majesty have grown so fond of him, and made him a prince? He forgets that I saved his life, and often opposes me and behaves insolently. Curse him! The other day I warned His Majesty that An is an ambitious wolf cub with treason written clearly on his face, and that steps should be taken to prevent his making trouble in the future; but the emperor did not listen to me. Today at court I shall find an opportunity to warn His Majesty again. Nothing short of having An dismissed will satisfy me. Here is the gate to the court. Attendants, leave me!
[*The attendants retire.*]
[*Shouts are heard offstage: "Clear the way!"*]
There is someone coming. I will see who it is.
[AN LU-SHAN *enters with attendants.*]
AN:

Strongly entrenched in the emperor's favour,
I hide my secret design.

Attendants, leave me! [*His attendants withdraw, and he greets the prime minister.*]
Good day, my lord.

YANG [*laughs*]: So it is An Lu-shan.
AN: Well, old man, and what have you to say to me?
YANG: This is the imperial palace—how dare your attendants raise this uproar?
AN [*insolently*]: See here, Old Yang—
The robes I wear were given me by the emperor,
The horses I ride are from the imperial stable;
I am summoned for private discussions on frontier affairs,
And dismissed from the palace long after all others have left.
Since I am a prince, and enjoy His Majesty's confidence, there can be no objection if my attendants call out to clear the way for me. That is, of course, a privilege you ministers do not enjoy.
YANG [*laughs coldly*]: So there can be no objection, eh? Let me ask you, An Lu-shan, since when have you become so high and mighty?
AN: I have always been like this.
YANG: Think back a little.
AN: To what?
YANG: To the time when you first came to see me. Were you like this then?
AN: That was different. Why harp on the past?
YANG: Why, An Lu-shan? Because—
As good as dead, with no hope of reprieve,
You knelt at my feet to plead.
It was thanks to my cunning intervention
That the prisoner's life was spared.
AN: His Majesty in his mercy pardoned me and restored me to my post. What had you to do with it?
YANG: Well said, indeed!
You sin against your conscience!
Favour and kindness to you are like floating duckweed!
AN: As you know, Yang Kuo-chung—
Fame and disgrace depend upon fortune;
Then why should you boast of your preeminence?
You mentioned my failure; but do you remember the attack on Nanchao?*
You hid the truth, and claimed that your defeat
Was a victory. Deceitful ministers
Like the drifting clouds obscure their sovereign's splendour.
YANG: Who would dare deceive our sovereign? This is treason!
AN: Have you never deceived him?
How many posts and official ranks have you sold?
You have squeezed the people dry in your greed.
YANG: Hold your tongue! You talk about the sale of official posts. How did you get *your* wealth? [*He laughs cynically.*]

* Nanchao was a tributary state southwest of China.

AN: Nor is that all, by any means.
You rely on your cousin's influence and your craft;
You are guilty of thousands of crimes against the state.
YANG:
Stop this baseless slander!
[YANG *seizes* AN.]
And come with me to the emperor!
AN: Who is afraid of you? Let us go!
[*Each gripping the other, they enter the royal presence and bow.*]
YANG: May it please Your Majesty—
An Lu-shan hides a dagger in his heart,
Posing as a fool, he is at heart a traitor;
Often he gives vent to his treacherous ambition,
He once actually insulted the Crown Prince at court!
I beg Your Majesty to mete out justice immediately.
Such insolence is not to be endured.
This evil must be struck down while yet there is time.
AN: Your Majesty—
Such royal favour has been shown to me,
This man, great as he is, is jealous.
And, simple as I am, where can I fly,
Now that I have aroused his enmity?
[AN *pretends to shed tears.*]
I fear I shall fall his victim soon;
Only the emperor knows my loyalty;
I beg permission to leave the capital,
To serve at the frontier in some humble post.
VOICE OFF: His Majesty decrees that since Yang Kuo-chung and An Lu-shan accuse each other and will not work together, they must not both serve in the capital. The emperor herewith appoints An Lu-shan Military Governor of Fanyang, and orders him to proceed at once to his post.
AN AND YANG: Long live the emperor!
[*They rise.*]
AN [*bows to* YANG]: I am going now, old man. You will not be troubled any more by my insolence.
In the court you shall do as you please; and so shall I,
When I go to govern my principality.
[*The prime minister laughs bitterly.* AN *starts to go, then turns back again.*]
One last word—
I suppose I should thank you, too, for this new appointment!
[*He salutes by bringing both hands together.*]
Goodbye!
[*Aside.*]
I shall be watching them with interest! [*Exit.*]

YANG [*watching him go*]: This is a bad business, confound it!
I wanted to overthrow him,
But promoted instead he has troops at his command.
How can I vent my anger?
I shall be laughed at over this!
I only hope that An Lu-shan does revolt. Then—
The emperor will see that I warned him rightly,
And may regret the decision made today.
A man should not hesitate to strike down what is evil.
Now trouble is brewing, unknown to all the world.
I sigh in vain, to find my ambition thwarted;
His words are sweet, but his actions dastardly.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE XXII

THE SECRET VOW

[*Enter the* HEAVENLY WEAVING MAID* *and two other fairies.*]
WEAVING MAID:
With my jade shuttle in the fleecy clouds,
I weave the whole year round.
There can be no love longing in heaven,
But I realize now that the Double Seventh has come.
Light wisps of clouds that interlace,
And shooting stars, convey our messages;
In the Milky Way autumn slips in unheeded,
We meet once a year in the chilly wind and dew,
Yet fare better than mortal lovers for all their meetings.
My heart melts at the thought;
Our tryst is like a dream;
Magpies will form a bridge ahead;
And when love is true,
It makes no difference how seldom lovers meet.
I am the Heavenly Weaving Maid. With the Heavenly Emperor's permission, I married the Heavenly Cowherd; and every year on the seventh day of the seventh moon, I cross the Milky Way to meet my love. Today on earth it is the seventh day of the seventh moon of the tenth year of the Tien Pao period. Now the Milky Way is calm and the magpies are coming to make a bridge. I will stop weaving and dress myself to wait for the appointed hour.
[*Music is heard offstage, and magpies are seen flying around. A bridge is set up, and the magpies support both ends.*]
FAIRIES: The magpie bridge is ready. Your Ladyship may cross the Milky Way.
[*The* WEAVING MAID *advances.*]
WEAVING MAID:
I toss aside my web and mount my carriage;
The sky is cloudless, the evening breeze is cool.
[*She reaches the bridge.*]
I step onto the bridge, which casts its shadow
Onto the stream below; the crescent moon
Is bathed in dew, the magpies circle low,
And the autumn sky was never as fair as now.
[*She reaches the other side of the bridge.*]
FAIRIES: We have crossed the bridge, my lady.
WEAVING MAID: Far under the Milky Way I see a wisp of smoke. Where does it come from?
FAIRIES: It is Lady Yang, concubine of the Tang emperor, who is praying in the palace on this Double Seventh for happiness.
WEAVING MAID: Since she is so reverent, I shall go with my husband to see her.
ALL:
Year after year we meet in heaven,
Pitying mortals because their love is transient.

[*Exeunt.*]

[*Enter two eunuchs holding lanterns, followed by the emperor.*]
EMPEROR:
The autumn night is still and the sky deep blue,
The light mist scatters with the dusk;
After a shower freshness breathes from the trees;
Are those clouds beside the twin stars by the Milky Way?
[*Laughter is heard. The emperor listens.*]
A light breeze carries the sound of happy laughter
Through the shade of flowers and trees.
Attendant, who is laughing and talking?
EUNUCH [*calling to someone offstage*]: His Majesty asks who is laughing and talking there?
VOICE OFF: Lady Yang is going to the Palace of Eternal Youth to pray for happiness on this Double Seventh!

* Heroine in one of the most popular myths in China which describes her love with the Heavenly Cowherd. According to one version of the story, the Weaving Maid (the star Vega) wove silk east of the Milky Way, conceived of by the Chinese as a river; while the Cowherd (the star Altair) tended his cattle west of the Milky Way. After they married, however, they neglected their tasks; hence the Heavenly Emperor was angry and separated them, allowing them to meet only once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh moon, when magpies would make a bridge for them across the Milky Way.

EUNUCH [*to the emperor*]: Lady Yang is going to the Palace of Eternal Youth to pray for happiness. That's the reason for the talk and laughter.

EMPEROR: Do not announce me. I will go there quietly.

I will go alone, without the crimson lanterns,
To watch unseen from the courtyard of the palace. [*Exit.*]

[LADY YANG *comes in. With her are* YUNG-HSIN, NIEN-NU *and two other maids who are carrying a box, a fan, a vase of flowers and a golden basin.**]

LADY:

Incense mounts in the courtyard from the golden censer,
*Candlelight gleams, and the spider spins its web;***
Here are beans in a golden basin,
And flowers of many hues in a silver vase.

MAIDS: Here we are at the Palace of Eternal Youth, and the offering is ready. Will it please Your Ladyship to offer incense?

[*The maids place the vase of flowers and the golden basin on the table.* YUNG-HSIN *takes the box to* LADY YANG, *who picks out several sticks of incense.*]

LADY: I, Yang Yu-huan, reverently burn this incense, the offering of a true heart, as I pray to the twin stars above. Look into my heart, and give me protection.

May our love, pledged by hairpin and jewel box, last forever.
May I not be cast off like a fan when chill autumn comes.

[*While* LADY YANG *is worshipping, the emperor comes in quietly, and stands watching her.*]

EMPEROR:

My love is kneeling on the marble steps,
There, in seclusion, praying in low tones.

MAIDS [*seeing the emperor*]: Ah, His Majesty is here!

[LADY YANG *turns hastily to kneel to him. The emperor helps her up.*]

EMPEROR: What are you doing here, my love?

LADY: It is the evening of the seventh day of the seventh moon, so I am praying to the Weaving Maid for grace and skill.

EMPEROR [*laughs*]: You are already cleverer than any heavenly weaving maid. What more do you have to ask for?

LADY: You flatter me, sire.

[*The emperor and* LADY YANG *take seats. The maids withdraw.*]

EMPEROR: Look, my love, at the Weaving Maid and the Cowherd. Separated by the Milky Way, they can only meet one night each year. How they must long for each other!

Still is the autumn night, and limpid the blue sky;

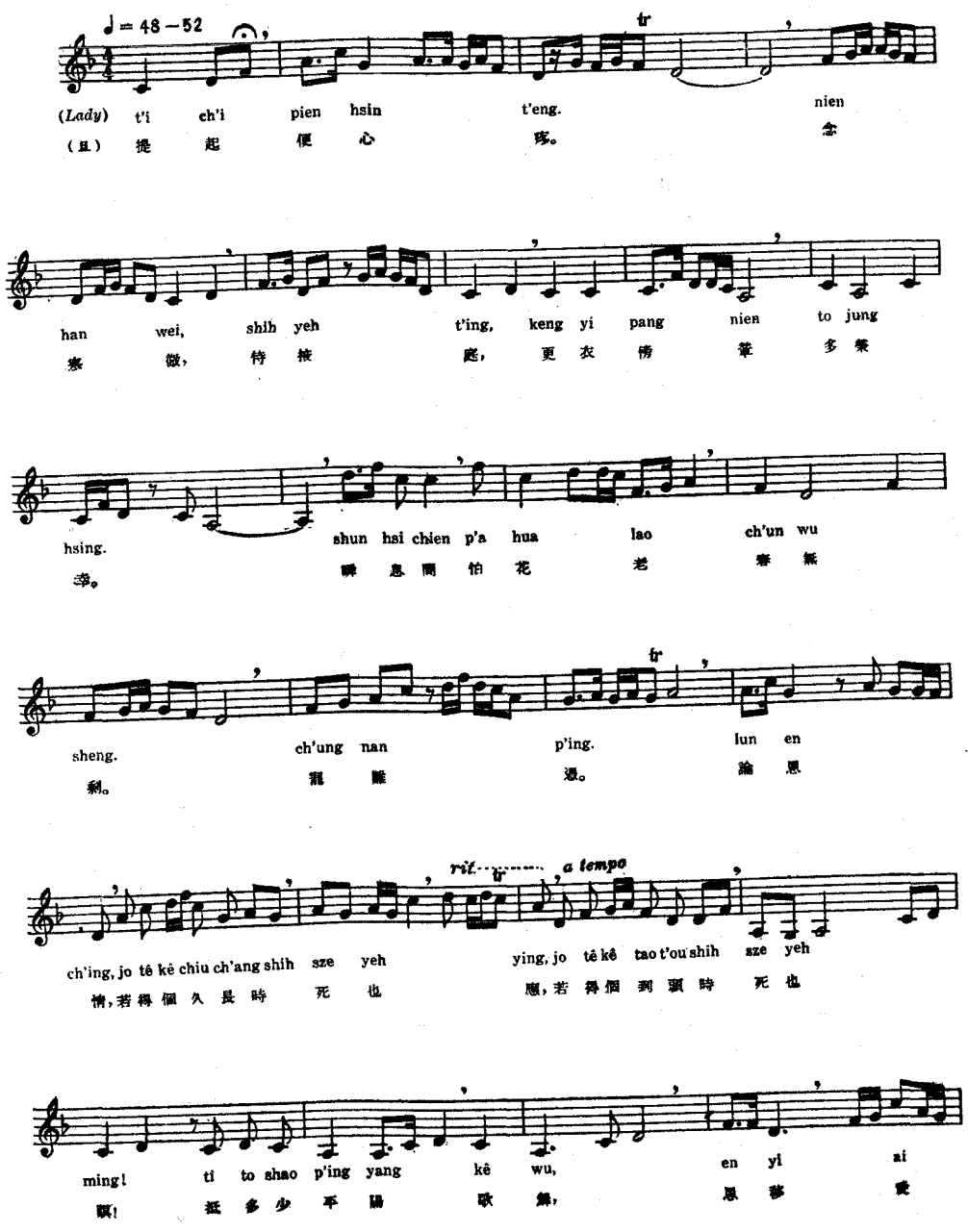
---

* At this festival women often prayed before a basin with beans in it, hoping that they would be given children.

** To see a spider spinning its web was considered lucky.

Songs from Scene XXII

I




keng, ch'ang men ku chi, hun hsiao lei
更, 長 門 孤 寂, 魂 消 淚
rit.
ling! tuan ch'ang wang ch'i hung yen ming!
零! 斷 腸 枉 泣 紅 顏 命!

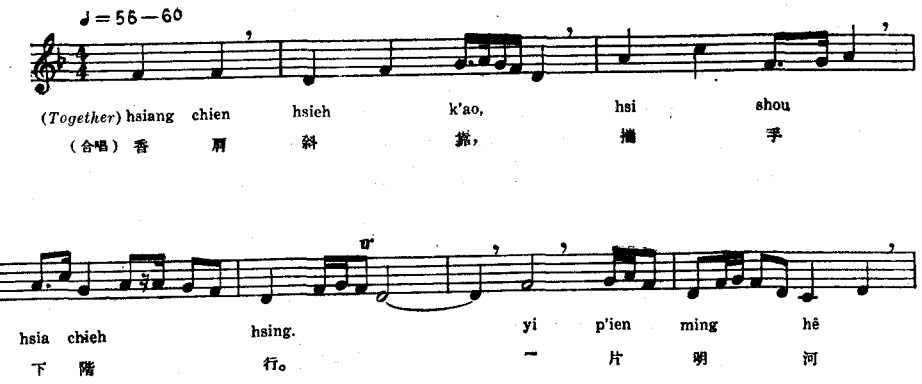
2


♩= 52—58
(Emperor) hsiu hsin lü, mien lei
(生) 休 心 慮, 免 淚


ling, p'a yi shih yu pien keng. tsuo su erh
零, 怕 移 時 有 變 更。做 酥 兒
pan mi chiao nien ting, tsung
拌 蜜 膠 粘 定, 總
rit.
pu li hsü yü ch'ing. (Together) hua mien
不 離 須 臾 傾。 (合唱) 話 綿


rit.
t'eng, hua mi yüeh an, fen pu tê ying hê hsing.
藤, 花 迷 月 暗, 分 不 得 影 和 形。

3


♩= 56—60
(Together) hsiang chien hsieh k'ao, hsi shou
(合唱) 香 肩 斜 靠, 攜 手
hsia chieh hsing. yi p'ien ming hê
下 階 行。 一 片 明 河


tr
tang tien heng. (Lady) lo yi tou chüeh yeh liang
當 殿 橫。(旦) 羅 衣 陡 覺 夜 涼
tr
sheng.(Emperor) wei ying hê ni ch'iao yü
生。(生) 惴 應 和 你 悄 語
rit.
ti yen, hai shih shan meng.
低 言, 海 誓 山 盟。

Translations of Songs from Scene XXII

1

Lady
The thought of this makes me sad;
It preys on my mind.
Of humble birth, I have been exceedingly honoured,
Able to serve at the emperor's side.
But all too soon your love for me may vanish,
For, when the flower fades and springtime is gone,
I fear the imperial favour will pass to another.
Often I think of Your Majesty's kindness.
If only our love can endure, then death holds no fear!
If only our love can endure, I shall die content!
But how many court ladies have been forsaken at last,
When, left alone in the palace,
With the emperor's love and favour transferred to another,
They can only shed tears to lament their unhappy fate!

2

Emperor
Take comfort and dry your tears.
You need have no fear that our love will change.
We are so close to each other,
That not for a single moment can we be parted.

Together
Our love will be unbroken,
Our love will be everlasting;
For we are like flowers in the moonlight,
Substance and shadow blended completely in one.

3

Emperor
Shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand,
We walk down the jade-like steps.
The Milky Way is gleaming above our heads.

Lady
In my silken dress I feel the night grow cool.

Emperor
The time is right to whisper to you of love,
And vow to be true forever.

The time has come for the heavenly lovers to meet.
But their time is short, for soon the cock will crow,
And parting in cold clouds and chilly dew
They must wait another year in loneliness.

LADY: When you speak of the twin stars' grief at parting, sire, you make me sad. It is a pity we mortals do not know what happens in heaven.

They must be lovesick too, if the truth were known.

[*She wipes away tears.*]

EMPEROR: Ah, my darling, why are you shedding tears?

LADY: Though the Weaving Maid and the Cowherd meet only once a year, their love will endure for all eternity. But our love, I am afraid, will not last as long.

EMPEROR: Why should you say that, my love?

Though the heavenly pair are immortal,
They cannot compare with lovers on earth,
For we in our hundred years know more of love's joy.
And so on a night like this we ought to be merry.
I cannot understand why you weep instead.

[*He moves closer to her and whispers.*]

Can the stars take pleasure as we do, day and night?

LADY: Your Majesty has been very kind to me, but there is something I beg to be allowed to say tonight. [*She pauses.*]

EMPEROR: Don't hesitate. What is it?

LADY [*sobbing*]: I am the most favoured now of all Your Majesty's servants in the imperial palaces. But I am afraid that as time passes you will stop loving me, and I shall be forsaken.

The thought of this makes me sad;
It preys on my mind.
Of humble birth, I have been exceedingly honoured,
Able to serve at the emperor's side.
But all too soon your love for me may vanish,
For, when the flower fades and springtime is gone,
I fear the imperial favour will pass to another.

[*She clings to the emperor's robe and weeps.*]

Often I think of Your Majesty's kindness.
If only our love can endure, then death holds no fears!
If only our love can endure, I shall die content!
But how many court ladies have been forsaken at last,
When, left alone in the palace,
With the emperor's love and favour transferred to another,
They can only shed tears to lament their unhappy fate!

EMPEROR [*wiping her tears*]: Don't be so sad, my darling. Ours is no common love.

Take comfort and dry your tears.
You need have no fear that our love will change.

[*He takes her hand.*]

We are so close to each other,
That not for a single moment can we be parted.

TOGETHER:

Our love will be unbroken,
Our love will be everlasting;
For we are like flowers in the moonlight,
Substance and shadow blended completely in one.

LADY: If you love me so much, sire, I beg you to vow under the twin stars to make our love eternal.

EMPEROR: Let us go then to offer incense and make a vow together. [*They walk together.*]

Shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand,
We walk down the jade-like steps.
The Milky Way is gleaming above our heads.

LADY:

In my silken dress I feel the night grow cool.

EMPEROR:

The time is right to whisper to you of love,
And vow to be true forever.

[*The emperor offers incense. They both bow to the stars.*] May the twin stars in heaven be our witness! We, Li Lung-chi, the Tang emperor, and Yang Yu-huan . . .

TOGETHER: . . . love each other so dearly that we wish to be husband and wife in every fresh life* and never be parted. May the twin stars witness our vow!

EMPEROR [*bowing again*]:

In the sky we will be two love birds flying together.

LADY [*bowing again*]:

On the earth we will be twin branches on one tree.

TOGETHER:

Though heaven and earth may end,
May this vow last forever and forever!

LADY [*curtseying*]: I thank the emperor from the bottom of my heart. I shall remain true to this vow in life and death.

EMPEROR [*taking her arm*]:

We have made a secret vow in the Palace of Eternal Youth.

LADY:

Are there no witnesses to our vow tonight?

EMPEROR [*pointing overhead*]:

The Weaving Maid and the Cowherd,
Twin stars that shine beside the Milky Way.

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* Influenced by the Buddhist theory of transmigration, the Chinese of that age believed that after death their spirits would be reborn in different animal or human forms.

[*Exeunt.*]

[*Enter the* COWHERD *wearing a cap with cloud designs and fairy garments, accompanied by the* WEAVING MAID *and other fairies.*]

TOGETHER:

We saw them make their vow, two with one heart;
They were earnest in their prayers.

COWHERD: See, my lady, how fond the Tang emperor and Lady Yang are of each other.

Hand in hand, they lean together.

We lovers in heaven should watch over lovers on earth. And as they have asked us to witness their secret vow of love, we should protect them.

Since as love birds, as two boughs on a single tree,
They desire to love forever, in all their lives,

TOGETHER:

It is only right for us to make them
The arbiters of love in the world below.

WEAVING MAID: But a sad fate awaits them, for they will soon be separated by death. Yet if they remain true, we can bring them together again.

COWHERD: You are right. But now the night is nearly done, and we must go back to our palace. [*They walk forward together.*]

TOGETHER:

Year after year we meet in heaven,
Pitying mortals because their love is transient.
Time presses for mortals on earth.
Now the starry bridge is made, and the magpies return;
No one can say that, meeting so seldom in heaven,
We have no time to care for mortals on earth.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE XXIV

THE ALARM

[*Enter* KAO LI-SHIH.]

KAO:

From the marble pavilion come sounds of flutes and singing,
Wind carries the laughter and chat of the palace maids;
In the shade of the moon-lit palace the water-clock sounds,
And the screens are drawn back to reveal the Milky Way.

By His Majesty's order I have prepared a small feast in the imperial

garden, and presently the emperor and Lady Yang will be coming here. I will wait for them.

[*Enter the emperor and* LADY YANG *in a carriage, followed by* YUNG-HSIN, NIEN-NU *and two palace eunuchs.*]

EMPEROR:

Clouds drift through the pale blue sky, and wild geese
Fly past in rows; while autumn paints the garden
With many colours: willow leaves turn yellow,
The duckweed grows less green, and the red lotus
Sheds all its petals; but there by the carved railings
The cassia flowers in bloom give a sweet scent.

KAO: May it please you to alight here, Your Majesty and Your Ladyship.

[*The emperor and* LADY YANG *get out of the carriage.* KAO *and the other eunuchs retire.*]

EMPEROR: Let us take a short stroll, my love.

LADY: Yes, sire. [*The emperor takes her hand.*]

Hand in hand we wander among the flowers,
Past the cool pavilion, and past the wind-blown lotus
Which trembles on the lake. I love the calm
Of these planes which form such deep green avenues.
The swallows are still lingering by their nests,
While the duck and drake sleep in the silver pool.

EMPEROR: Kao Li-shih, bring wine! I shall drink a few cups with Her Ladyship.

KAO: The feast is already spread in the pavilion. Please step over here.

[LADY YANG *starts to pour the wine, but is stopped by the emperor.*]

EMPEROR: Sit down, my darling.

There is no need to stand on ceremony
Or present the wine to me with your own sweet hands.
Let us just drink face to face,
Pouring the wine for each other,
To enjoy a few cups together.

Though this is such a simple meal today, it is rather pleasant to get away for once —

From the banquets prepared by the imperial kitchen,
When the tables groan under sumptuous fare,
And the palace musicians play as we eat.
Today crisp vegetables and fresh fruit
Make simple fare which suit a dainty lady.

I have not the patience to hear any of those old tunes today. But I recall that year, when we were enjoying the peony flowers in the Aloes Pavilion, we summoned Li Po to write some stanzas for us, and ordered Li Kuei-nien to set them to music. The poem was a charming one. Do you still remember it?

LADY: Yes, I do.

EMPEROR: Will you sing it for me, then, while I play an accompaniment on my jade flute?

LADY: Gladly, Your Majesty.

[YUNG-HSIN *brings the jade flute, and the emperor starts playing.* LADY YANG *rattles the castanets and sings.*]

Her dress is like a brilliant cloud,
Like a flower in bloom her face;
Her new-dressed hair is beyond compare,
She outdoes Lady Swallow's grace.
The queen of flowers and the matchless girl,
And a happy king between,
Telling the breeze of love's lassitude
On the balustrade they lean.

EMPEROR: Excellent! The poet's genius and your singing are two wonders. Maids, bring the large cups for us to drink from.

[*The maids pour the wine.*]

She smiles as she ends her song,
And I smile as I offer her wine.

Drink this, my love. [*He drinks a cup with her.*]

We need no drinking games,
No piercing, clamorous musical instruments.

[*He drinks to her again.*] Now, another cup.

LADY: I can't drink any more.

EMPEROR: Yung-hsin and Nien-nu, come and beg your mistress to drink.

MAIDS: Yes, Your Majesty. [*They kneel before* LADY YANG.] Do drink another cup, my lady.

[LADY YANG *forces herself to drink, and the maids urge her again.*]

EMPEROR:

Holding my cup I watch her without a word,
And see the red roses blossoming on her cheeks.

LADY [*tipsily*]: I am really drunk.

EMPEROR:

She is suddenly limp as a drooping willow or flower,
Languorous as a young swallow or oriole in spring.

Her Ladyship is drunk! Yung-hsin, Nien-nu! Help Lady Yang to the carriage.

MAIDS: Yes, Your Majesty. [*They help her up.*]

LADY [*drunkenly*]: Oh, Your Majesty! [*She takes a few steps, leaning on her maids.*]

I feel as if I were walking on air!
But dazzled, I stagger and yawn!
The ground slips away from under my feet,
And with hair in disorder I long for my bed,
As they help me slowly behind the embroidered curtain.

[*The maids escort* LADY YANG *out.*]

[*Enter* KAO *with other eunuchs.*]

[*Drums are heard in the distance.*]

EMPEROR [*startled*]: From where comes the sound of drums?

[*The prime minister,* YANG KUO-CHUNG, *enters hastily.*]

YANG:

The sound of rebel drums makes the whole earth quake,
Shattering the Rainbow Garment Dance.*

[*To* KAO.] Where is the emperor?

KAO: In the imperial garden.

YANG: The situation is serious, I must go straight in. [*He sees the emperor.*]

Your Majesty, I have bad news! An Lu-shan has revolted with his army and entered the Tungkuan Pass. He is marching on the capital.

EMPEROR [*greatly alarmed*]: What of the troops defending the Pass?

YANG: General Ko-shu Han was defeated, and has surrendered to the rebels.

EMPEROR: Ah!

An Lu-shan has rebelled,
And Ko-shu Han has surrendered!
The rebels have taken the eastern capital
And broken through the Pass!
This news strikes dread into our hearts
And makes us quake with fear,
Destroying our pleasure in the moonlight
And the beauty of the flowers.

What plans have you to resist the rebels?

YANG: In the past I warned Your Majesty repeatedly that An would rebel, but you would not believe me. Now it has happened as I predicted. In this emergency we are powerless to resist him. Your Majesty had better go to Chengtu for the time being, and wait there until the generals from the provinces can rally to defend the throne.

EMPEROR: Very well. Give the order at once for all the princes and ministers to prepare to accompany me to Chengtu.

YANG: It shall be done, sire. [*He hurries out.*]

EMPEROR: Kao Li-shih, quickly prepare horses, and order Chen Yuan-li, Commander of the Imperial Guards, to muster three thousand men to escort us.

KAO: The emperor's orders shall be obeyed. [*Exit.*]

EUNUCH: May it please Your Majesty to return to the palace.

EMPEROR [*walking forward, sighing*]: Ah, what a bolt from the blue! What is to be done?

While we were feasting peacefully in the palace
Rebellion had broken out at the frontier.

* In another scene of this opera, Lady Yang dreamed that she watched fairies dancing in the moon. After she woke up, she wrote down the music she had heard, calling her composition the Rainbow Garment Dance.

Alarms have been sounded, and beacon fires are lit;
The people are fleeing in panic,
And the empire faces ruin.
The autumn wind bids farewell to the setting sun,
And Changan, my capital, is growing cold.

[*He calls to the maids offstage.*] Has Lady Yang gone to bed?

MAIDS [*off*]: Yes, she is fast asleep.

EMPEROR: Don't wake her. We shall start tomorrow at dawn. [*He weeps.*] Ah, heaven, how unfortunate I am to be overtaken with such disaster. And how distressing to think of her taking to the road, with her flower-like beauty.

In the palace she is used to luxury,
How can she stand the hard journey to Chengtu?

[*He weeps.*] Ah, my darling —

Tenderly reared as a flower, and delicate as a jade,
How can you travel that rugged mountain road?
The palace looms starkly against the setting sun,
The Pass is lit up with the glare of beacon fires;
Now music is hushed and cold winds moan,
And our destination lies far beyond the clouds.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE XXV

DEATH AT THE POST STATION

[*Enter* COMMANDER CHEN YUAN-LI *with troops.*]

CHEN:

Marching ahead with pennants and halberds,
The imperial guards protect the emperor.
We travel in haste, to escape from the rebel army,
Along rugged mountain roads.
Will we ever reach Chengtu?

I am Chen Yuan-li, Commander of the Imperial Guards. Because An Lu-shan has rebelled and taken the Pass by storm, the emperor is going to Chengtu to be out of danger. And I have been ordered to accompany His Majesty at the head of the imperial guards. We have travelled some way, and have just reached Mawei Station.

[*Shouting is heard offstage.*] What is that shouting?

VOICE OFF: It is all Yang Kuo-chung's fault that An Lu-shan has rebelled and the emperor has had to leave the capital. If that treacherous minister is not put to death, we shall not escort His Majesty even if you threaten to kill us!

CHEN: Stop shouting and pitch camp quietly. I shall report to the emperor and ask for his orders.

[*A shout of assent is heard.* CHEN *and his soldiers go out.*]

[*Enter the emperor,* LADY YANG, *her two maids and* KAO LI-SHIH.]

EMPEROR:

We left the palace in haste,
To shed lonely tears,
Escorted by only half our equipage.
Our destination far beyond the horizon,
We are leaving the capital further and further behind.
We pass the few hills and streams that remain of our realm,
And four or five tumbledown houses.

KAO: We have arrived at Mawei Station. May it please Your Majesty to alight.

[*The emperor and* LADY YANG *alight, enter the station and sit down.*]

EMPEROR: I made a great mistake in trusting that rebel; but it is too late to regret that now. I am only sorry to have involved you in this trouble, my love.

LADY: I shall follow you, sire, wherever you go, and not shrink from any hardship. I only hope that the rebels will be defeated quickly, so that we can return soon to the capital.

VOICE OFF [*shouting*]: Yang Kuo-chung got us into this! And now he is secretly scheming with the Tibetan tribesmen! We have vowed his death—whoever wants to kill Yang Kuo-chung come with us!

[YANG KUO-CHUNG *runs in, pursued by guards armed with swords. After a scuffle, the prime minister is killed, and with a shout of triumph the soldiers troop off.*]

EMPEROR [*startled*]: Kao Li-shih, what is all that shouting outside? Order Commander Chen to enter at once.

KAO: Yes, Your Majesty. [*He passes on the order, and* CHEN YUAN-LI *enters.*]

CHEN: Long live the emperor!

EMPEROR: Why are the soldiers shouting?

CHEN: Your Majesty, by trying to take all power into his own hands, Yang Kuo-chung endangered the state. And when the guards discovered that he had been carrying on secret negotiations with the Tibetan tribesmen, they were indignant and killed him.

EMPEROR [*startled*]: What?

[LADY YANG *turns away to wipe away tears.*]

EMPEROR [*after a moment's thought*]: Very well. Give orders to resume our journey.

CHEN [*loudly*]: His Majesty pardons the guards for killing the prime minister, and orders you to set out again at once.

SHOUTS OFF: Though the prime minister is dead, his cousin, Lady Yang, is still with the emperor! Until she is killed, we will not go a step further!

CHEN [*to the emperor*]: The soldiers say that though Yang Kuo-chung is dead, as long as Lady Yang remains alive they will not go any further. I beg Your Majesty to execute your favourite.

EMPEROR [*greatly alarmed*]: How can they ask this?

[LADY YANG *in panic takes hold of the emperor's sleeve.*]

EMPEROR: My lord—

If Yang Kuo-chung was guilty of treason,
He has already paid with his life;
But his cousin only served in the inner palace;
Of what can the army suspect her?

CHEN: Your Majesty is right. Yet the troops are in an ugly mood—what can we do?

EMPEROR:

Go at once and reason with them.
This is a mad, impertinent demand.

[*Shouts off.*]

CHEN: Listen, Your Majesty—

The troops are in an uproar,
How can I pacify them?

LADY [*weeping*]: Your Majesty—

This has taken me by surprise!
As I grieve for my cousin's death,
I find that I, too, am involved.
I must have been fated to suffer.
I beg you, sire, to give me up at once;
Only one word is needed.

EMPEROR: Wait, my love.

SHOUTS OFF: We shall not move a step unless Lady Yang is executed!

CHEN: Though Lady Yang is innocent, Your Majesty, she is the prime minister's cousin. As long as she is at your side, the troops will feel insecure; but only when the troops feel secure will your own safety be assured. I hope Your Majesty will consider this carefully.

EMPEROR [*thinking*]:

In silence, I try to reflect,
But my thoughts are a tangled skein.

LADY [*clinging to the emperor's robes and crying*]:

Unhappy that I am,
How can I leave you?

TOGETHER:

Like an unlucky duck and drake,
Buffetted by the angry waves,
We face appalling danger.

[*Shouts are heard again.*]

LADY [*crying*]:

The soldiers frighten me so!

EMPEROR [*catching hold of her and shedding tears*]:

How can I bear this, my darling?

[*Soldiers burst in, shouting. They walk around, showing that they have besieged the station, then withdraw.*]

KAO: Your Majesty, the troops have besieged the station. If we hesitate, they may do something desperate. What is to be done?

EMPEROR: Commander Chen, go quickly to pacify the troops, while I find a way out.

CHEN: Yes, Your Majesty. [*Exit.*]

[*The emperor and* LADY YANG *cling to each other and weep.*]

LADY:

My very soul is trembling,
Drenched in tears.

EMPEROR:

Though the emperor is exalted,
He is not as free as a private citizen.

TOGETHER [*shedding tears*]:

How can we ever forget our love?

LADY [*kneeling*]: Your Majesty has shown me so much favour that even if I kill myself I cannot repay your kindness. Now the situation is desperate, I beg you to allow me to commit suicide to pacify the troops. For then you will arrive at your destination safely, and I shall feel comforted though I die.

I can see no other way to quell them;
Therefore let me be sacrificed.

[*She cries, her head in the emperor's lap.*]

EMPEROR: How can you say that, my love? If you die, what are my throne and empire to me? I would rather lose my empire than abandon you.

Let them clamour and shout;
I shall simply turn a deaf ear.
The fault was mine, and I cannot allow this flower
To be crushed and destroyed by the cruel wind and rain.
If the troops still insist,
I will die for you.

LADY: Though Your Majesty is so kind, things have come to such a pass that there is no other way out. If I hesitate any longer, we may all be destroyed; and then my guilt will be greater. Please give me up, to preserve your empire.

KAO [*wiping his tears, kneeling*]: Since Lady Yang shows such spirit and wishes to sacrifice herself, I beg Your Majesty to think of the empire and force yourself to agree to her request.

[*Shouts off.*]

EMPEROR [*stamping his foot and weeping*]: All right, if she insists, I cannot forbid her. Let the lady do as she thinks right, Kao Li-shih.

[*Sobbing, he covers his face and withdraws.*]

LADY [*bowing*]: Long live the emperor!

KAO [*calling to the men outside*]: Listen, men! His Majesty has ordered Lady Yang to commit suicide.

SHOUTS OFF: Long live the emperor!

[KAO LI-SHIH *helps* LADY YANG *to rise.*]

KAO: Please come this way, Your Ladyship. [*He helps her along.*]

LADY [*in tears*]:

Now we are going to part forever,
And I shall die for the emperor.

[*They halt.*]

KAO: Here is a shrine.

LADY [*entering the shrine*]: Wait! Let me bow to the Buddha. [*She bows.*] Great Buddha!

My sins are many,
Have mercy on my soul!

KAO [*bowing*]: May Her Ladyship enter Paradise!

[LADY YANG *rises, weeping.*]

KAO [*kneels, crying*]: Your Ladyship, have you any last commands for me?

LADY: Kao Li-shih, the emperor is growing old. When I am dead, you will be the only one who can understand him. You must look after him well, and tell him not to think of me any more.

KAO [*weeping*]: I will, my lady.

LADY: And there is something else. [*She unfastens the hairpin from her hair and takes out the jewel box.*] The emperor gave me this hairpin and jewel box to pledge his love. Bury them with my body—be sure that you don't forget!

KAO [*taking them*]: Yes, my lady.

LADY [*weeping*]:

My heart is broken,
My grief is too great to express.

[CHEN YUAN-LI *hurries in with his troops.*]

CHEN: Lady Yang has been ordered to commit suicide. Why is she still here, delaying His Majesty's journey?

[*The troops shout.*]

KAO [*stopping them*]: Keep back! Lady Yang is about to die.

LADY: Ah, Chen Yuan-li!

Why do you not press forward against the rebels,
Instead of against me?

[*The soldiers shout angrily again.*]

KAO: Alas! The soldiers are breaking in.

LADY [*looking round*]: Why, then, I shall end my life on this pear tree here.

[*She takes off her white silk belt, and curtseys towards the distance.*] Yang Yu-huan thanks the emperor for his past kindness; for we shall never meet again. [KAO *weeps.*]

LADY [*weeps and prepares to hang herself*]: Your Majesty!
Here I die but although my body lies in the earth,
My spirit will always follow the imperial pennants.
[*She dies.*]
CHEN: Lady Yang is dead, men. Withdraw! [*The soldiers troop off.*]
KAO [*crying*]: Ah, my lady! [*Exit.*]
[*The emperor enters.*]
EMPEROR:
The army will not advance; they have forced my hand;
And the girl with the mothlike eyebrows is doomed to die.
[KAO *enters and brings the white belt to him.*]
KAO: Your Majesty, Lady Yang is dead.
[*The emperor is speechless.*]
KAO: Lady Yang is dead, sire. Here is the silk belt with which she hanged herself.
EMPEROR [*looking at the belt, cries bitterly*]: Ah, my love, my love! How can I bear this?
[*He staggers, and* KAO LI-SHIH *supports him.*]
EMPEROR:
She was fairer than the peach blossom,
Fairer than the peach blossom.
KAO:
She is dead now under the pear blossom,
Dead under the pear blossom.
[*He shows the hairpin and box.*] Her Ladyship ordered that these be buried with her body.
EMPEROR [*looks at them and cries*]:
This hairpin and box are the root of our trouble.
We were too happy in the Palace of Eternal Youth;
So our love had ended like this at Mawei Station.
KAO: In this emergency, how are we to get a coffin?
EMPEROR: Never mind that. Wrap her up in a silk quilt for the time being, and mark the place well so that we can remove the body later. The hairpin and box can be fastened to her clothes.
KAO: I will do as Your Majesty orders. [*Exit.*]
EMPEROR [*in tears*]:
Her warmth and fragrance and beauty are gone;
Never in this life shall I see her again.
[COMMANDER CHEN *enters.*]
CHEN: May it please Your Majesty, your horse is ready.
EMPEROR [*stamping*]: What do I care if I never reach Chengtu?
[*Trumpets sound and the guards march in.* KAO LI-SHIH *enters and leads the emperor to his horse.*]
ALL:
Thick mist hangs heavy,
And a cold wind blows our banners;

The way is long and the riders covered with dust,
Both the emperor and his subjects are in danger.
The rebels are looting and burning, and beacon fires
Gleam all along the road.
When will these wild beasts be destroyed?
Far, far ahead are the outlines of craggy mountains,
And looking back we can see the palace receding,
For as wisps of cloud float over,
Changan, the capital, is lost from sight.
As the emperor rides west beneath scudding clouds,
Heaven and earth turn dark and the empire totters;
The beauty is no longer at his side;
Only the common herd make up his train.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE XXVIII

THE PATRIOT AND THE REBEL

[*Enter the lute-player* LEI HAI-CHING, *carrying his lute.*]
LEI:
Still the same old generals and ministers,
But they become turncoats and serve the new regime;
We musicians, at least, have stuck to our principles,
And are not afraid to sacrifice our lives.
I am Lei Hai-ching, by the grace of the emperor appointed a musician in the imperial Pear Garden Academy.* Who could have thought that An Lu-shan would rebel and take the capital, forcing the emperor to go to Chengtu! The court officials had high positions and huge salaries, and their sons and wives were given titles. They owed all their dignity and wealth to the government; but now, forgetting gratitude in their fear of death, they have all surrendered to the rebels, thinking only of their present comfort and not caring for the verdict of history. This is shameful and disgusting. Though I am only a musician, I could not do the shameless things that they do. Today An Lu-shan is feasting with those traitors at the Frozen Azure Pool, and they have ordered music. I shall take this opportunity to give him a good cursing to vent my indignation. Even if I am torn limb from limb, it will be worth it. I am going there now with my lute.
I am only a humble, unlettered musician,
I have never studied or sent memorials to the throne,
Never passed the civil service examination

* A conservatory founded by Emperor Ming Huang.

Or won high official rank;
But I have blood in my veins,
Loyalty in my heart, and a sense of justice;
And in face of this calamity and crisis,
I cannot help gnashing my teeth in anger and sorrow.
I hate the stinking barbarian who has seized the throne,
Like the toad in the proverb who tried to eat the swan,
And who has forced our emperor to fly.
His treason is so disgusting
That even if I eat his flesh and sleep on his hide,
I shall never forget my hatred!
Yet those rotten courtiers, those good-for-nothing curs,
Who talked so much of loyalty and piety,
As soon as disaster came just turned their coats
To grab at wealth and position.
They wag their tails when they accept new titles,
Taking their deadly foe as their benefactor.
Have they no sense of shame?
Not one has the courage to be a patriot!
Ah, Lei Hai-ching,
Unless you shoulder this task, you are no true man!
If I can stick to principles, and acquit myself like a man,
I am willing to die several deaths. [*Exit.*]

[*Enter* AN LU-SHAN *with two guards.*]

AN:

I have seized the empire and renamed it Yen!
In purple robes and an imperial headdress
By the Frozen Azure Pool this fine autumn day,
I will have the imperial musicians to play at my feast.

Since I, An Lu-shan, started the rebellion at Fanyang, I encountered virtually no resistance, so I advanced west until I reached the capital. The Tang emperor has fled to Chengtu, and this magnificent empire is in my hands. [*He laughs.*] Wonderful! Today I have summoned all the officials to feast and make merry by the pool. Attendants! Have all the ministers arrived?

GUARDS: They are waiting outside.

AN: Tell them to come in.

GUARDS: Yes, Your Majesty. [*Calling out.*] The emperor orders his ministers to enter.

[*Enter four puppet officials.*]

OFFICIALS:

We are old colleagues,
And now we have a new master;
You cannot call us disloyal,
But we know how to change with the times.

[*They kowtow to* AN.] Long live the emperor!

AN: You may rise. Today I have a little leisure, so I have invited you to feast at the Frozen Azure Pool to celebrate the pacification of the empire.

OFFICIALS: Long live the emperor!

GUARDS: May it please Your Majesty, the feast is ready.

[*Music sounds offstage, and the four puppet officials kneel to offer wine to* AN LU-SHAN.]

AN:

Now the dragon is at play beside the azure pool,
Through bright-hued clouds gleams the limpid autumn sky;
I take my pleasure here in the purple palace,
My jade-adorned whip cast aside, the feast begins,
Red-coated attendants are busy carving meat,
And roll up their silken sleeves to present it on plates.

[*The puppet officials offer wine and kowtow.*]

Like bears and pelicans,
They bow as they offer me wine.

AN: Attendants, order the musicians of the Pear Garden Academy to play.

GUARDS: Yes, Your Majesty. [*They pass the order on.*] The emperor orders the musicians of the Pear Garden Academy to start playing.

[*A response is heard offstage, music sounds and more wine is poured.*]

ALL:

Here at the feast the heavenly music is played,
The strains of the Rainbow Garment Dance
Soar high above to mingle with the clouds,
Borne off at last by the breeze.
This is rare music, only played before
In the palace of the moon
Or at the Aloes Pavilion;
But here today
We hear this heavenly music once again.

AN: Bravo! Well played!

OFFICIALS: The Tang emperor went to great pains to have this dance rehearsed; but now it is Your Majesty who enjoys it. Your Majesty is indeed favoured by heaven!

AN [*laughs*]: True. More wine! [*More wine is poured.* LEI HAI-CHING *is heard weeping and singing offstage.*]

LEI [*offstage*]:

While the drums of war are rolling
And thousands of homesteads lie waste,
While beacon fires are gleaming
And leaves fall in the empty palace,
One is startled to hear this beautiful melody played!
For ruin has seized the empire,
And both men and ghosts lament.

[*He cries aloud.*] Ah, my emperor!
When will you sit on your golden throne again?

AN: Who is that crying out there? This is very strange.

GUARDS: It is the musician Lei Hai-ching.

AN: Bring him in. [*The guards bring* LEI *in.*]
Lei Hai-ching, we are drinking here to celebrate peace. How dare you moan like that out there?

LEI: An Lu-shan, you were an officer who was defeated in battle, and you should have been sentenced to death; but the emperor was merciful and spared your life. He even made you a prince! But instead of trying to serve the government well, you rebelled with your army. You have befouled the capital and forced the emperor to fly. You are an arch criminal, who will soon be put to the sword when the imperial army comes back. Who are you to talk of feasts and peace?

AN [*furious*]: What insolence! Since I ascended the throne, no one has disobeyed me. How dare you, a common musician, act so presumptuously? Men, draw your swords!
[*The guards draw their swords.*]

LEI [*cursing and pointing at* AN]:
My blood boils at the sight of this heartless monster,
This beast with a human face!
Though I am only a common musician,
I am not so shameless as these turncoat officials.
An Lu-shan! For defying the will of heaven,
You soon will fall, a corpse bespattered with blood!
[*He throws his lute at* AN.]
Here comes my lute!
May it break your head!
[*The guards seize the lute.*]

AN: Take him quickly and kill him! [*The guards drag* LEI *off.*]
May he be accursed!

OFFICIALS: Do not be angry, Your Majesty. Why pay any attention to a foolish musician?

AN: My pleasure is spoiled. You may leave me.

OFFICIALS: Your Majesty's orders shall be obeyed. Let us see the emperor back to the palace. [*They kneel.*]

AN:
A thousand cups with good friends are not enough,
But when insults are hurled, one sentence is too much!
[AN *leaves in a towering rage.*]

OFFICIALS [*rising*]: It served that musician right—he deserved to be killed. Fancy a musician posing as a patriot! He positively tried to put us in the wrong!
We are all of us simply acting a part,
For how much, after all, is a loyal minister worth?
And where did your loyalty land you, Lei Hai-ching?
You were foolish because you had never been an official!
Blood flows in the capital like a river,
Mere chance decides which shall be rebel, which emperor.
Who is there in all the world to praise loyalty?
We had better enjoy ourselves while we have the chance.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE XXIX

HEARING THE BELLS

[*Offstage,* KAO LI-SHIH *shouts to the soldiers.*]

KAO: Forward, men! Wait for the emperor ahead.
[*Gongs sound offstage.*]

KAO [*off*]: Will you mount your horse, sire?
[*Enter the emperor on horseback, followed by* KAO LI-SHIH.]

EMPEROR:
Sorrow has dogged my steps throughout my travels;
The far-off clouds that merge with the distant mountains
Are like the tangle of my grief and cares;
In the autumn woods, that stretch to the horizon,
The leaves are falling, falling,
And in the sky a lone wild goose laments.
Since I left Mawei I have suffered all manner of hardships. The other day I sent an envoy with the imperial seal to cede my throne to the crown prince. Now, after travelling for a month, we are nearing Chengtu. We are far from the rebels, and can travel more slowly; but the birds and flowers, the rivers and hills, only add to my sorrow.

KAO: Your Majesty, you are tired after the journey. You must not grieve, but keep up your spirits.

EMPEROR: Ah, Kao Li-shih, in the past I always had Lady Yang at my side. I can never forgive myself for the death she met on this journey west. [*He sheds tears.*]
Thinking of her tragic end,
My tears keep falling;
And I look back towards Mawei
With a broken heart.

KAO: The path ahead is steep. Keep a firm grip on your reins, sire, and ride slowly.

EMPEROR:
Our pennants, fluttering in the setting sun,
Cast long, weird shadows;
Our horses doggedly plod on and on,
Over the mountain path.

The sky is dark with rain clouds,
Monkeys wail bitterly,
And the cuckoo's song, so lonely and anguished,
Is sad to hear.
Few men have skirted this high mountain,
And a cold wind blows the rain into our faces.

KAO: It is raining, sire. Will you go into the pavilion to take shelter?

[*The emperor dismounts and walks up to the pavilion.*]

KAO [*calling to the guards offstage*]: We are resting for a while, men. We shall go on when the rain stops. [*The guards give an answering shout.*]

EMPEROR:

I walk here alone in grief,
My sorrow endless as the hills and streams;
The wind has driven storm clouds over;
Rain falling endlessly makes me sick at heart.

[*Bells are heard offstage.*]

EMPEROR: Listen! What is that uncanny, tinkling sound? Find out what it is, Kao Li-shih.

KAO: It is the rain in the forest and the bells hanging from the eaves, which sound in the wind.

EMPEROR: What a dismal note!

Tinkling and jangling of bells,
And the dismal drip of rain
Make me sick at heart.
These melancholy sounds
Carry across the hills and woods,
Now high, now low, according to the wind,
To mingle with my tears of bitter anguish.
In this sad atmosphere,
I think of the deserted grave,
Where the poplars rustle in the rain
And her ghost is lonely now,
With only the will-o'-the-wisp for company,
And the glow-worms in the wet grass.
I am filled with remorse because in panic
I did her a fearful wrong.
Alone in the world, I have no desire to live on,
But long to join her soon in the nether world.
I cry, but the hills are silent,
Only the bells chime in tune with my sorrow;
And the path is rugged and twisting,
Like my tortured feelings.

KAO: Do not grieve, sire. The rain has stopped. Will you go down now?

[*The emperor leaves the pavilion, and mounts his horse again.*]

KAO [*addressing the men offstage*]: Guards! To horse!

[*An answering shout is heard, and they set off again.*]

EMPEROR:

The road ahead is long, and my sorrow is endless,
As I grieve for the dead and long for my native place.

TOGETHER:

Ahead stretch endless mountains,
Green after the rain.

EMPEROR:

Hills stretch for hundreds of miles,
And the traveller here feels doubly sad.
The imperial cortège braves the mud and storm,
And my tears fall at the sound of bells in the rain.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE XLIII

THE REBURIAL

[*Enter the emperor with two eunuchs.*]

EMPEROR:

The heavens have revolved,
The sun has come out again,
And the emperor's carriage is on its way back to Changan;
But at Mawei I hesitate, loth to go on.

I am on my way back from Chengtu. Because of my distress over Lady Yang's death in the mutiny and the fact that she had no proper burial, I have ordered pearl-decked garments and a marble casket to be prepared, and a new grave built. And in order to attend the interment myself, I have come to stay at Mawei Station. [*He sheds tears.*] The sight of the Buddhist shrine and the pear tree only brings my loss home to me more keenly.

To me, in my endless sorrow,
These surroundings are unchanged;
But it tortures me to think of her wandering spirit.
By the lonely Buddhist shrine,
The pear tree casts a cool green shade;
All my sighs are useless,
Yet she in the nether world must be suffering more.
No more will her spirit return to the palace,
Her pendants tinkling under the moon;
But how I long to see her face again,
Fresh as the sights of spring!

[*Enter* KAO LI-SHIH.]

KAO: As Your Majesty directed, I have superintended the building of a new grave for Lady Yang. Now everything is ready, whenever it pleases you to begin the ceremony.

EMPEROR: Order my carriage.

KAO: Yes, sire. [*He passes on the order.*] Guards, prepare the carriage!

[*Guards walk in.*]

GUARDS:

Under the slope, deep in the ground,
We search for the buried beauty.

KAO: Your Majesty, it was under this poplar tree that Lady Yang was buried.

EMPEROR: Ah, the weeds have grown rank in spring, and the wind is moaning. Take pity, my darling, on my wretchedness!

[*He weeps.*]

I groan and call your name;
Is your spirit here?
I weep till my tears run dry.

[*Enter* MISTRESS WANG *and three other women workers with hoes.*]

WANG: The old emperor is here. Let us hurry over, ready to open the grave.

KAO: Are you the women workers? [*They assent.*]

KAO [*to the emperor*]: The women are here.

EMPEROR: Order the guards to withdraw for the time being. Inspect the women's work, Kao Li-shih, and make sure that they take great care. [KAO *passes on the order, and the guards march out. The women start to dig.*]

WOMEN:

With picks and hoes we level the mound
Marked by the poplar;
But we fear that her sweetness has gone,
Like the mayfly that lives just one day;
Her white skin must have withered,
Her beauty must have vanished.

[*Startled.*] We have dug three feet down, but there is only an empty hole, with no sign of Lady Yang's body.

How could she disappear,
Leaving no trace behind?
There is only a sweet smell
Which perfumes all around.

SECOND WOMAN: Oh, look! Here is a scented pouch!

KAO: Bring it to me.

[*A woman brings over the pouch, and* KAO *weeps when he sees it.*] Alas, my lady! You women wait over there. [*The women go out.*] Your Majesty, the grave has been opened, but it is empty. Even the silk quilt wrapped round the body and the gold hairpin and jewel box

that were buried with her have disappeared. There is nothing left but this scented pouch.

EMPEROR: How could that be? [*He takes the pouch from* KAO *and weeps.*] I gave her this pouch on her birthday, after she had danced the Rainbow Garment Dance at the Palace of Eternal Youth. Where are you now, my darling?

The grave is empty,
My fair one is gone!
But even if the silk quilt had turned to dust,
How can we account for the durable hairpin and box?
Why is there only the scented pouch in her grave?
I wish I could summon the mountain god
To question him. [*He thinks.*]

Can you be mistaken, Kao Li-shih?

KAO: That day I peeled off part of the bark of the poplar, and wrote on the tree to mark the place. How could I mistake it?

EMPEROR: Could her body have been exhumed?

KAO: But in that case, why should the scented pouch have been left?

[*The emperor reflects in silence.*]

KAO: There have been many cases, sire, of immortals who were raised from the dead. Perhaps Her Ladyship has attained immortality. In the sepulchre of the Yellow Emperor* at Chiaoshan, only the emperor's clothes were buried; and since this pouch was worn by Her Ladyship when she died, if we bury it in the new grave it will serve the same purpose.

EMPEROR: You are right. Wrap this scented pouch in the pearl-decked garments, put them in the marble casket, and let the burial take place with due ceremony.

KAO: It shall be done, sire.

EMPEROR:

I groan and call your name;
Is your spirit here?
I weep till my tears run dry.

[KAO *puts the pouch in the casket.*]

KAO: Now the pouch is in its place. Where are the women workers?

[*The women enter.*]

KAO: Put the marble casket in the grave, and seal it quickly.

[*They build the grave.*]

WOMEN:

Her flower-like beauty and sweetness have turned to nothing,
And the grave is empty.
In the marble casket, beside the pearl-decked garments,

* The Yellow Emperor is a well-known legendary figure in ancient Chinese history. According to tradition, he attained godhead at Chiaoshan, and rode up to heaven on a dragon.

The scented pouch is buried again in the earth;
A new inscription has been written with tears,
And sorrow will haunt these lonely hills forever.

KAO: Now that you have sealed up the grave, I will give you a string of cash apiece as reward. You may go. [*The women bow in thanks, and all but* MISTRESS WANG *go out.*]

KAO [*to* MISTRESS WANG]: Why are you still here, old woman?

WANG: My lord, last year I picked up one of Lady Yang's silk stockings at the foot of Mawei Slope, and I have brought it here to present to the old emperor.

KAO: Wait, while I report this. [*To the emperor.*] Your Majesty, there is a woman here who says she picked up a silk stocking belonging to Lady Yang and has brought it to present to Your Majesty.

EMPEROR: Bring her in at once. [KAO LI-SHIH *calls* MISTRESS WANG *to enter.*]

WANG: Long live the emperor! [*She presents the stocking.*]

EMPEROR: Bring it here. [KAO LI-SHIH *takes the stocking and gives it to the emperor.* MISTRESS WANG *rises.*]

[*With tears.*] Yes, this is her stocking. Her perfume still clings to it, and the imprint of her foot is still clear. Ah, my love —

I see your delicate stocking again,
With some of your fragrance about it still,
It recalls the sight of your shapely feet
As they danced on the emerald disk,
Or tempted me in my sleep,
After we had drunk deeply late into the night.
But now the stocking and the fragrant pouch
Bring only sorrow. [*He weeps.*]
I groan and call your name;
Is your spirit here?
I weep till my tears run dry.

Kao Li-shih, give this woman five thousand strings of cash as a reward, and let her stay here to watch Lady Yang's grave.

WANG [*kowtows*]: I thank Your Majesty! [*She goes out looking at her hoe.*]

Now I shan't have to use this hoe any more.
I've got money and the job of minding the grave! [*Exit.*]

[*Enter* COMMANDER KUO TZE-YI *with four soldiers.*]

KUO:

Order is now restored in the world;
The sun and moon are hanging on high.

[*He greets the emperor.*] Your subject, Kuo Tze-yi, Military Governor of Shuo Fang, has come by His Majesty's order with a cortège to welcome your return, sire.

EMPEROR: Yours was a truly remarkable achievement, my lord. You

succeeded in wiping out the rebels and recovering the capital, so that the imperial sacrifice could be renewed and the empire rebuilt.

KUO: I was late in crushing the rebels; therefore I deserve punishment and can claim no credit.

EMPEROR: No one can say that, my lord. Kao Li-shih, order the carriage to proceed.

KAO: Yes, sire. [*He passes on the order.*]

[*The emperor changes into ceremonial dress, and they move on.*]

ALL:

Under canopies with auspicious cloud designs
The imperial carriage returns;
The road to the capital is lined with flags,
Old and young cheer at the sight of his sacred face;
Henceforth the aged emperor will rest in comfort,
While his son reigns in his place,
And the empire will be safe for ever and ever.
Broken-hearted, the eunuch returns from the grave;
Descending the hill, he hesitates, wheeling his horse.
Here is sorrow that lasts for a thousand years,
With only the scented pouch that glistens with tears.

[*Exeunt.*]

The Golden Khingan Mountains

Punsek

I

Over the Ujumchin highlands—a spur of the Khingan Mountains, the sun shone warmly, gilding the heights. Now and then, a gentle breeze, caressing the sea of grass, whispered softly. Amid the strong fragrance of wild flowers, there still lingered the faint smell of gunpowder. In the near distance, to the south, a wild fire raged crimsoning half the sky, and inky spirals of rising smoke dyed black the scanty patches of low white clouds, adding picturesqueness to the desolate expanse of the wide open uplands. From somewhere far off, a few sharp reports of small arms pierced the silence. And then all became quiet and still, the golden highlands seeming at once even more hushed than before.

On the southern slope, escorted on both sides by a handful of troopers from the People's Liberation Army, a varicoloured body of over twenty horsemen emerged. Some of the escorted riders were garbed in long, bulky robes of white fur trimmed with red—robes in pure Ujumchin style; some wore the brownish-yellow, hooded greatcoats of the Kuomintang army; some others short jackets of black cloth; and still others lama robes. But, one and all, they swayed listlessly in the saddle with an expression of helplessness clinging like a mask to their faces as they rode.

"From the look of things, the battle's over," said Bator, one of the troopers on a chestnut charger, addressing another soldier at his side. "When'll we get to the company at the rate we're going? We'd better hurry!"

"A useless bunch like this. However hard you push them it doesn't seem to do any good. You lead for a change, and I'll bring up the rear!"

"All right, Erdemt. You keep an eye on the flank. See if I don't make them stretch their necks till they're four yards long with this nag of mine." Giving free reins to his mount, he dashed to a point ahead of the advancing group, and with his round, high-cheekboned face taut he shouted at the top of his lungs: "Listen, everybody. Step lively and follow—that's an order! The battle's over now. Once we get to the company you'll probably meet your boss Pao Tsun-feng." Then, as he kicked back with the heels of his russet leather boots, his chestnut charger

went tearing ahead like a fiery whirlwind. With the reins held in his right hand, the trooper kept brandishing his left arm, and he incessantly yelled back his command: "Come on, keep up with me! Come on!"

They were still at some distance from the company when the chestnut charger, as if meeting old friends after a long separation, turned its large liquid eyes towards a group of familiar war-horses and began to neigh. And from among the many men and horses gathered at the top of the slope came an answering call. A big, black mare with its long mane falling loosely over its neck, whinnied, tossing to the ground its master who had been giving all his attention to cleaning his sword. The tall, dark fellow, Kharkhu by name, sprang to his feet in a great fury, and there was something ruthless in the way he raised his clenched fist. But he did not strike. His fist stopped in mid air, and then fell limply to his side.

"What's that red stallion to you anyway? A sweetheart of yours? A few hours apart and you're out of your mind pining for him!"

"Bator is the leader of the men in your squad," said one of the soldiers with a grin, "and that chestnut steed's the leader of the horses, so—why shouldn't that black mare of yours be pining for him? Seems to me you haven't even got the feelings of a horse. . . ." Paying no heed to the remark, tall, dark Kharkhu picked up the bridle of the shaggy black mare and went on polishing his sword with the same absorbed attention as before. "A fine blade," he declared proudly, contemplating the words engraved on the steel. "Even better than the blades we make at Harbin!"

After escorting the prisoners to a nearby camp, Bator galloped up on his chestnut charger, jumped out of the saddle and dropped the reins. His mount, a veteran of many battles, made no attempt to gallop away but, instead, moved submissively towards the big, black mare, and they began to nuzzle and sniff each other fondly.

Bator took a few steps forward and, holding himself stiffly erect, clicked heels and saluted:

"I beg to report to the company leaders. . . . We've cleaned up the battlefield. Twenty-three prisoners captured, fourteen rifles and a Canadian machine-gun. . . . What about the rest of the bandits? Did they get away?"

"What's the use of talking about it now . . ." answered a handsome, well-built young trooper somewhat gloomily. "A few hundred of them did come into this area; but—but no sooner had they got here than they split up into small bands and faded away in spite of all our attempts to catch them. Altogether we only managed to kill or capture around a dozen of them." Beside him, another trooper of medium height with a holstered Mauser on his hip was squatting on his haunches poring over a map.

"And I thought, instructor, that we had all the bandits rounded up!"

Bator sighed. "To think of all the trouble it took to find them! And now they've slipped through our fingers again. . . ."

"Never mind," answered the political instructor with a smile. "They may not be wiped out yet, but we've given them a pretty rough time of it. And d'you know what? When we chased them to this place, we took the only heavy weapons they had—their heavy Maxim gun and an 82-mm. trench mortar. And we killed their chief-of-staff Wang Tieh-shan too!"

"What? We've killed Wang Tieh-shan?—That's good! Where is he? I'd like to take a look at him!"

"At the foot of the slope, squad leader," said a ruddy-faced young fighter of eighteen or so in halting Mongolian. "I'll take you there." The youth was obviously Chinese. He took hold of squad leader Bator's hand and tugged him forward vigorously.

"How're you, Tiny? Well, how many bandits did you kill? Did you catch any prisoners?"

"No, I didn't get any! The sub-leader of our squad's just like you, makes me set up hitching posts all the time. Otherwise, I'd certainly have caught some of those bastards. But you know, squad leader, during the charge I picked up something—a Japanese sword one of the bandits dropped. A magnificent sword. I'd have given it to you as a present if your right arm weren't wounded. It's even got words engraved on it: 'In Commemoration of the Nomonhan Victory.'* The political instructor said it must be one of those souvenirs the Japanese invaders gave the puppet 'Manchukuo' officers who took part in the Nomonhan Campaign. Kharkhu was really delighted. He actually cut down a bandit with it. . . ." Tiny Li jumped about and chattered on endlessly in his enthusiasm.

Bator, who had been listening with great excitement to the youth's tale, suddenly halted, a strange expression coming over his face. "What did you say? There were the words 'In Commemoration of the Nomonhan Victory' on it?"

Tiny Li was puzzled at the enigmatic expression on the other's face. "What's the matter with you, squad leader?"

Bator, who, as a rule, was always cool and self-possessed, felt his thoughts racing: "It must be just a coincidence! It can't be that very same blade! No!—In the reactionary forces aren't there lots and lots of former puppet 'Manchukuo' officers who fought in the Nomonhan Campaign?"

"It's nothing," he replied at last, smiling at the little fellow. "It's just—you don't know why I haven't got any strength in my right arm, do you? Why I can't even use a sword? You'd understand if you knew."

* The Japanese imperialist forces in an attempt to invade the People's Republic of Mongolia attacked Nomonhan on the Mongolian border in 1939 but were routed.

"Didn't you get that wound in the arm in the Liaoyang-Shenyang Campaign last year? What has that got to do with that sword?"

"No, that isn't how it happened. There's a little story to it which I'll tell you some other time when we're free." They walked on eastwards. Tiny Li lifted his hand and pointed to a corpse in a long robe of black satin. "Over there, that's the man who murdered our old guide's son!"

"The old boy must be overjoyed, isn't he?"

"He certainly is. Strokes that moustache of his all the time!"

Bator laughed.

After walking another few dozen yards, they came upon the body of Wang Tieh-shan. The head of the corpse was missing, apparently torn off and carried away by the force of an explosion. It was from his clothes alone, therefore, that the identification of the dead man had been made: the American-style green duck jacket, the sports trousers, and the gleaming, jet-black, American rubber boots. Bator swore and, with a furious kick, turned the body over on its back. Much to his surprise the legs of the corpse curved to form a circle and remained in this shape despite all his efforts to straighten them.

Casting a careful glance about him, he exclaimed suddenly: "A fake, Tiny Li! This can't be the real Wang Tieh-shan—it's a fake!"

The young man was really taken aback.

"Why do you say that?"

"Why? Tell me, was Wang Tieh-shan a Chinese or a Mongolian?"

"A Chinese—no doubt about it!"

"Where did he come from, do you know?" Bator pursued.

"The political instructor said the fellow came from the other side of the Great Wall, didn't he?"

"That's just it, young fellow. A Chinese from the other side of the Great Wall—especially one of Wang Tieh-shan's kind who comes from a large place—couldn't be bow-legged like that. See what I mean? This fellow was evidently a native of the grasslands here who practically grew up on horseback!"

"I don't believe it!" Tiny Li protested. "After all, Wang Tieh-shan came to Ujumchin in 1947, remember? During all these years, he's had more than enough time to ride himself bow-legged."

"You little fool! We've been in the cavalry since '45 and we haven't become bow-legged, have we? And another thing—about that missing head. Did you throw any hand-grenades around here?"

"No. . . . But we did fire quite a few 60-mm. shells."

"It's all becoming plainer and plainer. Look!" Bator indicated the point of the explosion where only the surface of the earth had been disturbed. "Such a small crater with a 60-mm. shell? The fellow was probably killed by one of their own hand-grenades. How long did they hold on here?"

"They resisted very stubbornly here on this slope. A whole hour at

least, they fought. This is the spot where squad leader Merghen gave up his life."

"They must've been working out some trick as they fought. Let's go and report the case to the company leaders."

By the time they arrived at the company, the tents of the unit had been pitched, and those of the men who had not been given any assignments were already sound asleep. Bayar, the vice-commander of the company, was dozing on the military map spread over his saddle. The map was badly crinkled. "I beg to report to the vice-commander," Bator shouted. "Something's happened!"

Bayar was badly startled. His head popped up and, still sluggish from sleep, he mumbled, "Some of the horses have got away? Hurry—send some men to drive them back!"

Tiny Li and Bator could not help grinning; but they thought: "With the company commander transferred to regimental headquarters, and the assistant political instructor on a training course at divisional headquarters, our vice-commander and the political instructor are really having a tough time!"

"None of the horses have got away," Bator said, "and they've all been given good fodder. But, I have something new to report. Where's the political instructor?"

"He has gone to interrogate the prisoners. Well, what is it? Sit down, and let's hear what you have to say."

Bator and Tiny Li sat down. When Bator had finished acquainting Bayar with the situation, all traces of drowsiness had faded from the latter's face. For a moment he opened his eyes wide in astonishment; then he called in the orderly who had been putting the saddles in order.

"Go at once and tell the political instructor that there's something very important we must discuss with him. Hurry!" Then, turning to Bator appreciatively, he said: "For the two weeks you've been the leader of the reconnaissance squad you've done a good job. You've discovered new problems!"

With a jingling of spurs, political instructor Tsagan strode quickly into the tent.

"Oh! So you're both here, Bator and Tiny Li. You must have come upon something important. I've been examining these prisoners. . . . The regimental commissar said that Pao Tsun-feng and his bandits were the last of the counter-revolutionary forces of Inner Mongolia. Less than forty captives, and where do you think they come from? . . . Some are of the Khingan League, some of the Jerim and Joude Leagues, some of the Silingol and Charhar Leagues, and there is one who belongs to the Ikchao League. And there are former puppet 'Manchukuo' officers, runaway landlords, reactionary herd-owners, riffraff in uniforms, duped peasants and herdsmen, and even simple-minded lamas who have been taken in by cooked-up tales. When we catch that bastard Pao Tsun-feng,

there'll be even more types still. We should be able to organise an exhibition of the counter-revolutionary elements of Inner Mongolia by then, don't you think? . . ." The political instructor laughed heartily, his face beaming.

"Political instructor," put in Bayar, "Bator and his companion have just discovered that the chap who was killed isn't Wang Tieh-shan after all."

"What? Not Wang Tieh-shan! How's that?"

When Bator had repeated all the facts that he had uncovered, Tsagan paced about for a while, brooding, and then muttered: "Why, the accursed scaffold-bound bandits! Trying to get away with that trick. All right, I'll go and make another investigation on the spot with the vice-commander here and if things do look suspicious, well—we've got over thirty 'tongues' to help us out, haven't we? Go to the prisoners' camp and try to find out all you can there, Bator." Saying this, he turned and left, followed by the vice-commander of the company.

No sooner had Bator reached the front of the second tent in the prison-camp than he heard from within Kharkhu's voice thundering furiously:

"You blasted scoundrel! This isn't the Kuomintang army, or one of Pao Tsun-feng's bandit units! Who d'you think you can boss around here? Try and hit anyone just once more!"

Bator stepped into the tent and glanced quickly at the scene before him. Kharkhu was standing there with the newly captured Japanese sword glittering like a stream of quicksilver in his hand, and his piercing, steely gaze fixed fiercely on a figure squatting in a far corner. This second man, with his head tucked deep in the hood of his brownish-yellow Kuomintang overcoat, did not stir. Another figure, a swarthy lama in a greasy, soiled, fur-lined red robe, kept his sunburnt head buried in his hands and sobbed. The explanation of all this, Bator soon discovered, was that, after Kharkhu had brought the prisoners their food some time earlier and proceeded to another tent, the famished captives who had been through the long battle without a morsel to eat, had stampeded towards the rice. Despite the young guard's efforts to stop them, about a dozen of them had rushed forward. The black lama had followed suit. Thrusting his arm out amidst the frenzied horde in a frantic attempt to get his share, he had received a vicious blow squarely in the face from the fellow now squatting in the corner. The blow had knocked out four of the lama's front teeth and that was the reason for his crying.

Bator felt greatly annoyed at this unexpected disturbance.

"Get up!" he said to the offender.

Fear became apparent on the man's features as he came submissively to his feet. Bator made Kharkhu separate this prisoner from the others.

The black lama who had received a blow began to stare stupidly at Bator, his eyes filled with gratitude. With his large mouth split, swollen and still bleeding, he cut a ludicrous and pathetic figure. Clumsily he

nodded his square, over-sized head and, thrusting out his thumb in a gesture of approval, said with a heavy Ujumchin accent:

"Ah, officer, you are a good man."

Bator sat himself beside the man. The strong odour of the lama's sheepskin tickled his nostrils.

"All the men of the People's Liberation Army are good men."

Again the lama's square, over-sized head nodded, "Yes, that's true, but—"

"But what?" Bator queried with a broad smile.

"That Harchin fellow is certainly a fierce one," the lama said in a low voice with his gaze glued on Kharkhu's back.

It turned out that the lama had walked too slowly, and Kharkhu had given him a push with the muzzle of his rifle. Learning this, Bator burst out laughing, "He may look tough on the outside, but he's really kind at heart. Didn't you see how he flared up at that man a moment ago?"

For the third time the lama nodded acquiescently.

"What's your name?" Bator asked.

"Tsanrav."

"Temple?"

"The Ulan Halg Lamasery."

"You don't seem very happy with the bandits. Why did you join them anyway?"

"Alas, officer, I was duped! I was taken in by the lies of the 'Peking Lama'!"

"The 'Peking Lama,' who is he?" Bator was familiar with quite a number of unusual, and even fantastic, nicknames and aliases adopted by certain lamas to distinguish themselves, but this was the first time he had heard of the "Peking Lama."

Lama Tsanrav supplied the very simple answer: "He is a staff officer under that vulture Wang Tieh-shan."

"Oh! . . . So it was by following him that you became a bandit," Bator said, becoming very alert now. Then he went on: "Were you still with him just before you were caught?"

"Yes."

"And Wang Tieh-shan—he was there too?"

"That's right."

Bator fished out his tobacco pouch and paper, rolled himself a cigarette and passed over the pouch to the lama.

"I don't smoke," the lama said. "A few pinches of snuff are enough for me."

"Snuff all you want then," Bator said, giving the other a good handful of the tobacco.

Lama Tsanrav took it in his hands as if it were something very rare and precious, and, after stuffing it very cautiously into his small, red cloth bag, he drew out a little and began to rub it between the palms of his hands. It was not until he had taken several furious snuffs that he nodded

for the fourth time and said, "Good! . . . Under the Peking Lama you can't even take snuff once in a while."

"And how did you happen to become one of his followers?"

"Ai . . . that is a long story! The year before last, the Peking Lama went about in the lamasery whispering to everybody: 'The *Palu** from Harchin, they slaughter lamas and burn down lamaseries. . . .' And he never failed to add: 'Join us and you'll have all the things that matter most—you'll eat well, drink well and have a good time.' That was what tempted me most. . . . Who could have dreamed that joining the bandits meant the torment I have been through! It has been a living hell! Look!" He tore open the collar of his large, greasy red robe, laying bare the dark brown skin of his chest which was covered with bluish and purple whip-marks. "Many of us had been planning to desert, but the guards were keeping their eyes on us all the time. Even if you did succeed in slipping away unnoticed it was still as if you were in the palms of their hands! They had fast horses, good guns, and they killed without so much as batting an eye. The moment they laid hands on you, you were a dead man. There was nothing you could say to them. They just shot you and that was all. Once you got in, you could not bear to stay in and yet you didn't dare to get away. What a life!"

"I suppose you have seen the truth now—who it is that burn down lamaseries and beat the lamas! Who it is that come to their rescue! Could you ever have escaped from that living hell if it hadn't been for the *Palu* from Harchin?"

Lama Tsanrav nodded his square, over-sized head for the fifth time: "Now I understand, the *Palu* is good."

"If you understand, that's good. Now, whatever you have to say, say it. There's nothing to be afraid of."

"In the name of the holy Tsong-kha-pa I make this oath: May I be dispatched into the deepest pit of Hell in my next life should I in any way act against my conscience!" Lama Tsanrav pointed to the wounds on his chest. "The bandits have treated me cruelly! But you did not beat me or throw angry words at me, and you have given me food to eat and tobacco to snuff. I shall prove my gratitude to you. Never, never shall I sin against my conscience!"

Another bandit, a wounded man who had been lying on his back in the tent, sat up with great effort. "Alas, officer!" he moaned to Bator, fingering his bandages. "In the bandit band who would have looked after me? I would have died a death worse than a dog's."

Political instructor Tsagan walked into the tent with a beaming face. "Come out a little while, will you?" he called out to Bator.

"The vice-commander and I have discovered further evidence," he

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* Transliteration of "eighth route," referring to the Eighth Route Army which was part of the People's Liberation Army during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.

went on when they were outside the tent a moment later. "About five hundred yards to the east of where the body lay, we found a long fur robe, a cap, and a pair of Mongolian boots, all blood-stained. They must have been discarded there after having been taken from the corpse."

"Yes, there's no doubt about it now—it was a trick. Well, let me see what I can get out of Tsanrav. That lama was with Wang Tieh-shan's staff officer, the 'Peking Lama,' just before we laid hands on him, so he should know something."

Returning to the tent, Bator went round for a short while, talking to the other prisoners. Then, he sat down once more, this time facing Tsanrav.

"Tell me, were you scared during the battle?"

"Aiya, officer, I dread even to speak of it. I implored Heaven and supplicated the Buddhas, but all my prayers were in vain. I never believed that I would come out of it alive."

"But at the very beginning of the battle—you could have handed over your weapons and got out of it all."

"That is what I had in mind all the time, only the guards, they kept a very strict watch."

"Ah, so there are guards on the watch even in combat. . . . But what about Pao Tsun-feng, Wang Tieh-shan, and the rest of your chiefs? What do they usually do during the fighting?"

"Oh, they fight too. Wang Tieh-shan was badly wounded this time, but nothing happened to Pao Tsun-feng."

"And what did Wang Tieh-shan do after he was hit?"

"Supported by the Peking Lama and *Taij** Galsan, he managed to walk away. What happened afterwards, I don't know. I was caught on the western slope."

Because he was slightly deaf, the lama had not heard of Wang Tieh-shan's death. Aware of this, Bator pushed his questions further:

"How was Wang Tieh-shan dressed then?"

"He was a high officer, so he was dressed in satin."

"Wasn't he wearing an American outfit?"

"No. . . . He does have such an outfit, but he seldom puts it on."

"Judging from the state of his wound, do you think he could have followed the bandits in their retreat?"

"He was in a bad way. But he had no choice. He simply had to go with them, what else could he do?"

"Where's the home of the Peking Lama?"

"He is a lama who goes on pleasure trips to Peking and Changchun. It's said he has no fixed address."

"And what about Galsan—Where's his home?"

"They said it was on Mount Khozhgar."

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*A title of the Mongolian nobility.

Bator hesitated for a moment, then he remembered the loyal and reliable old guide Nasanwulzy who was thoroughly familiar with the geography of Ujumchin. Quickly, he stood up and went out of the tent.

II

". . . Show the might of the people's cavalry. Wang Tieh-shan and the culprit who sheltered him must be caught. The capture of that scoundrel Wang Tieh-shan will put us on Pao Tsun-feng's track and enable us to annihilate the whole band of bandits under him." No sooner had Bayar, vice-commander of the company, finished these last few sentences than the clatter of hooves and the clink of metal rose; horseshoe sparks flashed. . . . The reconnaissance squad went out on its mission.

Squad leader Bator pulled the girth of his saddle tighter, slipped his tommy-gun over his strong muscular arm and, touching the evenly cropped mane of his horse, swung himself into the saddle. Shoulder to shoulder with the old guide Nasanwulzy he rode, leading the squad of fourteen men towards the northwest. Giving free rein to his horse and squeezing it lightly between his legs, Tiny Li, who was the last to mount, soon caught up with the unit.

The hooves of the horses trampling down the thick grass and overturning stones pounded rhythmically. The chilly dew soaked the riders' boots and drenched their breeches. How cold August weather can be on the Ujumchin grassland!

After a thirty *li*'s ride, they reached a further depth in the mountains where one lofty peak after another rose before their zigzagging path. Bator pulled tight the reins of his galloping chestnut charger, and the unit fell into a slow trot. The sluggishness that clung to the men who had set out almost immediately after waking up was now completely shaken off by the comfortable jolting motion of the horses, and they began to chat spiritedly.

"That Wang Tieh-shan certainly has a lot of tricks up his sleeve!" Tiny Li remarked.

"And I never doubted anything when I saw the body for the first time," Oundus, the sub-leader of the squad, said in a regretful tone.

"The dirty dog! Murdering one of his own subordinates to throw us off the scent! He's not human." Kharkhu cursed roundly, with his heavy Harchin accent.

"How did the truth come out, anyway? Was it during the interrogation of the prisoners?"

"Yes! That Wang Tieh-shan's a real devil if there ever was one. Most of them didn't know a thing."

"This is certainly an uncanny place!" grumbled Kharkhu. "There's hardly a living soul to be seen. Where I come from, why, a fellow twice

as cunning as Wang Tieh-shan wouldn't be able to find a hide-out!" It had become a habit with Kharkhu to curse Ujumchin and frown at its every hill and stream whenever anything happened to upset him. This seemed to be the only way he could vent his temper.

"There's nothing strange about that at all," Bator retorted. "With the bandits running wild these last few years, people just don't dare show themselves any more around here, that's all. Supposing the place were clustered with villages, there wouldn't be any use for the cavalry then, would there?"

"Huh! It was when we stayed in the Joude League after we had fought in Liaohsi last year that the bandits began to ride the high horse. Remember how the bastards boasted, 'A lasso is all we need to throttle the local *Palu*'? What's become of them now, I'd like to know." Kharkhu proudly shook the reins and his big, black mare pranced and charged like a playful lion.

The greyish-whiteness of approaching day appeared over the eastern skyline. Rosy dawn came flooding over the hilltops and soon the heights glimmered with a soft enchanting golden glow.

"Hey, d'you know what chain these hills around here belong to?" someone asked suddenly.

"The Khingan mountain range," replied Kharkhu positively. "We are now on the southwest corner of the main chain," he explained. "And though this place does look a bit desolate, you'll find big forests a couple of hundred *li* to the northeast. Don't tell me you've never heard of 'The Golden Khingan Mountains' before?"

In fact, the phrase "The Golden Khingan Mountains" was known and loved by every young Mongolian, for it symbolized the beauty and loveliness of his homeland. How many popular folk-songs in eastern Mongolia began with the words, "The Golden Khingan Mountains"!

Bator turned himself slightly, shifted his weight to one side of his saddle and rode on with expert ease facing Oundus. "Speaking of the Khingan Mountains," he said, "reminds me of a man I shall hate as long as I live."

All Tiny Li and the other men in the squad knew about their squad leader was that he had come from a peasant family, that he had suffered much in the old society, and that the Japanese had conscripted him for forced labour. They knew none of the details of his past, for Bator had only recently been assigned to them, after completing his course at the divisional training section.

"Seven years ago, the Japanese invaders took me away by force to help build their fortifications north of Aerhshan. The labour superintendent there, a captain of the gendarmes by the name of Seren, gave me a vicious cut in the arm with a Japanese sword which had words engraved on it just like the one Kharkhu is carrying. All day long we had to quarry rocks and carry sacks of cement. We were made to work like cattle and all we were given to eat was some mouldy millet soup. I

never dared to imagine then that I should live to see this day! . . . We all used to sing *Dayabhur* in those days. . . ."

"That's right," Kharkhu threw in quickly. "That song certainly was popular. And it still is. Why, I've been able to sing it since I was thirteen." And immediately, his voice strong and rich, he began to sing:

Climbing to the top of the Khingan, the Golden Khingan,
I gaze—
And seem to see my native land, the Mongolzhin Banner!
Coming down the slope of the Khingan, the Golden Khingan,
I gaze—
And seem to see my ten-year-old son Dayabhur!

The soft melody rose and fell as it went floating through the air. During the last few years of almost continuous fighting, the men had seldom sung, or even thought about, such folk-songs. Now, however, ten or twenty familiar melodies of this kind suddenly came back to them. The old guide Nasanwulzy who was more accustomed to pastoral songs was also loud in his praises, for he found the songs of the agricultural areas had an unusual appeal.

A frown passed over Bator's features.

"That's a good song," he admitted to Kharkhu. "But the one that was on everyone's lips in your 'Khingan Cavalry' is still better—

The pine trees are swaying, swaying,
Blown by the cool autumn wind.
Who have broken up our homes?
'Manchukuo' and Japan!

—How plainly the truth is put!"

"Why did that fellow give you that cut in the arm, squad leader?" Tiny Li asked with sympathy, picking up the subject that had been dropped some time before.

"Well, this is how it happened. Once I was so tired that I simply couldn't go on. The labour superintendent, that captain of the gendarmes by the name of Seren, came charging at me, and accused me of slacking deliberately. That set my anger off, and I snapped back at him. In a flash, he drew his sword, waved it in the air yelling 'Bastard!' and brought it down on me with all the strength that was in him. I tried to ward off the blow with the spade I had in my hands, but the sword skidded over the fore-end of my spade and gashed my arm, gashed it so deeply that I can't use a sabre to this day. But I guess I needed this lesson to make me see what a fool I had been! You see, the fellow was also a Mongol and he even came from the same locality as I did—in fact, he was the son of Bo, one of the best known landlords of our Banner. And because he came from the same Banner and the same district, I had

always thought that he would never fly out at me. I had forgotten that he was a graduate of the Tokyo Military Academy who had been decorated for having fought for the Japanese against the People's Republic of Mongolia. Hand in glove with those Japanese devils he was. What did he care whether you lived or died! 'Your life isn't worth that of a dog!' he barked at me furiously after he had given me that wound. 'This sword is a symbol of my authority; it cuts first and reports afterwards!' The bastard! After that, I didn't give a damn what happened to me: I wanted to destroy everything I could. In one day I smashed four spades: the repairs department simply couldn't keep up with me. The Japanese devils and their lackeys were so angry that they almost burst."

"They deserved it!" Oundus burst out on Bator's behalf.

"But many of our brothers were punished and tortured for deeds of that kind afterwards."

"You did not kill him after the liberation?" Tiny Li asked in a tone filled with hatred.

"We certainly wanted to. But the fellow's legs were too long for us. Before we could stop him, he took to his heels as fast as a rabbit."

"He got off cheap!"

"A beast like that at large is like a wolf let loose; sooner or later he'll find new victims! It was said in 1946 that he had joined the armed forces of the Mongolian and Chinese landlords and the Kuomintang Garrison Headquarters in Northeast China and had been operating for some time in the district of the Tushet and Darhan Banners. Though he himself managed to escape when our district was liberated, his father, who was one of the local despots, was smashed in the land reform movement."

"And after that?"

"I don't know."

"But, squad leader, the sword dropped by the bandits which Kharkhu is carrying. . . ." Tiny Li guessed hopefully. "Isn't it possible that Seren is with the bandits now?"

"There are plenty of puppet 'Manchukuo' officers who fought in the Nomonhan Campaign and then joined the reactionary forces after the liberation. No, I don't think it possible." Bator said absently. Oundus urged his horse forward and said casually, "Now that tens of thousands of bandits have been exterminated together with all the American-equipped mechanized divisions of the Kuomintang that backed them—what can that fellow do? He can't just grow wings and fly away, can he? Maybe he has already got himself smashed to a pulp somewhere."

"That's what I say too, confound it! Hasn't our company alone wiped out about two thousand of them already!" Kharkhu bragged in his usual way.

"That bandit Pao Tsun-feng is about the only one left now. But though he hasn't got many men under him, he's certainly tough!"

"Tough?—Why doesn't he show himself then?" The conversation soon drifted back to their present mission. Discussing the bandits, most

of the men shared the same view: "Running with their tails between their legs all the time, they are hard to catch!"

It was now quite light; the tall grass swallowed the legs of the horses; dew-drops sparkled; a thin layer of frost clung to the bits and stirrups. . . .

Bator checked his chestnut charger which was tossing its head, ready to break into a gallop. He rolled himself a long, coarse cigarette and, after lighting it, spurred his mount and let it race forward. Along the deep valley and over the flat stretches of grassland, the fourteen horsemen raced, putting hares and mountain eagles to flight.

As his chestnut charger raced onward steadily, Bator took furious puffs at his cigarette from which tiny sparks shot out to fall on the moist grass. He felt quite excited. During the past two weeks he had done a lot of worrying: as soon as he had learned that the task of rounding up and cleaning out the bandits had been given to the First Company, aware of the important role reconnaissance would have to play, he had immediately asked his superiors to send his squad out to do the scouting. From the day Pao Tsun-feng had been routed and had started to run for his life, this strong and capable leader of the new reconnaissance squad had for days and nights on end strained all his faculties to the utmost in his endeavour to find the mountain that served as the bandits' lair. But all in vain. When the squad had reached the heart of the mountains and the desolate valleys of north Ujumchin, sometimes even after a whole week of hard riding, they hadn't seen a single yurt; and the few nomad families they had encountered had been either reticent and afraid because the men of the People's Liberation Army were not familiar to them or altogether ignorant as to the trail the bandits had taken in their flight. In short, the difficulties that had beset the pursuing group had been great and many. So how could Bator help feeling excited now that, at last, he had something to go on—something that would, perhaps, lead them to the place where Wang Tieh-shan had taken shelter while waiting for his wound to heal?

"See that peak over there? That's the direction we must take. Come on!" Nasanwulzy was leading the way, erect in his Tolun saddle, riding in the manner peculiar to natives of the grasslands.

From over the infinite succession of rising and falling ridges loomed the bold perpendicular outlines of ever loftier peaks cutting like mighty spearheads into the sky. With the light growing on the summits of the hills, the rosiness of the rising sun spread, till it embraced half the sky and lent its ruddy tint to every white cloud, and then, clear-cut and resplendent, golden rays poured out from the overhanging crimson veil. The tall, thick grass and wild plants in the open space between the mountains grew higher than a man's head. From the dense reeds concealing pools and ponds came now and then the croaking of an invisible frog and the monotonous chirping of a few crickets. Sparrows took to their wings in alarm, twittering; frightened hares dashing out of sight rustled through

the undergrowth, which crackled occasionally under their feet. The riders of the squad advancing through the maze of interwoven hills were soon swallowed by the sea of grass in which hoof-beats and the sneezing of horses did not carry more than a few paces. . . .

"How much farther is Mount Khozhgar, venerable Nasanwulzy?" Tiny Li queried impatiently, almost sorry that he could not grow wings and fly the rest of the way.

"Not far," the old man told him. "Just settle yourself once more in your saddle and you'll be there in a twinkle." Nasanwulzy pointed straight ahead with his horsewhip held parallel to the ground, and then he fell into a fit of coughing. Everyone understood him, for all knew that, in the grasslands, distance was expressed not in *li* but by gestures: pointing with the arm held flat meant about thirty *li*, the arm at a higher angle seventy or eighty *li*. Still such a distance to travel after the sixty *li* they had already covered! Dwelling places were few and far between in the land of the Ujumchin Banner!

"Are there many yurts at the foot of the mountain there?" Tiny Li asked, already anticipating how he would spend his time after the capture of Wang Tieh-shan.

"No, Mount Khozhgar, my little one, happens to be as bare as can be," Nasanwulzy replied in a gentle voice. "It's one of those mountains where even a hare won't leave his droppings, and where there isn't a yurt within a hundred *li* around. Why else, do you suppose, should the chief of the bandits hide there?" The old man's brows and whiskers were now covered with thin frost and his face was stiffly creased. He pulled down the folds of his round Ujumchin cap and pushed up the collar of his greatcoat, looking quite frozen.

"You've caught cold, haven't you, old uncle?" Bator asked, full of concern for the old man.

"What! Catch cold with this thick coat on me? No! Do you know what I used to wear at home?" Nasanwulzy protested, patting with a dry, bony hand the grey military overcoat which the army had given him. "This thing is certainly wonderful. You can wear it in the daytime, and use it as a quilt at night." With quick, practised movements he lit his native pipe and puffed at it unhurriedly, the smoke disappearing immediately in the clear, cold air of the morning. He knit his brow for a moment and then turned his glance on Bator inquisitively.

Nasanwulzy was a taciturn old man who liked to ponder with circles of smoke curling up lazily from his lips and a pot of very strong red tea before him. When questioned, he usually told all he knew, but he seldom volunteered information. Unlike Kharkhu and the others who did not pay attention to such things, Bator knew and understood him well. Now that the capture of Wang Tieh-shan seemed near at hand, the old guide was delighted, but so far he had, as was his habit, kept that delight entirely to himself. However, interested in the conversation of the young eastern Mongolians, he tried to find out more about them.

"To what Banner do you belong, young ones?" he asked.

"I belong to the Tushet Banner and he's of Zast. Most of us belong to the Khingan League, only our comrade there who seldom opens his mouth—he is a Daghor man," Bator acquainted the old guide with the birth places of the men, laying special emphasis on that of Ngo Wen-hsiang, the light machine-gunner, who was grave and silent. This man kept his gaze on Nasanwulzy; he did not speak, but a broad simple smile spread over his face, a smile that seemed to say: "This is what we are. Get it?"

Watching Nasanwulzy's worn-out form and meeting his searching glance, Bator felt sorry for the old man. "Seeing us laughing and talking happily as we are, he's probably thinking of his son who was murdered by the bandits," he thought sadly.

"Oh! They are a long way off, these places!" Nasanwulzy said. He sucked his lips, sighed and then fell back into his usual brooding mood, thinking: "The people of my Banner always warned me against outsiders in the past saying that men of other Banners were liars, deceivers, swindlers, and abductors and that everyone of them was a fox in human shape. But here, there are not only men of Khorchin and Harchin, but also Daghor men, and even Chinese. . . . And they are all good lads who keep calling me 'old uncle' all the time."

"Not a very long way off," someone said. "No further than a thousand *li* in fact."

"That used to be a very great distance in the past," said Oundus. "Why, when I heard stories as a child about the people of Ujumchin, I felt as if I were listening to some incredible outlandish tales. But that was true, too, in a way, for then every Banner prince did rule over his district as if it were an independent kingdom of his own. I'd never have dreamed that some day I'd really come to Ujumchin."

"Everything here seems to be different, the people's accent is different, their way of living is different, their songs and the way they sing them are different. . . . Why, I heard a girl singing one of those pastoral songs the other day, but although I listened hard, I simply couldn't make head or tail of it. See if you can do better, listen—Oooh-yee-jee. . . ." Kharkhu broke out singing, but something suddenly got stuck in his throat and the song died there. Everyone guffawed, and even Ngo Wen-hsiang and the old guide Nasanwulzy shook with laughter.

"Oh-ho! Look what progress our Kharkhu here is making. Floating into the air he goes with the notes of his song and then—bang! he falls flat on his bottom!"

"The feet of that big brother of ours slipped out of the stirrups of his song; the song started kicking and tossed him flat on his backside!"

"Oh, poor Kharkhu, are you hurt?"

Everybody joined in, poking fun at Kharkhu. A hare went darting away in panic from the roar of their laughter.

"All right, you've had your laugh, now drop it, can't you? I'm not

good at those pastoral songs, I admit it and won't try singing them again. Does that satisfy you fellows?"

"Listen to that! He's just about got the hang of them and he's giving up!"

Kharkhu was not a bad singer: he could sing cavalry songs and the folk-songs of eastern Mongolia quite well and play the four-stringed Chinese violin with great skill. And there were many other things he was good at: he was a good player of unsympathetic roles in drama; he was good at ball games in which he always charged forward like a tank and nothing seemed able to stop him; he was a leading light in the cultural and recreational activities of his unit; and he was also a good wrestler.

Now hurrying their pace, now slowing down, now talking, now laughing, they approached Mount Khozhgar. . . .

III

The sun came out in all its splendour; the dew-drops on the grass blades sparkled. The mist that had gathered in the hollows of the hills went creeping slowly towards the summits to form, a moment later, lazy puffs of cloud which twisted, rolled and rose before they began to drift almost reluctantly across the sky. Having concealed themselves carefully on the slope, the men of the First Squad scanned the terrain before them. At the foot of the hill lay a stretch of yellowish flat land, in the middle of which were two lonely yurts from which smoke was curling up weakly. One of the yurts was a large one of spotless white, decorated with what in the distance seemed like a barred "S" pattern. The other was small, narrow and black, and looked particularly ugly in contrast to the immaculate whiteness of the larger one. About half a *li* behind the yurts stood a small, low enclosure within which cattle and sheep moved slowly. Dimmed by the long intervening space, the animals seemed like a patch of swaying yellow and white flowers.

After having scrutinised the neighbourhood to his satisfaction, Bator turned and swept his men with his glance. The whole squad now ceased making further observations and stood alert with their eyes on their leader. Standing with the reins of his chestnut charger clasped firmly in his hand, his face beaming with excitement, he said in a voice that crackled crisply like beans roasting: "Comrades! The time has now come for us to take Wang Tieh-shan. There don't seem to be many of his armed bandits around. He counted on the vastness of the thinly populated grassland to protect him, thought that all he had to do was to pitch his yurt here where there isn't a living soul within a hundred *li*. But he was wrong! We aren't three-year-old kids. . . ."

The men listened tensely.

"However we must not forget to take careful stock of the enemy's situation and to keep our eyes open for anything suspicious. Now, the

first section shall go and search that sheep and cattle enclosure to see if anything is concealed there. The second section shall post themselves on that hilltop east of the yurts and watch out for any movement. The third section is to follow me; we'll charge at those yurts full speed. . . . And if none of you sees any suspicious movements anywhere, then assemble without further orders!"

Kharkhu and the men of his section mounted their horses and galloped in a horizontal line towards the enclosure; Oundus, the sub-leader of the squad, took the second section towards the top of the small hill. Bator instructed the men of the third section to readjust their saddles. Then, ordering them to draw their sabres so that the naked blades flashed in the air like quicksilver, he shouted at the top of his voice: "Charge!" Like a terrible whirlwind the little group went tearing down the slope, sweeping through the tall grass, with Bator's chestnut charger at their head. . . .

Bator was the first to reach the front of the big yurt. Not a sound came from within. Only two or three Mongolian dogs opened their large jaws and barked, their tails stiff and sticking high up. Bator swung adroitly out of his saddle. His heavy boots crunched and creaked over the small stones and pebbles on the ground. He placed Tiny Li on guard outside the yurt and ordered him not to let anyone move, then, when Nasanwulzy arrived and reined up before him, Bator sent the old guide into the small, ramshackle yurt to see whether there was anyone he knew there, or anything he could find out. After having planted a post into the ground and tied his horse to it, Bator took three of his men to surround the larger yurt. Still there was neither sound nor movement inside.

"How strange! Is it possible that Wang Tieh-shan has got away?" Bator's heart sank. He ordered the three men he had posted around the yurt to lie flat and get ready to shoot, and then, with his own gun levelled and ready, he advanced shouting: "Come out whoever's there!" At the third call the blue cloth shielding the entrance of the yurt was pushed up a little, and a skinny old man in a long grey robe emerged caressing his thin moustache. The eyes behind his thick-framed, old-fashioned glasses were pea-sized and watery.

"Ah, officer, what honourable business brings you to my humble abode so early?" he asked in a lazy drawl.

"Your name is Galsan, isn't it?"

"Yes. You want to rest yourselves? Come in and have some tea and food." The old man's courtesy was irreproachable.

"You're a wise man, Galsan. You should know without being told that we've come to arrest Wang Tieh-shan. Hand him over to us and the government will deal leniently with you!" Bator spoke bluntly.

"You can see for yourself that there are only two single yurts here with the young and old who live in them. There is no one else, no stranger. I've really never heard of that . . . what was the name you said—Wang . . . ? If you don't believe me you may search the place." Galsan's voice

was firm and confident, but there was an uneasy expression on his face and an apprehensive look in his small eyes which Bator caught at once.

"You'd better stop playing that game and tell the truth, Galsan. There are witnesses who saw you and the Peking Lama help Wang Tieh-shan get away! We wouldn't have travelled all this distance just on a blind guess! In a moment we will make a search and if we do find him it will be very bad for you!" Bator's words were soft and gentle, but his piercing gaze probed Galsan's eyes like a pointed blade of cold steel.

"There are only two yurts here, officer. Please go ahead and search. Yes, please go ahead and search. . . ." Galsan, unable to frame a denial, kept repeating that last phrase obstinately.

Bator ordered the three men posted outside the yurt to make a thorough search separately and, throwing up the red-rimmed flap of blue cloth closing the entrance, he stepped into the yurt, his eyes sweeping everything inside. The top cover of Galsan's abode was wide open and the bright daylight flooded in. The floor was covered with a double layer of thick felt that was snow-white and brand-new. A Japanese stove stood near the entrance, its thin pipe running up to the ceiling. Over an antique Buddhist shrine, incense smoke curled and twisted; and there was a strong smell of sandalwood. On the crimson hangings against the north wall of the yurt was suspended a large photograph of a man wearing a mandarin's hat and a long robe. This was the prince of Ujumchin. The photograph was almost a square foot in size, covered with glass and encased in a red frame. The whole thing was shiny and scrupulously clean, everything about it showing its owner's love and veneration for the prince. Nearby, on the same side of the yurt, sat a beak-mouthed old woman in a long brown robe intent on the endless Buddhist prayers she was muttering as her fingers kept count automatically on the string of crystal beads she was holding in her hands. A freckle-faced, faded girl who wore her hair in two long braids was reading on the couch with simulated calmness.

"Go ahead and search. Search all you want! We've never even heard of anyone called Wang Tieh-shan, so what do we care!" The girl spoke impatiently to Bator, then turned her back on him.

Bator came out of the yurt, furious. The old herd-owner, on the contrary, was standing with his pipe between his teeth, blowing leisurely circles of smoke; he looked calmer than ever. Paying no heed to him, Bator went into the other yurt. The felt covering this one was dirty, worn-out and almost falling apart; through large holes in it the cool wind poured in. Inside there were only a few felt rags on the ground and a stove built of clay in which glowed what remained of a fire that had been made with dried cattle dung. A small pot sizzled with steam escaping from its lid. Nasanwulzy was talking with a white-haired, withered old woman who moaned and sighed as she spoke:

"It was when Prince Teh of Sunid Banner was recruiting in Tolun . . . that my son, the little fool but—oh, the flesh of my heart! . . . There was nothing I could do to dissuade him. 'We shall not be the slaves of

Taij Galsan generation after generation. After I become a soldier, I'll take you away from this place,' he said to me, and then he ran away. It has been ten years already. . . . When I sleep I dream of him, when I eat I think of him. . . . In the day-time I long for him, at night I long for him, long for him, and long for him—but he does not come. . . ." Heart-broken, the old woman began to weep, her silvery hair trembling. The furrows on her gaunt face deepened as she wept, her shoulders shook and it seemed as if there would be no end to her mournful tears.

Nasanwulzy tried to comfort her with a sympathy that came from his heart, "Don't cry, it is useless to cry. Stop shedding those tears now. What good will it do you to cry your eyes out, eh? Now that you have found an old companion, it is better, isn't it?"

"Oh, him! He has a terrible temper, and it seems he will never get used to us, the people of Ujumchin. He belongs to the Darhan Banner . . . took refuge here because he was afraid that they would conscript him for forced labour. He is also a poor, suffering man without a home and with no one to depend on. He makes his living taking care of the horses of Galsan and so we became partners. Galsan did not object, but my partner . . . he is always in a sullen mood because he is badly treated here, and so whenever he comes home he yells at me, 'If it weren't for you, I'd have gone home long ago!' Ai . . . ! His temper may be bad, but he has a good heart. Without him, I would have gone out of my mind long ago. . . . And they would have thrown me to the wolves. . . ."

"How are you, old auntie?" Bator, stepping up before her, greeted her respectfully.

"I should say that I am well, I suppose. Sit down, child."

There was a pause. The old woman scrutinised Bator for a while, gave a short sigh and then said:

"My own child must be just your age now . . . if he is still alive! Oh! Fate has been cruel! I shall never, never see him again in this life!" She began to weep again.

When Bator questioned her about Wang Tieh-shan, the old woman shook her head, "I don't know anything, alas! My eyes are so bad I can't even see the top of this place I live in. The affairs of this *taij* are a complete mystery to me. . . . All I know is that in the past he had many visitors—men from all over the land of the Five Princes and the Eight Banners came to see him. Perhaps it was to get away from them that he moved to this secluded spot, who knows? I'm just a helpless old woman who follows him wherever he goes; I don't know anything."

"Is there any good hiding-place in this neighbourhood that you know of?"

"There isn't any good grazing pasture within a hundred *li* of here. Who would come to this place where you can't even find the droppings of a hare?" The old woman peered cautiously out of the yurt before she went on in a low voice, "Before we moved to this place the *taij* came here alone first. He didn't let anyone come with him, and now that he has

made us come, he has forbidden my partner and me to move about this place. Very terrible the *taij* is, but his daughter is even more wicked. She curses without end for no reason at all, and the word 'slave!' is on her lips a thousand times a day!"

From outside came the hoof-beats and the metallic clink of the bit and stirrups of a single horse, and then an old man in a tattered black robe walked in. The forehead of the newcomer was bald and shiny and he examined Bator and the old guide with narrowed eyes, "Oh-ho, so we have guests! Something very rare, very rare indeed. What is the matter with you there, can't you move? Make some tea! Even though I have become a slave here with you in Ujumchin, we must still treat guests with some decency at least!" He untied his cloth belt sullenly, his glance roving over Bator, "This gentleman, what is his Banner?"

"The Tushet Banner," Bator told him. "Right next to yours."

"I would never have imagined that I would see on this day people of the Ten Banners of Khorchin. The other one is from Zast, and this one Tushet—this is certainly a happy occasion for a man with one foot in the grave." The old man was so deeply moved that tears filled his eyes as he laughed, and his joy seemed suffused with his painful longing for his homeland, Khorchin. "Bring the kumiss! Let us drink—celebrate! . . ."

The old woman struggled to her feet hurriedly and took out from a small broken-down closet a little wooden flask containing the fermented milk liquor.

"No, no, no, we have our official task to complete yet," Nasanwulzy said. But his eyes remained greedily on the flask and his feet seemed glued to the ground.

"That man called Kharkhu—did you come with him?"

Seeing that there wasn't much more he could learn from the old couple, Bator was ready to leave.

"Hum! They caught a fat lama. Birds of a feather they are, Galsan and that lama—both rotten! Beat them! Beat them, beat them hard! A good beating is all that's needed to get the truth out of them!" This outburst came from the old man who was heating the liquor. The old woman watched him with knitted brows, looking as if she wanted to stop him but did not dare. A new question was forming on Bator's lips when Kharkhu swept into the yurt like a whirlwind.

"I beg to report to the squad leader," he said. "We've just caught the Peking Lama. But he insists that he is just a horse-tender."

Bator turned to Nasanwulzy, "Carry on your chat," he said before he followed Kharkhu out.

The lama was standing beside the post to which the horses were tied. His head was like a meat ball, a big mass of fat bulged out from the nape of his neck and he had a huge belly. As soon as he saw Bator, his eyes narrowed to mere slits. "What is the meaning of this, officer? Arresting people for no reason at all!"

"No more tricks out of you! Tell the truth—what is your trade?" Bator said grimly.

The lama's tone began to change. "For those who have left their homes to join the Holy Orders, to lie is a great sin. I shall not lie. In the past I was a lama, but since it is the fashion to work now, so . . . er, there is no reason why a lama should be an exception, so . . . er . . . I decided to become a horse-tender. . . ." He took off his small, red silk cap which was shaped like a melon seed, exposing his shining forehead, and then added, "If you do not believe me, officer, you may go and investigate in the home of Galsan. Everyone knows that I am a good old lama who would not hurt a fly or tread upon an insect when he walks." He stopped talking and, with a handkerchief soiled with particles of snuff, wiped the garlic bulb peppered with red moles that served as his nose. An affable smile spread over his liver-coloured face.

"You—a horse-tender? Rich as you are, with your saddle all rimmed with silver! There isn't a soul who'd believe you! One can see at a glance that you're a high priest of the lamasery. We've always been for freedom of religion; you are perfectly safe even if you claim to be the living Buddha. Why on earth do you choose to say that you are a horse-tender?"

"But I am, I am! With all the courage in the world I wouldn't dare deceive you!" His face was beginning to pale now, and when he saw Nasanwulzy emerge from the yurt, he began to tremble. "Ah! Nasanwulzy, so you've also joined the Ha—" The words "Harchin *Palu*" almost slipped from his lips, but he corrected himself very self-consciously, "Joined the revolution."

Nasanwulzy grated his teeth grimly, "Good! What a small world for deadly enemies! That beloved nephew of yours killed my son Mandalt. And now that the murderer has met the death that he deserved, you cross my path!"

The fat lama smiled obsequiously: "If no ties of blood hold us together, then at least for the sake of this land on which we both were born, Nasanwulzy dear brother, do not speak of these things to me! To every grudge there's a wrongdoer just as to every debt there's a creditor. It was not I who killed your son. And Harchig who killed him is now dead. . . ."

Nasanwulzy, who could not out-talk the fat lama, turned to Bator trembling with impotent rage: "That's the so-called 'Peking Lama' from the Ulan Halg Lamasery who followed the bandits, uncle of that bastard Harchig."

Unable to deny his identity any longer, the fat lama confessed that he was a bandit. But when questioned about Wang Tieh-shan, he stubbornly refused to admit knowing anything.

After the capture of Wang Tieh-shan's staff officer, the Peking Lama, Bator and Oundus were even more convinced that the man they wanted was hiding in the neighbourhood. Briefly, they exchanged opinions and

resolved to carry on separate interrogations and searches. They placed another four men on guard. The herd-owner and his daughter were very calm. The beak-mouthed old woman alone was shaken now and then by a fit of trembling and her face paled and grew livid by turn. The freckle-faced girl, seeing her, puckered her brow impatiently. "What's the matter with you, mother?" she said harshly. "Haven't you ever seen any stranger before? There's nothing to be afraid of!"

When Bator instructed the men of the squad to search every suspicious place thoroughly, the beak-mouthed old woman fidgeted nervously. Pretending to gaze into the distance, Bator standing at the entrance of the yurt watched her intently out of the corners of his eyes. The old woman kept turning her stealthy glance in the direction of a heap of cattle dung about fifty yards away. Strange! . . . Bator ordered Oundus, the sub-leader of the squad, and Kharkhu to make a careful search of the heap.

"Wow-wow! . . ." Three dogs as big as calves, with the hair on their backs standing on end came leaping towards the approaching men, encircling them in a tightening ring of ferocious snarls and snapping jaws. Kharkhu, taken off his guard, was very nearly bitten. He lifted his rifle in a flash and—"Crack!" fired a shot. At the same dazzling speed as they had come, the dogs turned tail and fled. The dung heap was in great confusion and looked like a pile of rubbish, but it failed to reveal anything worthy of attention. . . . There was a kennel on the heap. Oundus paused an instant before it, studying it with interest. "Queer thing!" he exclaimed, "the Mongols love their dogs as they love their own children. Why on earth did they put that kennel on this heap, of all places?" Kharkhu stepped up to the object of their attention and unceremoniously flung it aside. On the spot where the kennel had stood was now exposed a square piece of wood which looked like the cover of a well. At a tug the board came away and the two men grew suddenly tense as they found themselves gazing into the gaping pitch black mouth of a cave.

A savage look came over Kharkhu's features as he prepared to climb down into the hole, but Oundus clutched him by the arm. "An old secret agent like Wang Tieh-shan, do you think him such a fool as not to be ready? Wait a little while!" Even as he spoke he picked up the kennel and threw it into the tunnel. "Crack! Crack! . . ." Several shots fired in quick succession rent the impenetrable darkness within. The two men exchanged a quick glance and, without saying a word, hurled simultaneously a couple of their lemon-shaped hand-grenades into the pit. "Boom . . . !" Ear-splitting explosions were followed by the cracking and rumble of disintegrating wood and earth. Someone gave a loud groan which died almost as soon as it began, and then there was silence. Oundus jumped swiftly into the hole. The acrid sulphur smoke was suffocating; the darkness seemed like a solid block. He edged along the wall of the black tunnel on tiptoe, his eyes wide open and alert. The

ground under his feet was soft and yielding, as if it were covered with a thick carpet of felt; the shower of splinters and clouds of dust had not yet altogether subsided. Going a little further, he could catch the rasping sound of laboured breathing, and knew at once that the wounded man must have lost consciousness. Oundus took a leap in the direction of the sound, and his arms fastened about the invisible form like a vise. The man had been caught under a thin supporting beam which had fallen over him, so that he now lay limp as a dead pig. Oundus' rough fingers fumbled at the man's silk clothes until he found the pistol, which he picked up and put in his belt. And then with an effort he lifted the man and dragged him to the mouth of the cave. Kharkhu heaved a deep sigh of relief as he saw Oundus emerge hauling the dark inanimate form behind him; he had been worried and about to go down into the pit himself, but it was all right now.

"Brothers of the Mongolian Communist Army, if you want to shoot me—shoot me! If you want to chop my head off—chop it off! Only hurry up and get it over with!" Wang Tieh-shan spoke through clenched teeth as soon as he recovered his senses. His horse-like face, covered by a thick growth of beard, had turned iron-grey.

"It won't be that easy for you! It was you who formed an accursed alliance with bandits and reactionary secret agents, you who together with them ravaged the land and slaughtered the people. Thousands upon thousands of people are waiting impatiently for the mass trial which will be held for you!"

"Well, I am at your disposal then." The veteran secret agent spoke with an accent that plainly belonged to the other side of the Great Wall, but he was dressed, from head to foot, in Mongolian clothes: a long robe of black silk tied at the waist with a green silk belt; conventional red-rimmed Mongolian boots on which was printed a square, flowery pattern. He walked with a limp, his tall, lank form swaying like a sorghum stalk. The wound in his thigh was bad and being knocked unconscious by a beam had not improved his condition. He moaned at every step, probing the southern horizon with sad eyes, probably remembering the days when he had worn a khaki uniform and ridden in a jeep—the days when he had gone through training under his American overlords.

"We'll take the herd-owner along too!" Bator's eyes were wide and round, and he had to struggle to keep his temper under control as he recalled how these rascals had tried to trick him. In the yurt the beak-mouthed old woman broke out wailing and yelling frenziedly: "Leave us the old man. . . . It is all the fault of that fat, bald jackass . . . and the stinking southerner. . . . They drove him to it. . . ." Galsan, the old herd-owner, all his previous imperturbability gone, began to cower and shudder too, "Oh . . . I was unarmed and powerless, how could I set myself against them? . . . They forced me . . . they drove me to it—that . . . that stinking southerner named Wang and the bald jackass! I . . . I'll go straight from now on. . . . I'll be a good man. . . ."

"You've done enough squawking. Shut up! Why did you lie just now and put on such airs?" Kharkhu snapped back at Galsan who fell silent immediately. The fat lama was frantically taking snuff; the only one of the trio who had not yet broken down was Wang Tieh-shan.

The old man from Khorchin appeared leading an ox which he quickly harnessed to a cart. "Don't let these fellows deceive you with that look of helplessness. Everyone of them used to be a devil incarnate who killed without blinking an eye. That Galsan's own son is a bandit too. Heaven knows what would happen if he returned!" he said to Nasanwulzy and Tiny Li, and then, turning in the direction of the smaller yurt, he called: "Oyi! . . . Come on out quickly! We're going south where all is nice and peaceful!"

The old woman tottered out. "Where do you want to go?" she asked, her voice dry, rasping.

"Where? Anywhere is better than here. To be a slave for a few years is enough for anyone, we're through! The moment has come for us to flit to distant places, to fly high up in the air!" Busily, he went on preparing the cart for travel, and he did not pause when he said to Nasanwulzy in a low whisper, "Tell your squad leader to search everything carefully. . . . Tell him not to underestimate that wench there."

"Old uncle," said Bator with emotion to the old man. "If you want to go—go. However, you needn't be afraid of the bandits here. They won't dare to take revenge. Pretty soon we'll be out searching for them. They'll be too busy running to save their own skins."

The old man nodded: "I know that, and I am not afraid. Only I'd like to find some good place where I could look after a herd for someone. I would never have come to work for him, that Galsan, if I had known him to be so black-hearted! Never! Oi-da! . . . Sha-daa! . . ." He waved his whip at the ox and the cart began to move, creaking and squeaking. The old man's eyes crinkled in a smile as he looked back: "Look! We're so poor, we've practically nothing to take with us. Hop —and we're ready to go. See how simple it is!"

Ngo Wen-hsiang took one of the herd-owner's unsaddled horses, giving his own mount to Wang Tieh-shan to ride. The purpose of this exchange was to eliminate any possibility of escape on Wang Tieh-shan's part during the journey, for Ngo Wen-hsiang's own grey horse was a model herd-animal which always kept close to its own group of horses. Wang Tieh-shan hummed and hawed and sighed but made no attempt to mount.

"With things as they are now you'd better go—yes, you'd better go . . ." muttered the fat lama who was leading his own ghastly-white little pony. Nasanwulzy and Tiny Li took the lead, riding at a great speed, and Ngo Wen-hsiang's grey horse plunged ahead after them with Wang Tieh-shan shaking and trembling in the saddle as if he had malaria.

With his tommy-gun on his shoulder and firmly grasping the reins

of his fierce chestnut charger, Bator rode at the rear of his squad. His eyes were grimly riveted on the backs of the three captives. His heart thudding with excitement, he fished out of his pocket a pack of "Racehorse" cigarettes. It was the last of those he had bought when in town. He offered cigarettes to Oundus and Nasanwulzy.

It was almost noon now. The grassland was a pool of warm sunshine and intoxicating fragrance. Mountain eagles circled proudly high overhead. It was a beautiful day.

"Well," said Tiny Li to Kharkhu, "we didn't come for nothing, eh? Look at these three birds we've caught—all freaks, eh! One looks like a white speckled snake. The second dressed all in red, swollen in the middle and sharp at both ends is the very picture of a bed-bug, and the third, with his grey eyes peeking from behind those thick lenses—a rat!"

"Hah! . . . Whatever it is—freak, ghoul or monster—if it goes hiding in a rat hole, old Kharkhu never fails to drag it out, eh? What do you say? Kharkhu is wonderful, isn't he?"

"Wonderful! Splendid! My, he knows how to use his fists. . . . He knows how to use his sword . . . and he has even proved that he knows how to catch these underground rascals! Very remarkable, indeed!" Tiny Li said somewhat ironically. But Kharkhu, taking no notice of this, went on with his conceited boasting, "Even in the whole regiment old Kharkhu rates as one of the very best!"

Kharkhu had been a soldier in the puppet "Manchukuo" forces before he was liberated by our troops. He had had many friends in the so-called "Khingan Cavalry," but these fellows had been mostly uniformed riffraff, with whom he had often gone into the nearby villages to make trouble. He had always had a devil-may-care recklessness that had made him different from the rest of his companions. Once, when he had been on home-leave, drinking in an inn with several of his friends, they had happened to meet the notorious chief of police of that time nicknamed "Skin-them-alive." They had picked a quarrel with him, and, in the fight that inevitably ensued, given him the beating of his life. Nothing had happened afterwards. Their victim, who called himself "The Police Officer of His Majesty the Emperor," seeing that they were "Soldiers of Great Manchukuo" had not dared to take his revenge upon them as he certainly would have, and most ruthlessly, otherwise. After the liberation, Kharkhu had joined the Autonomous Army of Eastern Mongolia. During the few years that had followed, he had made remarkable progress and overcome most of his bad habits: he had given up drinking, brought his wild temper under control and cured himself of his riotous tendencies. And moreover, he had twice received honours for Outstanding Meritorious Services. But, owing to his careless temperament, he still had many little faults which despite the criticism of his comrades and the utmost goodwill on his part, he did not seem quite able to overcome. When it came to fighting, nothing could stand in Kharkhu's way. Among all the men in the squad Bator was the one Kharkhu respected

most, because the squad leader who was kind and capable and at the same time a good fighter and a good worker, never used pedantic phrases to criticise people.

IV

Wang Tieh-shan was brought into company headquarters by two guards. Under the shadow of his black felt hat which he had pulled low over his brow, his eyes flashed, and he cast a quick stealthy glance over everyone in the tent before letting his eyes rest on the stern, handsome and youthful features of Tsagan, the political instructor who acted as interrogator. Wang was now living through the dreaded scenes which had haunted his dreams for the last six months. He tried hard to appear calm and nonchalant, but, meeting the steely gaze of Tsagan's coal-black eyes that seemed to look right through him, and with the consciousness of the inevitable end that awaited him, he felt a cold shiver go down his spine and his flesh begin to creep.

"So you are 'chief-of-staff Wang Tieh-shan'?" Tsagan said somewhat carcastically.

"I am," he said, taken aback by this unexpected tone. "And if it offends you, your humble servant begs your forgiveness."

"Well, you must have foreseen this day, didn't you?" Tsagan said.

Wang Tieh-shan avoided the question, replying:

"Though your servant accepted the post of chief-of-staff to which he was appointed, it was only to make a humble living, he has never had any authority whatever. This he hopes you will understand and forgive."

"All right, Wang Tieh-shan, let me make it plain to you—we know all there is to know about you. It was you who brought nineteen reactionary secret agents to the grasslands after having completed your advanced training under the Americans in Peking. It was you who formed the accursed alliance with Pao Tsun-feng to expand his counter-revolutionary organisation. It was also you who organised the so-called 'Anti-Communist Guerrillas,' and it was also you who, in a desperate effort to get away from the net of justice closing around you, murdered one of your subordinates in cold blood and dressed the body up in your own clothes to fool us into believing you were dead. So—don't try to deny anything now!" The voice of the political instructor rose, clear and sonorous, as he spoke, and he frowned sternly at the prisoner. Wang Tieh-shan's heart sank, and all colour drained from his face, leaving it a sickly grey; he clenched his teeth and kept silence.

"These things can wait for the time being, however. Now, what we want you to tell us is where the bandits have gone. What direction have they taken?"

"I am sorry, officer. But since I have been resting for quite a long time—I have nothing to tell."

"Well, I'll ask you one more question—Do you or do you not know anyone by the name of Tsanrav?"

"I don't."

"He is a man who served under you; keeping your mouth shut won't help you!" exploded Tsagan. "Let's see what some of those comrades of yours have to say!" He resolved to bring another counter-revolutionary as witness, in order to expose Wang.

The fat Peking Lama was escorted into the tent. He wore an expression of injured innocence and resentment—how could they treat a "noble personage" like himself with so little respect?

Tsagan began to examine the Peking Lama with incisive questions. He had already learned many things concerning the man from Nasanwulzy: Before the liberation, the lama had gone with a prince on a trip to Peking where he had stayed for a long time, only to brag on his return about the respect and honour with which the prince and he had been treated by the officials there. As a consequence of all this bragging which was intended to heighten his own prestige and position, he had won the nickname "Peking Lama" of which he was very proud. During the puppet "Manchukuo" regime, he had joined hands with a notorious Japanese secret agent and helped him to round up numerous patriotic underground workers and to send agents to spy on the Army of the People's Republic of Mongolia. After that, he had also gone to Changchun, capital of the puppet "Manchukuo," to take part in the so-called "Conference for Promoting the Prosperity of Asia."

"The Japanese invaders and the Kuomintang may have greased your tongue and lips so that all your words are glib and oily; but you can't fool us. Now that your Kuomintang chief has been caught, the only chance for you, if you don't want to increase your own guilt, is to come clean. What direction have the bandits taken?"

"Oh, officer, ah!—yesterday, I buried my past, and today I am reborn a new man! The humble priest now standing before you will tell you everything he knows to make up for his past guilt. It is true that he concealed that savage by the name of Wang, but it is also true that this was because he did not see things very clearly and could not do otherwise. . . ." The questioning had thrown the Peking Lama into great confusion. He was ready to make a clean breast of all the information that he possessed but—not without the aid of all the quotations and proverbs he had learned in a lifetime. He narrowed his small, piggish eyes and stole a glance at all the officers in the tent to see the effect of his words.

"As long as I have these three inches of tireless tongue in my mouth," he had often boasted, "I shall have at my command all the wealth and luxury in the world!" It was, indeed, his obsequious lips and lying, flattering tongue which had earned him the job of secret agent for the

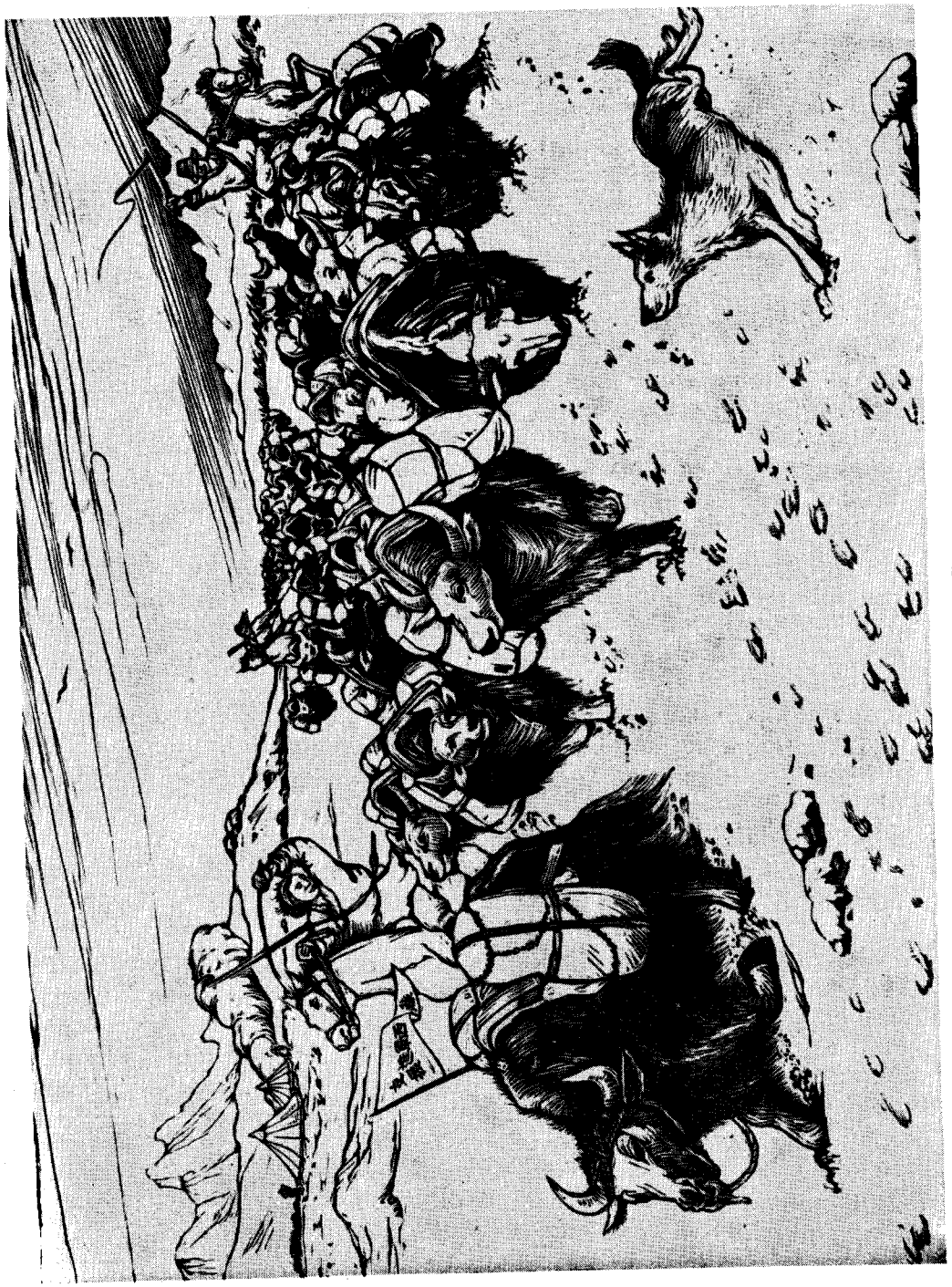
Japanese invaders and a position on the staff of the "Anti-Communist Guerrillas" after Wang Tieh-shan had come to Ujumchin. The lama had always been proud and arrogant even when he was licking Wang Tieh-shan's boots. But since he had been taken prisoner—something he had never thought would happen to him—he was beginning to see things in a different light: It had dawned upon him now that the men of the Liberation Army, who could be bought with neither women nor gold, were not so easy to deal with. And so he gave up all his former illusions except one—and that was that he could still rely on his tongue to lick off all the traces of his guilt.

"Forget the fancy talk and let's get down to reality," Tsagan said coldly.

"Of course, of course—forgive me, officer. I am not skilled with my tongue . . . forgive me. Now I'll tell. . . ."

The Peking Lama began to make his confession. In 1946 the bandits and reactionary herd-owners of Ujumchin had got together and organised a revolt to seize political power. As a result of this conspiracy, many chiefs of the Charhar League had been slaughtered on their way back from a conference they had attended at Bisin Sum. After the total annihilation of Chiang Kai-shek's Northeast Forces, the survivors of the Northeast Garrison Cavalry Brigade under Pao Tsun-feng's command had fled to Ujumchin where they joined forces with the local bandits and reactionary herd-owners. The whole band re-grouped under the command of Pao Tsun-feng, who proclaimed himself commander-in-chief and appointed Wang Tieh-shan chief-of-staff. . . . They took it for granted that the Inner Mongolian Cavalry Division would follow the Fourth Field Army to the other side of the Great Wall leaving the vast and desolate expanse of Ujumchin practically unprotected. In this situation they believed themselves quite capable of dealing with any small attacking force, and relied on difficulties in communication to hamper any large movement of troops. This was how this desperate bunch of scoundrels and cutthroats aspired to establish themselves permanently on the grasslands and to shout the insolent slogan: "The lasso is all we need to throttle the local *Palu*." Their fantastic dream, however, was short-lived, for soon afterwards, a section of the Cavalry Division had followed their trail and dealt them several terrible blows. But consequently they had grown more cunning and treacherous. Pao Tsun-feng had then picked another, more sober, slogan, "We must preserve our forces and keep our strength for the future!" and the band had gone into hiding whenever possible, resorting to the tactics of scattering into small parties in the face of danger and assembling again later at an appointed place.

The Peking Lama went on with his confession. Pao Tsun-feng had remained optimistic even when the Northeastern Provinces were completely liberated. But when, with the liberation of Peking, Tientsin and Kalgan, he had found himself cut off from his allies to the west, he had



Ai Yen: A Yak Caravan

become panicky. Then, having begged secretly for instructions by radio, he had received an order to beat a hasty retreat towards Tingyuanying in the Alashan Mountains, Ningsia Province. The order had been kept secret even among the bandits, for, apart from twenty or thirty die-hard guards, most of the men in the band, having already lost all hope, preferred not to leave their homes. Taking in the situation, Pao Tsun-feng had ordered the execution of four men and proclaimed a ruthless law: "All men lowering the morale of the troops will be shot immediately." Even the Peking Lama grew pale as he spoke of this savagery. Before finishing his confession, he added that the chief of the bandits, Pao Tsun-feng, being still uncertain as to the present situation in Ningsia, had not yet got up enough courage to take the risk of going there. He was probably hiding somewhere waiting for more information. But "where?" —the Peking Lama was unable to tell.

Listening to the talk in Mongolian which he only half-understood, Wang Tieh-shan, nevertheless, managed to grasp most of what was being said. The realisation that the Peking Lama had betrayed him came to him like a knock-out blow, for he had never thought it possible that the lama who had always been so servile and mealy-mouthed in ordinary times would suddenly turn against him and put all the blame on him at the most critical moment. How often had he congratulated himself on the wisdom that had led him to take the Peking Lama into his service! It seemed now that he, Wang Tieh-shan, had been the cat's-paw. This sudden disillusionment, combined with the pain from his wound, made him grind his teeth and fall into a faint.

Having heard the confession of the Peking Lama, political instructor Tsagan felt surge up in him a class-hatred more bitter than he had ever known before. He knew it was a fact that after the liberation of Peking and Tientsin Prince Teh had gone to Tingyuanying in the Alashan Mountains, and organised there a so-called "Autonomous Government of Inner Mongolia" on the instructions of the American imperialists. What angered Tsagan most was the tactics Pao Tsun-feng was using so slyly in his attempt to escape and get to Alashan without losing too many of his bandits. It was outrageous! Tsagan almost shouted:

"Pao Tsun-feng won't get away! Even if he were able to grow wings and eight legs, he still couldn't get away! Just as justice has overtaken you today, it will overtake Pao Tsun-feng tomorrow, and we'll send you all together to the people's court!" Keeping his eyes grimly on the prisoners who were being escorted out of the tent, he ordered a squad to take them to regimental headquarters. And then he said to Bayar: "Our Tiny Li was right. When he said that these three were freaks, he gave a true description not only of their appearances but also of their minds. They are freaks—and very dangerous ones!"

The difficulties confronting the company were very serious. Their leaders, being accustomed to making bold attacks and night raids felt

rather at a loss now that they had to deal with an enemy that kept on vanishing and leaving few traces. Bayar, the vice-commander of the company, who had been tasting the bitterness of disappointment, had stopped repeating his favourite phrase: "Jump on them mercilessly and swallow them up!" But disappointment also made him realise many things he had previously overlooked. The enemy was not only running away at a great speed but he was also driving before him four or five hundred Ujumchin horses so that he was able to replace every horse that collapsed in the race with a fresh one! This presented a great problem because the company, having only one horse to every man, ran the risk of having their mounts break down from sheer exhaustion if it came to giving a long, continuous pursuit. In fact, this was exactly what had happened to the Third Company which had now been replaced by the First Company. At present, the enemy was getting ready to flee to Ningsia, which meant that they must cover a greater distance than ever before. And in Ningsia, which was still waiting for its liberation, communications were much worse and inhabited places even more difficult to find! No! The enemy mustn't be allowed to go there! He must be stopped!

It was already late at night. Outside, the darkness was impenetrable. In the tent the flame of the candle flickered weakly while the young orderly Delger snored. Tsagan and Bayar paced slowly up and down, pausing occasionally to lean over the military map and exchange a few words. Some time later, Bayar, scrutinising the maze of hills on the paper and the signs that stood for grasslands, said: "I have a feeling that the bandits must be somewhere in this area; and, the way I see it, if they are going to make a dash for the Alashan Mountains, they'll certainly go through Chohor, Altan Ayag. . . ." He explained that he had reached this conclusion because there were many nomads scattered over this area whom the bandits could rob to get the horses, cattle, and sheep they needed for the journey. The bandits would not dare to go through north Ujumchin because it was too close to the Khingan League; and they most certainly would not consider taking a southern or southeastern route because there were other units of the People's Liberation Army there whom they feared even more. The north side was too desolate, and further north was the People's Republic of Mongolia where they would not dare to operate; hence the bandits' only hope was to escape to Ningsia through Chohor and the Altan Ayag Mountains, this route being still relatively safe for them.

"Bayar, old boy," Tsagan said. "That's how I figure it too. The bandits would never have left traces in the northeast if they intended to escape towards the east. For leaving traces to mislead pursuers has always been the bandits' favourite trick. . . ."

They both nodded, heaving a sigh of relief.

V

It was after midnight. A thin crescent moon shone overhead and the edges of the clouds glowed beautifully, like gold-trimmed Mongolian garments. The grass fondled by the autumn breeze rustled softly. Over the hazy infinity of hills, the stars twinkled lazily. The hour for the troops to set out had come. The thunderous clatter of hooves rose and shattered the stillness of the grassland, frightening the grasshoppers into silence. And then the horsemen galloped forward and spread out like an angry flood breaking through a dam. At the front rode the reconnaissance squad and the men of company headquarters and, though faces were not discernible through the haze of the night, the shapes of the horses stood out clearly: the long and thin grey Ujumchin horse, the tall, strong chestnut charger, the powerful, fierce-looking black mare with her loosely-hanging mane, the daring, all-white stallion, the plump iron-grey. . . . Like a school of fish swimming in the deep sea, they leaped and darted forward happily.

The riders, like their mute, four-legged comrades-in-arms, were in high spirits, for, accustomed to intense activity, they loved action and dreaded idleness. They loved the scorching sun, loved the cool morning air, loved to race, and most of all, they loved to charge on the battlefield at full speed brandishing their sabres over their heads. . . . Lately, however, pursuing an enemy who left no traces, in the depth of the mountains where they seldom came on the tracks of man, they had been rather depressed. When Bayar told them they were to give chase again, they beamed and became lively once more. Political instructor Tsagan spurred on his powerful all-white stallion which had been going at a slow pace, and it lifted its ears and began to trot, now whinnying, now shaking its head and struggling to break into a full gallop. Tsagan patted it fondly on the neck. He loved the daring of this horse which had been his constant companion for four years. In the summer of 1947, when he was still a squad leader, he had once come very near to disaster. Our forces had, with a succession of surprise attacks, cleaned out from the Liaoyang and Shenyang area the political power of the Chiang Kai-shek reactionary clique and the enemy's newspaper had begun to scream: "The swift cavalry units of Eastern Mongolia have become a veritable plague. . . ." Once Tsagan had been assigned, with a handful of others, to cover the retreat of the main force. Charging forward fiercely on his horse, he had soon been wounded and fallen from the saddle only to find that he was alone, cut off from even his few comrades, and abandoned by his horse which had galloped away carried on by the impetus of the charge. Painfully he had dragged himself on his hands and knees into the fields of tall sorghum, while shells rained down from the sky behind him, golden sparks darted in all directions, and low-flying enemy planes droned threateningly overhead. When the enemy had come charging with their bayonets towards the place where he lay concealed

from view, he had had only three cartridges left in his Mauser and had prepared to keep the last for himself. . . . It had been this white horse that had returned to find him and carried him off to safety with the speed of lightning. Ever since then he had been strongly attached to the horse, and throughout the long years of bloody fighting his affection for it had grown from day to day.

Political instructor Tsagan always carried himself with the pride of a young trooper and, as he rode side by side with Bayar, his face beamed with a youthful glow.

They talked as they proceeded on their way. Suddenly they were interrupted by a quickening clatter of hooves closely followed by a groan. This confusion of sounds was caused by the Daghor fighter Ngo Wen-hsiang. Keeping close to Kharkhu to listen to his jokes, he had been kicked on the knee by Tiny Li's horse and, his temper getting the better of him, he had struck out at the animal with his whip. Tiny Li's mount had reared up at the blow almost throwing its rider. And now the two men were quarrelling.

"Hey, what do you mean, hitting my horse like that?"

"Why shouldn't I hit him, damn him! He kicked me, didn't he?"

Bator intervened quickly, "Hey, you two, what's the sense in arguing over such a small matter!"

The men fell silent and Kharkhu went on telling his jokes by the dozen.

Recalling the short quarrel of a moment before, Tsagan smiled, "A fine thing! We haven't come into contact with the enemy yet and these two start fighting each other!"

"With Tiny Li's touchiness coming up against Ngo Wen-hsiang's stubbornness—the clash was inevitable!"

"Yes," the political instructor said. "The main trouble with comrade Ngo Wen-hsiang is his quick temper." He thought back to a few weeks before, when they had been in the uninhabited depths of the mountains. Ngo Wen-hsiang had been suffering from sore eyes then, but he had insisted on keeping on working. He had gone out to pick dried branches and grass for the fire, and he had taken the horses out regularly, all of his own accord. . . . Tsagan also reflected on the man's desire to join the Party. "Concerning Ngo Wen-hsiang's application to join the Party . . ." he said to Bayar, "it seems about time the Party Committee gave it some consideration." Despite the fact that they had been very busy working and moving lately, Tsagan felt that they shouldn't have let the matter stand for more than two weeks. It made him feel bad to think of it, for he attached great importance to any Party membership problem. They went on discussing the men of the company. Bator was a really good squad leader, he worked well, fought well and was ideologically sound. They both agreed that he was highly qualified to be promoted to the rank of platoon leader in the near future. Kharkhu had a great deal of experience in combat and he was also making good progress politically; he deserved special attention and help. As to Tiny Li, the lad was a good member of the People's Revolutionary Youth League of Inner Mongolia, but he was always getting into mischief.

They were nearing their destination at last. A long way towards the northeast, wolves were howling. Sound travels far over the grassland and the howls reached the men quite distinctly from a distance of over ten *li*—"Ahooo. . . ."—the sound was weird, ghostly. After riding for a while, they passed the crest of a great slope and reached the border of a stretch of flat land. "Well here we are," Nasanwulzy announced, riding close to the men. "This is the Chohor slope where the horse of the Prince of Ujumchin fell sick and died." The scouts in front of the unit dismounted quickly and, putting their ears to the tall grass, listened intently. Only the sound of the wind rustling and swishing through the grassland reached them now. Scattering into a long horizontal line, all the troopers moved forward, paused and listened.

"Don't move there! Listen carefully!"

"Sh! Listen!" some of the men said, hardly breathing.

"Hey . . .! Seems like the sound of hooves. . . ."

"Pooh, it's our own horses back there!"

Suddenly, in the blurred centre of the grassland two or three *li* away, a faint green spark flashed. A long moment of watching. Nothing more happened. Clenching his teeth, Bayar resolved to make a dash in that direction and find out what was going on. "About turn!" he called out in a low voice. "Get ready to charge!"

All the men's cold and weariness vanished. Silently, the company divided itself into two columns, starting out at a slow pace and then galloping ahead at full speed. Ten minutes later, the First and Second Platoons that were approaching along a line curving to the north, fired a number of red and green tracer bullets. When the troops came to within half a *li* of their objective, a blood-curdling battlecry rose from among the men; sparks flew from the clattering horseshoes; sabres flashed. . . . The first platoon to reach the spot found it shrouded in silence and the hopes of the men were dashed.

"Stop!" they shouted to one another. "We're miles off the mark!"

The autumn wind whirled softly over the bare plain and a few scattered bones of sheep and cattle cracked under the hooves of the horses. The company having assembled on the flat land, the men dismounted, unsaddled their horses and relaxed for a few minutes, smoking cigarettes. Bayar, the vice-commander of the company, drew a map out of the knapsack on his back, switched on his torch and, squatting down beside Tsagan, began to study it with him. Immediately on the north side of Chohor, bordering the Altan Ayag area stood the Borkhan Mountains which, according to their plan, formed the next objective of their search. Groping their way in the darkness throughout the latter half of the night, they closed in on the towering dark Borkhan Mountains at six a.m. From the distance, it seemed as if a great part of the sky had crumbled leaving a

wide gap which had later been filled with huge piles of coal. The densely wooded mountains, where the enemy might be hiding, called for special vigilance. With the reins held firmly in their hands and their guns on one arm, the men split into two columns and in a pincers movement pushed along the lowland towards the mountains, while the heavy-weapon section brought up the rear. When at last they came to the foot of the hills, they cursed in their disappointment. They hadn't even seen any suspicious tracks.

After a whole day and night without food or sleep, the men felt weak and sluggish. The command of the company ordered the men to prepare a meal right away. After the horses had grazed and the men had eaten their meal and pitched their tents, some of the soldiers went straight to sleep; others made their way to a small stream nearby to wash. The day grew warmer as the sun began to rise. One more of those rare beautiful days! The men soon recovered their high spirits after a short rest, and some of them climbed onto a high peak to gaze into the distance. The succession of lofty summits glowing with golden light seemed endless, and the wind whistled round the rocks on the heights.

The weather of the grasslands is not only unpredictable but seems determined to set itself against man. They had barely rested four hours when the sky suddenly filled with black clouds and big drops of autumn rain began to splatter the earth. A furious mountain wind blew fiercely against the tents, almost overturning them. The men ran about in great confusion to catch their horses and get them ready for another move. After everything was packed, the company resumed its journey towards the north. The downpour continued ceaselessly throughout the afternoon and even increased with the thunder which began to growl and rumble as soon as darkness fell over the hills. The mountain terrain became an angry sea of roaring and seething black waters. The wild storm persisted all through the night and it was only after daybreak that the rain grew less and receded into the distance where thunder still rumbled faintly like a far-off duel of heavy guns. Endless ridges rose one after the other in front of the horsemen, but the going was easier now that the ground underfoot, covered with grass and stones, was no longer as waterlogged as it had been during the night. Their hoofs broken, the pack-camels moaned painfully under their loads. The food and the tents loaded on the backs of the animals were all sopping wet and the canvas, all hollows and bulges, formed weird shapes. The men's soaked cotton-padded uniforms and wet weapons weighed heavily on their shoulders; their horses shook their drenched heads and sneezed. Both the men and their beasts were cold and worn out. How they longed to dry themselves under a warm sun!

As soon as the rain stopped, the clouds began to part. The men dismounted for a ten-minute rest during which they quickly arranged their saddles and wrung their clothes dry. . . .

A man of the vanguard squad who had been sent out to explore the

terrain ahead came dashing back on his horse which was breathing heavily. Swinging out of his saddle with expert ease, he clicked the heels of his soaked boots and saluted smartly.

"I beg to report to the company commander—there's a nomad encampment at the foot of the hill there in front."

"How far?"

"About five or six *li*."

There was some hope now that the men would be able to find shelter for the night. They mounted their horses and Bayar, summoning what remained of his strength, waved his hand and shouted: "At a trot—advance!" In the damp air his voice did not sound so clear or strong as usual.

The camp consisted of only about twenty yurts. The first thing the men did when they reached the place was to seek information concerning the bandits. The nomads there had nothing to tell: the enemy had not visited the neighbourhood lately. The soldiers were very disappointed. After a short discussion they decided that, since the local inhabitants did not know anything, someone would have to be sent out tracking. An order was immediately given to the reconnaissance squad: they were to go to the Altan Ayag Mountains after a day's rest to search for suspicious hoof-prints. . . .

VI

The men of the reconnaissance squad were delighted when they learned that their unit had been assigned the job of searching for the traces of the bandits. They rushed around happily like horses set out to graze. Tiny Li raced towards them driving the horses of the squad before him. His ruddy face covered with sweat was shining like a red apple. The men caught their horses, saddled them hastily and set out on their mission fifteen minutes later. Nasanwulzy took the lead as usual, holding himself upright in his saddle and riding Ujumchin style. Also as usual, he listened to the talk among the young eastern Mongolians and seemed greatly interested though he hardly spoke a word himself. Kharkhu rode proudly, with his weight shifted to one side of the saddle. With impressive motions and gestures he was telling Ngo Wen-hsiang and the others a story about something which had happened the year before when they had been fighting in the Liaoyang-Shenyang Campaign:

". . . The assignment was very sudden, and so we set out in a great hurry to block the enemy that had broken through our encirclement. But on the other hand, the night was pitch black. Our old pal Bagan was the last to rush out of the tent with his saddle. The platoon commander was calling 'Get your horses ready! Come on; get going!' Our old friend got into a real flurry, he strained every muscle and did everything he could to buckle his saddle-girth around the animal he had found—but it

was no good! He simply could not bring the ends of the girth together. He thought that the animal must have eaten so much that it was about to burst. When it came to fastening the bit, and he felt around the head of his horse, he exclaimed, 'Why! This horse has got horns!' My, he got the fright of his life until he realised that he had been trying to saddle a peasant's cow!"

"Ha-ha! . . ." The men guffawed, their voices joining with Bator's in a chorus of laughter. Tiny Li doubled up and even Nasanwulzy laughed till there were tears in his eyes. Kharkhu's little joke was only the beginning. Soon almost every one of the men was sharing his own fund of stories with his companions so that the whole squad roared with endless laughter.

Listening and laughing, the men rode on. Then Bator, addressing the old guide, said: "You must have some stories to tell us too, old uncle."

Nasanwulzy smiled faintly, and spoke in a very low tone after giving a short sigh: "Alas! With such a miserable existence as I have led and with my only son murdered by the bandits, I can't tell you anything funny, I'm afraid." The furrows on his crinkled face deepened and he shook his head sadly. No one made any attempt at story telling after that. The mood of the men turned serious all of a sudden. For a while at a loss for words they kept quiet, until Bator broke the uncomfortable silence: "Tell us how your son came to be murdered, old uncle."

The life of the old man had been as painful as it was long. Even in the short period following the liberation, he had suffered one of his most heart-rending experiences. His home was in the Chulu settlement, completely cut off from the outside world, where since his childhood he had been making a living as a herdsman. His old wife and he had only one son, Mandalt, a sturdy lad, very good at lassoing and tending horses and very adroit in whatever work he was required to do.

In the middle of a December night the previous year the peace of Nasanwulzy's home had been shattered by his dogs which suddenly began to bark and growl with unusual ferocity. Soon the sound of hooves was heard outside, followed by sounds of ugly voices cursing loudly and profusely. Then several men burst into the old guide's home. The fellow at the head, wearing a long silk robe and holding a cane inlaid with silver, said only one thing: "Tie him up!" At this command, the men had quickly tied up Mandalt. It was only later, when the leader of this gang had called a meeting of all the heads of the families in the settlement, that his identity had become known. He was Harchig, a henchman of Prince Teh. "In the land where commander-in-chief Pao Tsun-feng reigns supreme, I, Harchig, also have a part," he had announced at the meeting. "We are now engaged in a duel to the death with the *Palu* from Harchin. So everyone of you who can fight will have to come with us. Whoever disobeys us in any way won't get a second chance!—" And so saying,

he had patted the Mauser on his hip and pointing at Mandalt he added: "All who are young and healthy like this fellow here must join us!"

The old couple had watched their son grow up and he was the apple of their eye. How could they let him go like this! They begged, "Son of the noble one, set him free, set him free! He is our flesh and blood, the only child we ever had!" But Mandalt, their son, who was young, straightforward and short-tempered, had immediately yelled at his captor: "Damn your commander-in-chief Pao Tsun-feng! You've got eyes, haven't you? Are you so filled with mutton and kumiss that you can't even see that we're starving here? Why. . . ." Before he had been able to finish, Harchig had set about him with his rattan stick hitting out wildly. And so Mandalt had been taken away trussed up like some dangerous criminal.

Several long months had passed without any news of the boy. Then in the first days of April, he had escaped. The old woman was so delighted at the reappearance of her son that, muttering incessant prayers of thanks to Buddha, she had enfolded him in her arms and fainted. But on the next day, a dozen horsemen had emerged from the hills to the east, riding fast. "They have come for me!" Mandalt shouted, jumping on a saddleless horse. The boy who had been able to ride bareback on any untamed horse since he was very young would have been able to get away from his pursuers unharmed, if he had had a gun. But since he was unarmed his pursuers were able to shoot at him. Nasanwulzy's old wife wrung her hands in front of their yurt and entreated Buddha to protect her son, her heart fluttering at every shot. Shortly after the shooting started, however, Mandalt's horse fell under him and in the distance they saw the horsemen turn back driving the lad before them.

The old couple realised then that there was no hope left. They threw themselves on their knees before Harchig's horse and begged for mercy. Foaming at the mouth with his great eyes bulging, Harchig did not even look at them. Instead, with his pistol in his green silk belt and his face a grim mask, he called at once for another meeting of the people of the whole settlement. There he declared:

"Now I repeat this to you once more—In the land where Pao Tsun-feng reigns supreme, slaves like you don't count. You have no rights of any kind. Whoever forgets that, so much the worse for him! He will be dealt with as a *Palu*. Don't have any illusions just because commander-in-chief Pao has suffered a couple of defeats. Victories and defeats are the routine in a military career—Just wait and see! Soon the third world war will break out, and after that all Ujumchin, all Silingol—the whole of Inner Mongolia—will know no other ruler than commander-in-chief Pao Tsun-feng. Today you have been called to witness the end of Mandalt!" While he was saying this he cocked his gun. Mandalt sank to the ground at the first shot.

When later the People's Liberation Army had gone into this settlement looking for a guide, Nasanwulzy had turned the matter over in his

mind many times before he had finally decided to go with them. In the end he brought his horse, the only one he had left, a long and lanky grey Ujumchin horse and, putting on it his narrow saddle he said: "I can find my way to any spot in the whole Ujumchin area with my eyes closed —and I'm not boasting when I say so. I may not be very good at anything else—but if it's a guide you want, you'll have to go a long way to find a better one."

His old wife who had come to see him off dried her tears, and said, "Forgive me for crying, old man. I know I shouldn't cry, but. . . . Let me say something for luck instead. . . . When you catch that swine Harchig, kill him with your own hands!" Then she turned and faced the troopers, adding: "He's old and in poor health. Take good care of him!" Nasanwulzy who was already over fifty gritted his teeth, jumped quickly onto his horse and left with the Second Company. Later, he had become the guide of the First Company when this unit had been ordered to relieve the Second.

They combed the Altan Ayag Mountains systematically and thoroughly. It was in the afternoon of the third day that, on an unnamed slope, they suddenly found a fresh horse-trail cutting across the brownish-yellow grass. The men scrutinised it closely. "With the blessing of the almighty Buddha, our efforts have not been in vain this time!" Nasanwulzy exclaimed, aroused as if he had discovered hidden treasure. As if by magic, he seemed in a flash ten years younger as he jumped lightly to the ground. "Look, young ones! Don't you see what this means?" he said pointing to the clear hoof-prints. "Apart from yours, the only horses in the grassland which are shod are the bandits'! And look how fast they rode! Almost as if snakes were biting their backsides."

The men of the reconnaissance squad laughed with real joy, and they sent someone at great speed to report their discovery to the main force.

Tsagan and Bayar rode close to Nasanwulzy at the head of the unit. With great care they followed the trail of hoof-prints. Bent forward on his long and lanky grey Ujumchin horse, the old guide seldom removed his intent gaze from the ground before him. From the moment they had come upon the bandits' tracks he seemed to be a changed man. Now he beamed all the time, and he even talked to the others. "As long as there are tracks," he kept saying to Tsagan, fondling his grey moustache, his eyes crinkling in a smile, "as long as there are tracks, and I am with you, we shall catch up with the people that made them. We'll follow them to the end of the earth, and track them to their lair."

With a lifetime of nomadic experience behind him, the old herdsman was not only able, by cupping his hands over his eyes, to tell at a glance the shape and colour of any fast rider from a distance of two or three *li* or more. He could also identify the hoof-prints of his own animals from those of hundreds of horses and cattle mingled together. Now, riding at

a quick trot ahead of the men, he further proved his value by never, even for a moment, leading them away from the tracks.

Almost a hundred *li* further on to the west, the hoof-prints sometimes suddenly increased to twenty or thirty only to scatter again leaving but a few clues to follow. Bayar, however, was determined to persevere to the end this time. Though he knew that both the men and the animals were approaching exhaustion, he was also convinced that they would not have much further to travel before coming up with the enemy. They soon reached the foot of another mountain where even the few hoof-prints they had managed to follow so far vanished altogether. Bayar was the first to dismount. Carefully he studied the stony ground but failed to find any traces. The men of the reconnaissance squad made a very thorough search but this, too, proved unfruitful, and before long they were all perspiring with their efforts. Bator looked everywhere. Kharkhu was so exasperated that not once did he come out with his favourite saying: "Even if the enemy hides in his mother's womb, Kharkhu will drag him out!"

It was old Nasanwulzy who helped them out of this apparently hopeless situation. With great effort and much patience, having followed one overturned stone after another, he had finally found definite proof: the bandits had passed over the mountain. Tsagan was the first to dismount and ascend the slope, followed by the others. The feet of many of the men whose boots had been worn through were covered with blisters and cuts, and, with the sand sticking to their feet, they were in great pain. The weight of their weapons made matters worse. The strain of the march, the pain, hunger, fatigue and lack of sleep were all beginning to tell heavily on all of them. Many of them were now also suffering from eye trouble. But, all of them kept going stubbornly. Over one lofty ridge after another, they pushed on. Suddenly they sighted, in a ravine where there was a mountain stream, three skeleton-like horses, black from sweat and dust, gasping desperately for breath. Beyond any doubt these animals had been abandoned by the bandits very recently. At this discovery, the voices of the men rose in a violent outburst shaking the hills like a terrific explosion:

"The enemy is near!"
"Close your ranks!"
"Come on! Come on!"
"Prepare for combat!"

VII

The red sun appeared over the summits of the mountains. The men forming the spearhead of the company reported that there were men shouting and horses neighing at the foot of the hills. They had even seen wisps of smoke rising. . . . Under cover on the top of the moun-

tain, Bayar and Tsagan scanned the terrain before them with their field-glasses. Below, over a flat area of about four hundred yards, the bandits had pitched their tents. The enemy was over four hundred strong. In the centre of the scattered tents stood a larger one of khaki cloth more conspicuous than the rest. It was apparently the one occupied by the so-called "commander-in-chief Pao Tsun-feng." On a small ridge near the right side of the camp, five or six sentries paced back and forth watching over the horses. The bandits' mounts were grazing in great disorder around the tents, and the herd of over three hundred reserve horses was about half a *li* from the camp.

His sun-tanned, ruddy face taut and his round eyes flashing, Bayar, the vice-commander of the company, immediately formed from his past experience a plan of attack.

"Third Platoon!" he ordered. "Go round to the left at the foot of the mountain and then make straight for the herd of horses. Make sure to take full advantage of the element of surprise in your raid. That herd must be captured within twenty minutes, that's your task! Second Platoon! Go round to the right at the foot of the mountain and as soon as you hear shots take that hilltop to the west of the bandits' position! First Platoon! Stay here with the men of company headquarters. We'll charge them in the centre! Now, comrades, keep this in mind—no one is to fire a shot before the Third Platoon goes into action! The camel unit and the reconnaissance squad are to remain here too. And in case the bandits try to break away in the direction of that hill on the north-east after the attack has begun, the reconnaissance squad will hold them in check there. Not a single bandit is to get away!"

Following the instructions they had received, the Second and Third Platoons galloped away at full speed. The First Platoon and the men of company headquarters stood ready to hurl themselves at the enemy like the shells in a loaded gun. Tensely and with great impatience, they unsheathed their sabres, their horses pawing the ground restlessly with their forefeet. It seemed as if these few minutes would never pass!

Tsagan gazed at the dark weather-beaten faces of the men, caught the glitter of excitement and impatience in their eyes. He too was burning with excitement. Leaving his white horse to the care of an orderly, he leaned against a rock on the ridge and began to scrutinise the landscape once more. Hardly a sound came from the bandit camp now. It seemed as though they had collapsed from sheer exhaustion.

Deployed in a long line, the Third Platoon approached the herd of horses. So far the bandits had not discovered them. Perhaps it was because the stupid sentries they had posted to watch over the horses had been so intent on scanning the distant horizon that they had forgotten to look right in front of their noses; or perhaps the guards were so full of kumiss that they had become dizzy. After galloping around the foot of the mountain, the Third Platoon charged out of the tall grass. They were only a little over a thousand yards away from the herd, when the

panic-stricken enemy began to shoot at them. The leader of the Third Platoon whipped out his sabre and waved it in a circle above his head. The blade flashed in the air like a streak of lightning.

He shouted in a piercing voice, "Comrades! Charge! . . ."

With great agility and speed, all the horses galloped forward kicking up a thick cloud of sand and dust.

A tumultuous uproar rose from the enemy camp which had become a hive of furious activity. For a moment, the bewildered bandits raced about, frantically trying to put up some kind of resistance; then they took to their heels and dashed in every direction leaving behind them most of their supplies. The ground around the tents was strewn with pots and pans, still untasted broiled mutton, and slaughtered horses that had not yet been skinned. Camels with piles of ammunition crates and fur coats on their backs trotted awkwardly away with their loads. Hit by 60-mm. shells, some of the tents burst into flames.

The First Platoon also began the frontal attack.

The bandits raced pell-mell over the fields and low hills towards the west side of their camp in a desperate attempt to escape. But the Second Platoon, who had been lying in wait for them on the hill there, opened furious and ceaseless fire on them, mowing them down by the dozen. It was then that the bandits realised that they were surrounded. Caught between the shower of missiles blocking their way in front and the swishing, thrusting sabres closing in on them from behind, they reined in their mounts in great disorder, momentarily at a loss.

In the short pause that followed, one of them, a fellow on a large yellow horse, looked quickly at the mountains surrounding the plain and hesitated for a moment. An instant later, wheeling around, he went galloping towards the northwest. Then about thirty others, all of them on powerful horses, turned and, whipping their mounts mercilessly, rushed after him. The rest of the bandit force numbering about three hundred men also followed suit but the distance between them and those in the lead increased rapidly. In a moment, the First and Third Platoons crashed into the enemy force and, with their glittering sabres rising and falling, slashing right and left, they began to cut down the bandits. Watching the situation, the Second Platoon was filled with both joy and anxiety. The First and Third Platoons had succeeded in piercing into the bandit force and were now engaged in annihilating it. So far, so good! But—the bandit chief and the guards were about to get away!

At the most critical moment, a cloud of dust rose some distance ahead of the fleeing men. About a dozen troopers were galloping up the mountain at break-neck speed to cut the fugitives off.

"It's the reconnaissance squad! It's the reconnaissance squad going into action!" The men began to shout excitedly. A great weight was lifted from the mind of the leader of the Second Platoon. He immediately led his men in an impetuous charge. Like angry waters breaking

through a dam, they rushed forward one after another and closed in on the confused enemy from the west.

"Even if it comes to fighting to the last man, the enemy must not get away!" This was the order the men of the reconnaissance squad had received and it was also their own will. "Stop them there!" They shouted at the top of their voices racing up the slope. "Take that hill-top! Hurry!" The foremost rider was Bator on his fierce chestnut charger. The tall, long-legged animal seemed hardly to touch the ground as it galloped past scrub and rocks. Immediately behind it raced the big, black mare with her long mane flying. The third in the line was Ngo Wen-hsiang on his iron-grey horse. With the reins of his mount looped around one arm, this Daghor fighter held a captured Canadian light machine-gun firmly in his hands and kept firing long bursts as he rode.

They had almost reached the top of the hill when the iron-grey horse stumbled and fell. Ngo Wen-hsiang who had jumped swiftly to one side sped in search of a spot to set up his gun and resume firing. But, partly because of the ruggedness of the terrain and partly because the mounting of his gun was too low, he was unable to train his weapon on the bandits who were trying to get to the top of the hill ahead of them. Just then he felt someone jump and land sprawling on the ground beside him. The newcomer seized the legs of the machine-gun and shouted, "Hurry! Hurry! I'll hold up the gun for you!" It was Tiny Li. Ngo Wen-hsiang propped the barrel of his weapon on the lad's shoulder, took aim and pressed the trigger. With the machine-gun rattling furiously at them once more, the onrushing bandits froze in their tracks, some falling never to rise again.

At the bottom of the slope, Nasanwulzy appeared on his grey Ujumchin horse. With a newly captured lasso, he was expertly driving back into the herd some frightened horses which had galloped away. "Where's your horse, little one?" he asked as soon as he saw Ngo Wen-hsiang and Tiny Li who were lying flat on the earth near the top of the slope.

"His has been killed," Tiny Li told him. The lad seemed on the brink of tears. "Mine has run away!" They were not the only ones to have lost their mounts. Offering better targets to the enemy than the men, more than ten horses had been killed or wounded during the race for the hilltop. The men of the reconnaissance squad were confronted with a very serious problem: being mostly without horses now, how were they to stop the bandits who were preparing to force a break-through?

Nasanwulzy tucked the lower part of his long robe into his belt and rolled up his sleeves. "There's an old Mongolian saying: 'As long as there's breath in your body, there's hope of reaching Peking.' As long as you are safe and sound, what does the loss of a couple of horses matter? Don't worry now! I may not be much use at fighting, but I can use a lasso—Get some reins ready, my lads!" And so saying he flourished the long lasso, spurred his horse and rode off. In the distance they saw him making a bee-line for a chestnut horse. Dodging right and left, the animal tried to shake off its pursuer, but the old guide's grey mount, like a diving swallow, flew straight at it. In a second a loop flashed over the neck of the chestnut, tightened—and it was all over. A short while after, a big white horse was caught in the same manner.

Ngo Wen-hsiang jumped for joy at the sight of the horses.

"You have given me new legs, old uncle!" he cried. The two men jumped quickly onto their new horses and went galloping towards the hilltop.

Crack. . . . The shooting grew in intensity. The bandits were ready to charge again.

Oundus was shot in the left arm. The blood flowing from his wound made crimson stains on the back of his white horse. Temerbagan hurriedly stripped off one of his puttees and bandaged the wounded man's arm with it. No sooner had Bator reached the top than he left his horse in the care of Tiny Li. At Bator's orders, Kharkhu took his section to another hilltop further north to eliminate the possibility of the bandits escaping in that direction. There were only five men on the hilltop now, because a few of the men whose horses had been shot from under them had not yet managed to get there. And these five men included Tiny Li and the wounded Oundus, which meant that there were only three men who could really fight.

About twenty enemy horsemen came charging up the slope. The rider in the lead, a fellow on a tall snowy horse, lashed his horse with one hand and kept shooting with the other, all the time lying almost flat on his saddle. The expertness with which he rode and handled his gun showed that he was a veteran bandit. Two thousand yards . . . one thousand five hundred. . . . Some of the bandits lost their nerve and leaped to the ground, but he kept coming on grimly, with four or five men at his heels. In their frantic attempt to escape the net of justice, Pao Tsun-feng's guards, those loathsome desperadoes, rushed forward like cornered beasts making a wild dash for their lives.

Bator, who knew from many years of fighting experience that the most important thing at such a moment is to keep one's head, was very cool and steady. He took careful aim, watched his target grow in his sights, waited. . . . When at last he fired, the rider on the snowy horse toppled over grotesquely in the air and crashed headlong to the ground. His horse, frightened by the sound of the shot, ran wild, dragging the reins behind it. As the fighting raged, Temerbagan was wounded in the shoulder and so, except for the steady bursts from Ngo Wen-hsiang's Canadian machine-gun, the firing from the defenders of the hilltop was subsiding. A shrill cry rose from the lips of the bandits and they came charging on once again. . . . Shooting as fast as he could, Bator told Oundus to help Temerbagan to the rear; but the latter, pale as a ghost, his teeth tightly clenched and sweat running down his face, kept on firing.

"When I order you to go—go!" Bator shouted at him. "You heard me! What are you hanging around for!" There was nothing for the two wounded men to do but retreat towards the rear leaving Bator and Ngo Wen-hsiang alone on the position.

The voices of the onrushing riders rose in terrible shrieks as they drew nearer and nearer:

"Men of the Harchin *Palu*—surrender!"

"Out of the way, you scum!"

"Surrender!"

At this moment the reconnaissance squad's only machine-gun suddenly stopped firing. Bator urged Ngo Wen-hsiang: "Fire! Fire! Cut down those fellows who've mounted their horses!" But Ngo Wen-hsiang crumpled in a soft mass over the machine-gun and did not move. Bator crawled quickly to his side. Blood was gushing from a ghastly wound in the centre of Ngo Wen-hsiang's chest. The fighter's eyelids fluttered faintly. Feebly he lifted his hand and pointed to the approaching enemy. Then his hand dropped lifelessly and his eyes closed.

Wheeling around, Bator saw over half a dozen horsemen no further than a stone's throw away. He did not want to take cover now. With eyes ablaze and his blood racing through his veins he sprang to his feet, levelled his Thompson at the two foremost enemy riders and twisted the automatic release.

The first rider who was wearing a long grey robe went crashing to the ground together with his horse. But the second bandit kept thundering onward, with the short broad blade of his sabre raised high. The sight was a familiar one to Bator. How many of the men of the Kuomintang Garrison Cavalry Brigade they had annihilated in the battles for the liberation of the Northeastern Provinces! The enemy had carried exactly the same kind of sabres then! The horse was almost on him now. Bator saw clearly the coarse hair of the animal, the sticky sweat. . . . He dodged out of the way of the slashing blade, heard the sharp steel whistle past, cleaving nothing but the air and fired a quick burst. The horse rolled over, his upturned hooves pawing the air, while the rider sailed head over heels through space. The rest of the enemy immediately turned tail and made off as fast as their mounts could carry them.

Bator threw himself flat on the ground once more. He was now alone on the hilltop. To the north, Kharkhu and his section had the enemy well under control. But on this side, the bandits, guessing that Bator was the only one who stood in their way, began once more to shoot savagely. Then, above the ear-splitting, tumultuous shooting, there came to Bator the sharp blast of a familiar bugle sounding the charge. "Boom. . . ." 60-mm. shells were now bursting amidst the bandits a short distance before him. The terrible battlecry was rapidly coming closer. The First, Second, and Third Platoons, having exterminated the enemy on the other side, came charging towards what was left of the bandits on

the slope. Flushed with excitement, Bator held his weapon firmly and went on shooting as steadily as ever.

The hoarse voice of a bandit bellowing furiously came to him quite distinctly: "Confound it! The *Palu* scum are coming this way! I told you to charge, didn't I! Charge! Charge—!"

The bandits, who had been lying flat on their bellies to shoot, sprang to their feet one after the other.

Bator took aim at the nearest of the men who was swinging into the saddle and squeezed the trigger. The man's hands flew to his chest and remained there as his legs gave way under him. Bator pulled the trigger again—but, only a faint click came. His gun was empty! In a flash he seized the light machine-gun. . . . One of the bandits, a fellow in a felt hat and a black, wool overcoat advancing with tremendous strides on a black horse with white fetlocks, emptied his carbine at Bator. The shots whistled, clipped the grass, smashed into stones near him. Suddenly Bator felt as though he had been hit with a hammer and great dizziness overcame him. Blood spurted from his shoulder and streamed down to the barrel of the light machine-gun to mix with that of Ngo Wen-hsiang. The grassland began to spin crazily around him as his blood gushed out and gradually he lost consciousness. The few remaining bandits charged past his inert form unhindered and went dashing away. . . .

Tiny Li who was setting up hitching posts in a hollow in the hills fidgeted and stamped his feet in terrible anxiety. He had seen his squad leader's cap fly off at the sound of a shot. He had heard the light machine-gun fire a few bursts and then fall silent. He wanted to rush to the hilltop as fast as his legs would carry him, but he did not know what to do with the three horses that had been entrusted to him; he could not abandon them, and he could not go into battle riding one and dragging the other two behind him at the end of a rope. . . . Shortly after, he saw three swift bandit riders loom into view on top of the hill. The first one was immediately shot down from his tall cream-coloured horse. The second was also shot out of his saddle but one of his feet caught in the stirrup and he was dragged away by his white horse, which reared and kicked and then ran off. The third rider alone escaped unharmed on his black horse with white fetlocks, which went galloping past with the swiftness of an arrow. Bending very low to one side of his saddle, the man kept shooting rapidly with his carbine at Kharkhu and the others behind him. He was apparently unaware of Tiny Li's nearness.

Surrounded by the three restless horses which kept pulling at the ropes and rearing, Tiny Li raised his cavalry rifle. With the horses bumping into him and his target galloping speedily ahead, he was unable to take steady aim. His first shot went wide of the mark. The second time he missed again. The white fetlocks of the horse continued to fly with the same dazzling speed. Gritting his teeth, the lad pulled hard at

the rope holding the horses, took quick aim and fired another shot, this time at the fugitive's mount. The man's horse reared once, but gave no sign of stopping or slowing down. Tiny Li was furious. He leaped on the back of Bator's chestnut charger and dropped the reins of the two other animals. Then, slinging his rifle on his shoulder, he whipped out his small sabre, gave a loud cry and charged forward. Bator's chestnut charger was putting on speed as it ran, while the horse with white fetlocks was flagging. . . . Wrathfully, the lad swung his sabre, preparing for the kill. The fugitive, as soon as he discovered that there was someone hot on his heels, began to fire at his pursuer at the same time whipping his horse with increasing fury. The distance between pursuer and pursued had now shortened to under seven hundred yards . . . . Crack! . . . The man fired again. Tiny Li felt his sabre jerk violently and almost fly out of his hand: a notch had been made on the edge of the blade. A cold shudder ran down his spine, for he realised that his quarry was a veteran bandit, skilful and vicious. But urged on by his burning hatred, which blotted out his sense of danger, he closed in grimly on the man single-handed, regardless of his own life.

"Surrender your weapons and we won't kill you!" Tiny Li heard Kharkhu's gruff voice boom close behind him and, encouraged by the familiar sound, he charged on with redoubled ferocity.

The wild race continued for four or five thousand yards further before the horse with white fetlocks staggered for a moment and finally crashed to the ground. The figure in the black, wool overcoat, quickly leapt free and landed firmly on his feet. Without betraying the slightest sign of nervousness at the sight of Kharkhu and the lad hurling themselves at him with the fury and speed of whirlwinds, the veteran bandit unhurriedly set his feet apart and with deadly steadiness aimed his carbine at Tiny Li. Quicker than the eye could follow, however, Kharkhu whipped his horse, turned and was on the man. With all the strength that was in him, he brought the silvery blade down on the dark felt hat. The man gave a savage groan and both his arms flew into the air as the steel slashed into his left shoulder. He sank slowly to the earth, but in another second his good hand reached into his overcoat pocket for a pistol. In a flying leap from the right side of his big, black mare, Kharkhu sprang on his foe. "Don't move!" He thundered, planting his hobnailed boot hard on the man's chest. Kharkhu and Tiny Li quickly picked up the bandit's carbine and American automatic pistol before kicking the man to his feet. The fellow was now bleeding, his blood soaking the black, wool overcoat. Tiny Li bandaged the prisoner's wound with one of his puttees and then drove the man up the hill where Bator had fallen.

"You are one of the bandit guards, aren't you?" Kharkhu asked, very pleased with himself.

The fellow pulled the brim of his black, felt hat low over his nose to conceal his blotchy, dark, fleshy face. "Ai-no! Not a guard—your servant is just an ordinary soldier."

"If you're not a guard, then at least you must be a staff-officer! From your looks, your horse and your guns you're no ordinary bandit! Nobody in his senses would believe that!" said Tiny Li.

The fellow stopped suddenly and a crafty smile spread over his face: "Your eyes are sharp, dear brothers, they have not deceived you. I am a guard of commander-in-chief Pao, and, if you'll allow me, dear brothers, I'd like to say a few words, may I?"

"What rotten trick are you up to now?" Kharkhu asked, curbing his rising anger.

The fellow fished out a gold watch from a pocket of the wool sweater he was wearing under his overcoat, and took a step forward: "We are Mongolians, both of us. And we're both from Khorchin. . . . If you do not care about the ties of blood that bind us together, then at least for the sake of our common birth-place, brother, I beg you to release me. Set me free! I'll never forget that you have been my friend in this moment of distress. And the day will certainly come when I'll be able to repay you in full for your noble generosity! There isn't a soul besides the three of us here. No one on earth will ever know—Now, this watch . . . a very humble and unworthy gift. . . ."

"Who wants that stinking watch of yours!" Tiny Li cut him short vehemently.

"Ai-ai. . . . Is it not enough?" The fellow advanced another step. "You may also have two gold rings."

"Give it to me!" Kharkhu snatched the watch from the other's fingers and flung it savagely into his face. "Here," he shouted, "you take it to hell with you!"

All the units of the company had assembled on the slope by now. On one side, the swarms of prisoners and captured horses stood, worn-out, crest-fallen.

Bator, who had fainted from loss of blood, gradually recovered his senses.

Like the rest of his comrades, he kept gazing intently into the distance at Kharkhu and Tiny Li who were approaching on their horses driving a man before them. Bator was filled with great joy, but at the same time with great anxiety: a good thing Kharkhu and the lad were both safe and sound, but what if their captive should turn out not to be Pao Tsun-feng? The painstaking search they had made among the multitude of prisoners and dead bandits had proved in vain. If Pao Tsun-feng were still at large, it would spoil their great triumph, even though they had wiped out the enemy and caught most of the bandit chiefs. And so the last hope of the men was now fastened on the approaching group. Clamorous shouts rose from among the ranks as the distance shortened:

"Perhaps it is Pao Tsun-feng after all!"

"It *is* Pao Tsun-feng!"

There was no mistake about it. The prisoners soon confirmed that

the man in the black, wool overcoat was none other than "commander-in-chief Pao."

"We've caught him! We've caught him!"

"Good! Good!" the younger fighters yelled rapturously.

Not for a second did Bator remove his gaze from Pao Tsun-feng who was slowly coming towards them. Along with his strong hatred for the man, he felt himself gripped by a strange feeling. Pao Tsun-feng's thick, short figure and the way he had of rubbing his black, shiny boots together as he walked, looked very familiar.

When the trio came within six hundred yards, Kharkhu rode forward at a full gallop, dismounted smartly and clicked his heels.

"I beg to report to my superiors! We've captured a guard who broke through."

With a broad smile on his face, Tsagan took Kharkhu's hand and shook it heartily, "Let me congratulate you on having captured the ringleader of the bandits, Pao Tsun-feng!"

Kharkhu was staggered for a moment, and then his mouth creased into an irrepressible smile. Tiny Li did not pay the slightest attention to what was going on. As soon as he got off his horse, he made straight for Bator. So great was his joy that he seemed on the brink of tears.

"Aiya!" he exclaimed with great warmth and affection. "You are all right, squad leader, you are all right! I'm so glad!" He wanted to hug Bator, but somehow the grave expression he saw on the other's face held him back. Never before had he seen the squad leader look so grim.

Bator strode forward. "Look at me—Seren!" he roared.

A shudder passed over Pao Tsun-feng when he saw Bator. "Who are you?" he asked, shrinking back. "I am not Seren."

And now there was a great silence as every man in the company watched the two.

With his round, high-cheekboned face taut, his teeth clenched hard, and his eyes fixed firmly on Pao Tsun-feng, Bator lifted his left hand and shouted in a thunderous voice:

"Seren! Listen to me! Seven years ago, when the Japanese invaders were building fortifications at Aerhshan, you gashed my right shoulder with your Japanese sword and shouted at me, 'Your life isn't worth that of a dog!' And today, you shot me in the left shoulder with your American carbine. But we've caught you at last. Now it is my turn to speak and I say that we have crushed a poisonous viper for the people of Inner Mongolia! Speak, you criminal, speak if you dare!"

Pao Tsun-feng, his fleshy face sullen, gazed darkly at him.

Since the last campaign, seven long days and nights had passed.

It was almost noon. Mountain eagles were circling proudly high overhead.

At the foot of the Golden Khingan Mountains, the triumphant song of the cavalry rose and shook the air.

The Realism of Wu Ching-tzu

WU TSU-HSIANG

I

The long and glorious tradition of classical realist literature in China was carried forward in the middle of the eighteenth century by two outstanding novelists—Tsao Hsueh-chin, author of *Dream of the Red Chamber,* and Wu Ching-tzu, author of *The Lives of the Scholars.* Their immortal works added new glory to China's fine literature.

Although Wu Ching-tzu was born some twenty years earlier than Tsao Hsueh-chin, *The Lives of the Scholars* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* were written during the same period. Both writers lived about a hundred years before the Opium War of 1840, when China fell into the clutches of the imperialists.

At that time capitalism in Europe was considerably developed, while China still remained a backward, feudal country. Owing to unlimited exploitation by the nobility and the landlord class and the extreme backwardness of agriculture, the peasants were becoming more and more poverty-stricken. And the Manchu ruling class, in order to suppress the revolts of the people, had to wage a series of campaigns within the empire; hence state expenditure became heavier and heavier, and the extra burden naturally fell upon the people.

The rapid impoverishment of the people and the unbridled extravagance of the ruling class began to shake the foundations of feudal society. Thus, while exploiting the peasants more ruthlessly than ever before, the rulers began to quarrel among themselves; they became more corrupt and decadent, as the feudal system sank rapidly into decline.

Both Tsao Hsueh-chin and Wu Ching-tzu were born into ruling class families which had come down in the world. With deep insight into the rottenness and hopelessness of his own class, each made use of what he himself had seen and experienced to paint a great canvas. Tsao took marriage as his central theme, to reflect the vices of the aristocratic ruling class which was nearly played out. Wu wrote of official position and

wealth, to expose the decadence of the literati and the rottenness of the political structure. Although the two men took different positions in relation to the existing state of affairs and described different social strata and facets of society, the nature of the problems they raised was the same; for they both sharply exposed the iniquitous feudal system and feudal rule of their time.

Dream of the Red Chamber and *The Lives of the Scholars* have been widely read for nearly two hundred years. Directly and indirectly, these books have educated the Chinese people and made no small contribution to the development of democratic ideas.

In his *An Outline History of the Chinese Novel*, Lu Hsun states that *The Lives of the Scholars* is the first Chinese novel which is a social satire, and that in this respect it has seldom been surpassed. This book exercised a profound influence on Lu Hsun, who refers to it in many of his essays and is never tired of praising it.

II

If we want to understand *The Lives of the Scholars*, there are certain important facts about Wu Ching-tzu's life and thought which we must take into consideration.

Wu Ching-tzu was born in 1701 into a distinguished family in Chuanchiao County, Anhwei Province, on the north bank of the Yangtse River. Many of his clan had held high government posts during the time of his grandfather and great-grandfather; thus for the fifty years at the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Ching (Manchu) Dynasty his family had prospered. Wu's grandfather died early, however, after a less successful official career than his brothers and cousins. And Wu's father had only been a county instructor for a few years when he offended his superiors and lost his job, dying a year later. Wu Ching-tzu lost his mother when he was thirteen and his father when he was twenty-three. His father's experience disillusioned him with officialdom; and, coming from a distinguished family, he became a spendthrift who despised wealth. In a few years he ran through the property left by his ancestors. His servants and dependants deserted him, his wealthy relatives looked down on him, and snobbish neighbours cold-shouldered him. Finding it impossible to stay in his native place, he moved at the age of thirty-three to Nanking. Very soon he was quite destitute, and until his death in Yangchow in 1754 had to depend on writing and the help of friends to keep alive. Often he had to sell old books to buy food, and sometimes he went hungry for several days on end.

During the gradual decline of his family and his own rapid impoverishment, he saw and suffered a great deal and gained a wealth of experience which strengthened his sense of justice and made him a sensitive, cool-headed observer of reality. This helped him to see the

nature of the class to which he belonged, and made him sympathize with the common people. He saw through the decadence and shamelessness of scholars under the Manchu despotism, and realized the wickedness of the government and the rottenness of society. He was, therefore, increasingly drawn to the humble, unsuccessful people with whom he came into contact. In short, Wu Ching-tzu's own personal experience was the source of his sober realism.

Though Wu's father had served as an official, he was a classicist who always retained his faith in the Confucian virtues. And Wu Ching-tzu was deeply influenced by his father. Realizing the decadence of the ruling class and seeing no hope for the immediate future, he believed that the Confucian virtues were of positive value to his age. He despised wealth and position and believed in sticking to principles. Of course, in that society and under the influence of the intellectuals of the time, it was impossible for any man to be completely indifferent to wealth and position. After passing the prefectural examination at twenty, Wu Ching-tzu sat for other examinations. When he was thirty-six, he went to the provincial capital to sit for a special examination for which the governor of Anhwei had recommended him. Later, when he was recommended to go to the capital for the palace examination, he did not go; but his poems express regret at having missed this opportunity. It was only after he had seen the mortification of friends who had failed in the palace examination that he finally made up his mind not to take any more examinations himself.

Thus it is clear that Wu Ching-tzu had gone through a painful mental struggle, and vacillated between wealth and poverty, success and obscurity. It was not until a few years before he started on his novel *The Lives of the Scholars* that he finally became firm in his stand. This was no easy struggle. But without this bitter experience of the examinations during so many years of his life, Wu could never have felt such disgust for wealth and rank and the *paku* essays and the examination system by which these were attained. Nor could he have seen so clearly through ordinary men and affairs to unmask the essential evil of the society and politics of his time. It was thanks to his personal experience that Wu Ching-tzu, as Lu Hsun has said, with a strong sense of justice and by means of deep humour and subtle sarcasm, pointed out the faults of his age.

The unknown author who used the pen-name Hsien Tsai Lao Jen wrote in his preface to *The Lives of the Scholars*: "The main theme of this book is the attainment of wealth and position through the official examinations. Some scholars become abject flatterers through their craving for wealth and position. Some take advantage of their wealth and position to lord it over others. Some, who pretend to despise wealth and position and pose as superior, are held up to ridicule. There are others, however, who turn their backs on worldly success; and these are the finest characters, who form the backbone of the story."

These apt generalizations give us the main theme of this novel in a nutshell. The choice of this theme was the outcome of deep thinking

and genuine feeling on the author's part; and all the characters and incidents in the novel are based on keen observation and personal experience. It is no accident, therefore, that *The Lives of the Scholars* is so penetrating and moving.

III

Wu Ching-tzu lived during the reigns of three emperors—Kang Hsi, Yung Cheng and Chien Lung. He was born in the forty-first year of Kang Hsi, when the Manchus had suppressed the revolts in various parts of China. There was still considerable nationalist feeling, however, in China. Moreover, because of the yearly conquests and the increasing exploitation by the landlord class, this nationalist feeling spread far and wide. In order to consolidate their rule, the Manchus intensified the control of thought within China by buying the allegiance of some intellectuals and suppressing the writings of others. While encouraging the study of the Confucian classics and setting scholars to edit and compile ancient works, the emperor banned "fiction and licentious works," and had many scholars tried or executed for expressing anti-Manchu sentiments. There was a reign of terror under Yung Cheng, when almost every year scholars were tried.

Wu Ching-tzu, naturally, was well aware of this repression and censorship. Although *The Lives of the Scholars* is based on real people and incidents of the Ching Dynasty known to Wu Ching-tzu, he altered many details and set the story in the Ming Dynasty. He did so with good reason, since in this way he could avoid offending the Manchus and could write more effective satire. Wu had as his models earlier novels like *Water Margin* and *Chin Ping Mei,* and he made skilful use of the method of veiled attack which we find in these books.

In the first chapter of *The Lives of the Scholars,* where Wu Ching-tzu wants to make clear the meaning of the whole book, he chooses a historical figure, Wang Mien, selects from Wang Mien's life all that is relevant to his own poetic conception of an ideal man, and portrays him as a model for later scholars. Wu Ching-tzu makes it clear that this chapter points the moral of the novel.

Wang Mien's type of scholar had always been admired in ancient China during the golden age of which Wu dreamed, when the literati came between the ruling class and the people. Administering the country for the ruling class, scholars had a special position. According to tradition, it was their duty to do good deeds for the emperor, to watch over the people's interests and, to a certain extent, to listen to the voice of the people. In this way the feudal system could be securely maintained. Thus whenever the feudal rulers flouted the wishes of the people by "improper rule," some scholar of integrity would make the gesture of going to live as a hermit. Hence Wang Mien, as depicted by Wu Ching-

tzu, epitomizes the traditional integrity of the scholars of ancient China and by refusing to accept an official post expresses his protest against oppressive feudal rule.

By using Wang Mien to point the moral of the book, Wu Ching-tzu presents his main theme clearly, and provides a criterion by which all the other characters may be judged. Hatred for officialdom and mockery of officials run through the whole book. Wu Ching-tzu makes Wang Mien's mother say, "All the officials I have seen have come to a bad end." And Prefect Chu, lonely in his old age after the death of his son, says, "I am afraid Heaven is punishing me for becoming an official."

Disgusted with officials and disdaining the eagerness of scholars to pass the imperial examinations, Wu praises the Confucian virtue of filial piety. He substitutes filial piety for loyalty towards the ruler, denying, in fact, that loyalty to the ruling class is a virtue.

Again, the author consistently expresses sympathy for old families or elderly people, and shows contempt for the newly rich, at whom he invariably pokes fun. This cannot be considered a conservative tendency on his part, for during Wu's lifetime the old families were those which had prospered during the Ming Dynasty, while the elderly people had started their life under a Chinese dynasty. In Wu Ching-tzu's eyes, these old people still retained a certain degree of honesty and goodness. The newly rich and powerful, on the other hand, had made their fortunes under the Manchus. Forgetting their origin, they had grown servile and vulgar. Society as a whole was rapidly deteriorating too. Wu was very distressed and indignant at this trend of the times, and his feelings on the subject corresponded with the facts—for society is most corrupt under the evil rule of foreign aggressors.

IV

But, while exposing the political and social evils under Manchu rule, the main attack in this novel is directed against the literati. The central theme of *The Lives of the Scholars* is the scholars' attitude towards the examination system which led to position and wealth. In feudal society, scholars were the nerves and sinews of society and could often influence the people's attitude towards the rulers. Hence the Manchu rulers paid special attention from the first to the control of the scholars. Taking over the infamous examination system of the Ming Dynasty which tested scholars by means of the stereotyped *paku* essay, they used this as the chief means to win over scholars, to restrict learning, to control thinking, and to corrupt the scholars.

The examination system was instituted by China's feudal rulers in order to select scholars for official posts. During the long history of feudalism in China, the ruling class of each dynasty had its own system of selecting scholars and appointing officials. The Ming rulers, in order

to bolster up their feudal system, began to use the *paku* essay in examinations to fool scholars. The *paku* essay had a prescribed number of words, and isolated quotations from the Confucian classics were chosen as subjects; thus each essay was very slight, consisting for the most part of stereotyped and meaningless phrases. Because this type of essay always had eight paragraphs, it was called *paku* (eight-paragraph essay). This obscurantist examination system was designed to make scholars abandon the principles of true scholarship, lose their integrity and throw aside the ideals of the Confucian classics, studying only to gain wealth and position. The effect of this system was to make scholars ignorant, hypocritical, mercenary and decadent.

During the reigns of Kang Hsi, Yung Cheng and Chien Lung, which covered the lifetime of Wu Ching-tzu, the *paku* system was supreme. During this period the policy of the Manchu rulers achieved remarkable results. It was a dark age for scholarship, after the movement to restore all the best in ancient Chinese civilization, which was led by Ku Yen-wu at the end of the Ming Dynasty, had died out.

In the first few chapters of *The Lives of the Scholars,* Wu Ching-tzu makes a powerful attack on the examination system itself. Chou Chin and Fan Chin lead miserable lives before passing the examinations, but once they pass they are as good as transported to heaven. Chou Chin suffers hardships and humiliations, but after he succeeds in the examinations Mei Chiu who formerly laughed at him brazenly claims to be his pupil. Chou Chin's calligraphy is carefully taken down from the wall to be kept as if it were a great treasure, while the villagers who despised him and dismissed him from his post as teacher now build a shrine for him, and treat him as if he were a god.

Fan Chin, again, when we first meet him is on the verge of starvation. When his family has gone without food for two days, he has to take a laying hen to the market to sell. But then, in the twinkling of an eye, he gets land, houses, servants, fine porcelain and cups and chopsticks inlaid with silver. By passing the examinations scholars who have been trampled under foot suddenly become officials who can lord it over everybody else. Inevitably, they make desperate attempts to pass.

There was no fixed standard of scholarship, however. Chou Chin, who sits for each prefectural examination, does not pass until he is an old man. Then he has a sudden run of luck and soars to great heights. Fan Chin, too, does not pass until his hair is grey, when he is examined by Chou Chin who has succeeded only in his old age. Because Chou Chin sympathizes with Fan Chin and wants him to pass, he reads his paper three times. At first he thinks the essay very poor. "'Whatever is the fellow driving at in this essay?' he wondered. 'I see now why he never passed.'" But after reading it three times, he decides that it is "the most wonderful essay in the world—every word a pearl." And so, before even looking at the other papers, he marks Fan Chin's paper first and a paper by another student, Wei Hao-ku, twentieth.

This was the kind of farce the *paku* examination system was, and the absurd way in which rank and riches were won. Yet it was precisely this absurd farce that sent scholars off their heads with longing, making them lose all sense of right and wrong and abandon all their ideals and convictions.

Since most of the officials of that time were the stupid and shameless "scholars" produced by this examination system, it is no wonder that the government was corrupt. Thus we see Magistrate Tang of Kaoyao County acting quite irresponsibly. When the Moslems ask permission to sell beef, Magistrate Tang takes the advice of another fool, Chang Ching-chai, and has an old man killed. He causes a great uproar, yet in the end is allowed to punish the Moslems in order to preserve his face. Thus, here and there, the writer makes casual yet penetrating references to the political situation and officialdom of his time. There are few good officials—mostly corrupt tricksters—and this is typical of the feudal Manchu rule.

In addition to describing scholars who are eager to become officials, Wu Ching-tzu depicts in the same vein many pseudo-scholars who are cheats and charlatans. Such men, having failed in the examinations, cannot win wealth or position. They therefore try to take a short cut to respectability by learning doggerel verses and posing as spotless and superior. They run after the rich and powerful, lying to and entertaining their patrons in order to swindle money out of them or to be given jobs. We see knaves like these scurrying about in Hangchow, Yangchow and Nanking. They are vagabonds thrown up by the social system of the time.

This examination system revealed to Wu Ching-tzu the tricks of the ruling class of his time, the true nature of many of the intellectuals who were being used by the ruling class, and the corrupting and evil influence of this system on the political life and morals of the people. Not only disillusioned but thoroughly indignant at this system, he dared to make a bold exposure of the civil service examinations and the scholars ensnared by them. As a result, he naturally inclined towards two types of men.

One type were those high-minded persons who despised worldly success but believed in the good old ways and prized moral character and learning. Wu Ching-tzu himself was like this; hence such men figure as the positive characters in his book. The other type were the humble folk and the failures. Because they were oppressed and lived a hard life, and were not influenced by the civil service examinations, they retained the true qualities of decent people. The author has drawn such characters with great care, contrasting their fine qualities and integrity with the ugliness of office-seekers, in order to show that there were no true scholars among the literati. Wu Ching-tzu's sympathy for these downtrodden people was obviously a reaction against the greed and degradation of the scholars who pursued fame and position, and arose

from his disgust with the despicable examination system designed by the ruling class to restrict intellectual activity. Wu felt that all who held aloof from this system were more lovable than the scholars, for they retained more of their original integrity. Chou Chin's brother-in-law Chin Yiu-yu and his friends are examples. These small merchants were honest and tried sincerely to help people; while honesty and kindness were lacking among the ambitious literati.

V

"Truth is the life of satire," wrote Lu Hsun. "Satire must be based on the portrayal of reality." Satire therefore implies realism, and it is realism that gives life to Wu Ching-tzu's satiric art. The characters and incidents in *The Lives of the Scholars* are strictly true to life and could be found anywhere in China during the Ching Dynasty. But in people and events which others might find quite insignificant and commonplace and take for granted, the author with his sober realism and sharp sensitivity recognized all that was ridiculous and despicable. And, feeling the need to express what he saw, he depicted these characters and incidents with sympathy and art, hoping, as stated in the preface, that readers of every type would find themselves mirrored in his novel.

Thus the satire of this novel is rooted in sober realism.

The Lives of the Scholars presents several positive characters, emphasizing their contempt for position and wealth which makes them so different from the average scholar. These characters preserve their intellectual and moral integrity. But they are all living human beings, each with an individual personality, not merely abstract qualities. And as human beings living in a real society, they cannot be perfect. Yu Yu-teh, for instance, who is presented as a true scholar, is not without his faults. He lets his nephew have the use of his house in the country, and when his nephew sells the house and comes to Nanking to ask for more money to rent another house, Yu gives him all he wants. In his generosity he is actually encouraging his nephew's bad habits.

Again, a scholar of the Imperial College is sent to Yu to be punished for gambling. Yet Yu lodges this man in his library, shares his meals with him, treats him well and makes excuses for him to his superiors. There is a student, too, who cheats during an examination, then inadvertently hands in the smuggled notes from which he has copied with his essay; but Yu stealthily returns the notes to him. When the results are announced and this student finds he has won a second class, he comes to thank the examiner. Yu, however, denies any knowledge of his cheating. Such extraordinary behaviour proves, of course, that Yu disapproves of the examination system. But in that case why did he accept the post of examiner in the Imperial College? This shows that Yu is an

eccentric who, while rebelling against the practices of the time, is something of a pedant and a fool.

We cannot say, then, that Wu Ching-tzu makes no satirical attack on his positive characters. But in spite of these characters' failings readers today do not dislike them, because men like Yu Yu-teh are honest human beings. By pointing out the faults of these characters he loves, the author shows his critical realism.

Wu Ching-tzu deals most ruthlessly with rich, high-ranking officials like Academician Kao, Secretary Chin of the Imperial Patent Office, and Censor Shih. But the characterization in such cases is brilliant and completely convincing. Not all officials are condemned, however, in this book. Prefect Hsiang's kindness to Pao Wen-ching, for example, and Censor Li's help to Kuang Chao-jen are realistically and movingly described.

The author's thrusts at his characters cannot be considered as personal attacks. On the contrary, Wu Ching-tzu has a deep sympathy for all of his characters and makes his readers feel that these scholars, ridiculous, despicable and disgusting as they may be, are at the same time much to be pitied. While unable to resist laughing at them, we cannot help feeling sorry for them too; for it is clear from the novel that the scholars are not by nature bad, but that their outlook and personality have been conditioned by an evil political and social system. Wu Ching-tzu believes that all men are by nature good. He portrays Kuang Chao-jen, Wang Yu-huei and others as victims of the political and social system, who, having lost their original goodness, become decadent and ignorant. That is to say, in his portrayal of his characters' thoughts and personality the writer exposes the true nature of the society of his time. His satire against certain scholars is thus a powerful attack upon the Manchu rulers and the social system of the Ching Dynasty.

While Wu Ching-tzu shows up the decadent stupidity of the scholars, the vulgar depravity of society, and the vile corruption of the government, he nevertheless conveys his firm conviction that the glorious heritage left by our ancestors is indestructible. He believed that Chinese society and morality would one day be reformed, when a clean sweep would be made of all the old abuses and shame. So, though living in a period of daily increasing darkness, he never lost heart.

Longing for the light, Wu Ching-tzu looked for a force to carry on the past tradition and point the way to a brighter future. Such a force would find expression in human dignity, in the upholding of ideals of justice and truth, in the love of life and creation. Wu obviously realized that no such force could be found among the scholars of his time, whether they were rich or poor. He had no illusions that the literati would build a brighter future. In the beginning of the last chapter of *The Lives of the Scholars* the author sadly draws this conclusion. He then goes on to describe four eccentric characters—men of integrity and moral conviction. One is Chi Hsia-nien, the calligraphist who "had

possessed no home or property since his childhood, and who stayed in monasteries." Another is Wang Tai, the chess player who sells spills and comes from a family of market gardeners. Yet another is Kai Kuan, an old man who has lost his property and opened a tea shop, but who paints well and loves books. And lastly, there is Ching Yuan the tailor, who "after working every day at his trade, spent his spare time playing the lyre, practising calligraphy or writing poems." Thus, among the lower walks of life and the common people, Wu Ching-tzu discovers a force holding out hope for the future.

From his observations of ordinary people and incidents, Wu Ching-tzu is able to grasp the essence of things and go to the very heart of a matter. By simple, seemingly casual descriptions, he gives full, profound pictures of inevitable development.

Why, we may ask, does Fan Chin go out of his mind after passing the provincial examination? It is because he has been taking examinations all his life, longing to pass yet never thinking that he actually will. After his feelings have been pent up so long, the sudden joy of passing is more than he can bear. The description of his fit of madness makes readers laugh, but excites their sympathy too. And this episode is portrayed so convincingly and with such insight that it reads more like fact than fiction.

Fan Chin's old mother, who is like her son in many ways, is not so excited by the news of his passing; for she is a peasant woman who cannot understand the full significance of his success in the provincial examination. When, however, she realizes that all the fine porcelain, the cups and chopsticks inlaid with silver, and all the servants and houses belong to her, that is a concrete situation that she can understand. Then she gives a scream of laughter and falls unconscious too.

The book contains many incidents so skilfully described that they make an indelible impression on us, and we can quote them easily. Such incidents accurately expose conflicts in concentrated form, throw into vivid relief the characters' chief ideas and traits, and faithfully and graphically reflect the true state of politics and society. Very effective artistically, these passages are also extremely significant. Distilled from life, they sum up reality with the utmost economy and efficacy.

Besides being vivid and lifelike, the dialogue and delineation of character in *The Lives of the Scholars* are extremely succinct. The dialogue is used with such exquisite skill to reveal the speaker's thought and personality that every sentence repays careful study. In the sixth chapter, for instance, Senior Licentiate Yen quarrels with the boatmen and insists that the wafers the steersman has been eating are expensive medicine. After mentioning his high official connections in almost every sentence he utters, he finally threatens to send the steersman to the local yamen to be beaten. The main thing here is his threat. The lie about the medicine is secondary, for it is too fantastic for anybody to believe. But in all he says, Yen's vicious and shameless character is clearly

revealed. Again, when some dockers who have come aboard to intervene and appeal to Yen to be generous, they may appear to be blaming the steersman, but actually they are exposing Yen's deceit and helping the boatmen. The intelligence, goodness, sense of justice and unavailing protests of the oppressed people find expression in their speech, as well as their contempt for Yen and all officialdom.

In the fifty-five chapters of this novel we find nearly two hundred clearly delineated and unforgettable characters, fifty or sixty of whom have major parts to play. Each chapter has one or more central figures, with subsidiary figures to create the necessary background; and in this way the characters' thought and personality are expressed through their relations with other people and through everyday life. A character may be the main figure in one chapter, but only of secondary importance in the next when someone else takes the centre of the stage. This process continues throughout the book, presenting the reader with endless variety and a succession of new incidents, all of which are related in time and space. These different characters engaged in different occupation are displayed to us in succession, like waves which impel each other forward, interlinking to form one huge canvas.

The form of this novel is obviously influenced by earlier Chinese fiction, notably the Ming Dynasty short stories, and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*. It has something in common, too, with the accounts of historical figures in the traditional histories.

In brief, *The Lives of the Scholars* combines the characteristics of novels and short stories in a distinctive form—a highly flexible form admirably fitted to express the content of this novel. And in certain ways this book, which has some of the features of a serial story, resembles the long scrolls of ancient paintings like *Springtime by the River* or *The Yangtse River* which, when unrolled, reveal a vast panorama.

"The Palace of Eternal Youth" And Its Author

Hung Shen

I

An old man made of wood and moved by strings,
With snow white hair and wrinkles, true to life,
Dances for a while, and then is still—
And this is like the life of mortal man.

This is a poem about puppets. A puppet representing an old man, which looked like a real human being, was taken as a symbol of human life; for, even if passed in pleasure and excitement, the life of man is brief and ends in nothingness. Emperor Ming Huang of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) loved to recite this poem in his old age when he was mourning for his favourite, Lady Yang. The emperor was a poet and a musician, who loved the drama. He was a bad ruler, however, whose extravagance and love of pleasure, and the burdens he laid on the people, gave rise to a revolt which nearly overthrew the Tang Dynasty. A sincere but weak lover, he showered favours on Lady Yang when all was well, but when danger threatened he made her commit suicide, while after her death he was broken-hearted and never stopped mourning for her. *The Palace of Eternal Youth* is a musical drama about Emperor Ming Huang and Lady Yang—a love story which could only end happily in fantasy.

Emperor Ming Huang reigned from 713 to 755. His reign was divided into two periods, Kai Yuan and Tien Pao, which lasted twenty-nine and fourteen years respectively. This was the heyday of the Tang Dynasty. The Tang empire had been founded after several hundred years of war between different races, despotic foreign rule, contests for power within the ruling class, decimation of the population, and the gradual breakdown of the economy. The unification of the empire had

taken place in 624, the seventh year of the first emperor. During the century which had since elapsed, the nation's economy and culture had been fully restored; and the Tang Dynasty reached the peak of prosperity by the end of the Kai Yuan period.

During the Tang Dynasty, foreigners coming to China had brought their own religions, as well as their religious architecture, sculpture and painting. Mohammedanism, Manichaeism and Nestorianism were all introduced to China during these years. The influence of Buddhism, handed down from preceding dynasties, was particularly strong. This influx of foreign religions not only enriched intellectual activity and art in China, but had the effect of making the early Tang emperors encourage Taoism, because it was a religion indigenous to China. Ming Huang was an ardent supporter of Taoism, who believed in alchemy and hoped by means of breathing exercises and a special diet to become an immortal.

This was a golden age of literature, music, dancing and drama. The two great poets Li Po and Tu Fu lived during Ming Huang's reign.

Ming Huang was himself a talented poet and musician, and a fine performer on the drum. He set up two centres for folk musicians, dancers and actors, where two thousand students were trained. Three hundred young actors were also taught singing and dancing in the "Pear Garden Academy" founded by Ming Huang.

The Tang empire had been carved out by a frontier general who became the first Tang emperor. After crushing all their rivals, suppressing the peasant revolts which were an outcome of the tyranny of the Sui Dynasty (581-618), and establishing unified control over the whole kingdom, the rulers of Tang began to send troops against the states at their borders. Order was restored in areas which had been disturbed for many years, and a number of small tribes on the outskirts of the empire were brought under the Tang rule. As a result, the territory of the empire was greatly extended. The tribes which submitted rapidly adopted Chinese ways and were given the same political rights as the Chinese; and, because tribesmen were made use of and often appointed generals in the long campaigns against foreign states, they gradually came to control large forces.

Ming Huang, who wished to continue his attack on the northern tribes, appointed as military governor of Pinglu, Fanyang and Hotung (in present-day Hopei and Shansi Provinces) a man called An Lu-shan, whose father was of Hunnish and whose mother of *Tu Chueh* (Turkish) descent. The emperor was acting on the advice of his prime minister, Li Ling-fu, who had recommended the appointment of tribesmen as frontier generals on the grounds that, because their original status was low, they would be doubly grateful for such promotion and would do their best to prove their loyalty. An Lu-shan gradually substituted Tartars and *Tu Chueh* fighters for his Chinese officers and men, until practically all his officers were tribesmen.

The story of Emperor Ming Huang and Lady Yang is as follows:

Lady Yang, whose name was Yang Yu-huan, was an orphan, brought up by her uncle. In the twenty-fourth year of the Kai Yuan period, Ming Huang's favourite concubine died. Though he had other concubines, including Lady Plum Blossom, the emperor lived a life of pleasure and wanted to gather more beautiful women around him. Someone recommended Yang Yu-huan for her beauty, and proposed that she be sent to the palace. Accordingly, she was taken by the eunuch Kao Li-shih to the court. Because she sang and danced well, was a good musician and was quick to anticipate the emperor's wishes, she became a great favourite. This was in 740, when Lady Yang was twenty-one years old while Ming Huang was fifty-six. In the seventh month of the fourth year of the Tien Pao period (745), she was made an imperial concubine, with half the prerogatives of an empress.

Lady Yang had three sisters, all of whom were beauties, and they were made the duchesses of Han, Kuai and Chin. They had three men cousins, including a certain Yang Chao, whose name the emperor later changed to Yang Kuo-chung. The Yang sisters were depraved women, and the men of the family were quite unscrupulous, Yang Kuo-chung being a particularly vicious character. Ming Huang, however, favoured them above all his subjects. He kept a thousand skilled workers to embroider or make jewellery for Lady Yang, and had tribute of rare objects delivered from all corners of the empire for her. For instance, since Lady Yang was fond of the lichee fruit of South China, Ming Huang ordered relays of envoys to gallop thousands of *li* to the capital to deliver the fruit while it was still fresh.

When Yang Kuo-chung became prime minister, he accepted bribes and accumulated over thirty million bolts of silk—silk then was commonly used in place of money. The emperor loved luxury and made many presents to his subordinates, while fighting at the frontier never ceased and military expenditure kept increasing. In order to defray these expenses, Ming Huang ordered Yang Kuo-chung and his other officials to extort more money from the people. And at this juncture—when the emperor and his courtiers were indulging in pleasure, the political system was thoroughly corrupt, and the people were groaning under heavy burdens—An Lu-shan revolted. He advanced southwest against the Tang empire from Fanyang (in present-day Hopei Province), and in the twelfth month of 755 took the city of Loyang. The emperor ordered General Ko-shu Han to defend the Tungkuan Pass; but in the sixth month of 756, Kuo-shu Han was routed and the Pass fell. Ming Huang fled with Lady Yang and her relatives from the capital, Changan; but when they reached Mawei Station the imperial guards killed Yang Kuo-chung and the Duchess of Kuai. In their rage, the soldiers demanded Lady Yang's life too, and the emperor had to order her to commit suicide. Ming Huang then fled to Szechuan Province. The crown prince went north to Lingwu, where he was proclaimed emperor and rallied the army to attack the rebels.

After An Lu-shan took Changan, his army plundered and butchered the common people until they rose to resist. The Tang general Kuo Tze-yi led the army of the north frontier and the Uighur troops, reinforced by the people's militia, to recover Changan and Loyang. In 757, An Lu-shan was killed by one of his own followers. The rebels' resistance continued, however. And this war lasted for nine years, ending only in 763.

Changan was recovered in 757. In the eleventh month of that year Ming Huang returned from Chengtu, determined to give Lady Yang a fresh burial. When the eunuch Li Fu-kuo and others who had connived at the assassination of Yang Kuo-chung and helped to set the crown prince on the throne raised objections, Ming Huang gave secret orders for the body to be moved. However, Lady Yang's body had disappeared. Only a scented pouch was left, and this was delivered to the emperor who always carried it with him. Ming Huang ordered artists to make a portrait of Lady Yang, and morning and evening he wept before it. In 762, still unable to overcome his grief at her death, he started a special regimen which he hoped would make him an immortal, refusing even to take fruit juice. And very soon, at the age of seventy-eight, he died.

The Palace of Eternal Youth was based on the facts related above. It may be considered a historical drama, since the various incidents in the plot are taken either from histories or biographies of the Tang Dynasty. For instance, in Scene 45 we see how Ming Huang longed for Lady Yang and sent an alchemist to look for her spirit; and in Scene 47 the alchemist visits Lady Yang in the fairy mountain, takes back the golden hairpin and jewel box given as a pledge of love, and asks her to tell him something known only to her and the emperor, so that he may convince Ming Huang that he has really seen her—these episodes are based on a story of Lady Yang written by an imperial historian of the Tang Dynasty and on the *Story of the Song of Everlasting Sorrow* by Chen Hung, also of that period.

What strikes us about this drama, however, is that Hung Sheng gives his own interpretation of the facts. Previous writers on the subject had thrown the responsibility for the revolt on Lady Yang. The Tang historian, for example, concluded his account of Lady Yang with these words: "I have written this not simply to tell the story of Lady Yang, but to point out that she was the cause of the trouble." Chen Hung, also, in *Story of the Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, wrote: "This story is worth recording for its own sake; but it is our duty, too, to expose the trouble caused by this witch, as a warning to future generations."

Hung Sheng, however, does not lay all the blame on Lady Yang. *The Palace of Eternal Youth* tells a sad and unusual love story, and the author's intention is clear from Scene 1 (the prologue):

Since ancient times how few lovers
Have really remained true to the end;
But those who were constant have come together at last,

Even though thousands of miles apart,
Even though torn from each other by death;
Thus all who curse their fate are simply those
Lacking in love. True love melts gold and stone,
Moves heaven and earth, shines like the sun and lights
The pages of old histories. Loyal subjects
And filial sons—all prove themselves true lovers.
. . . . . .
And so we take the tale of Lady Yang,
To fashion a new drama about love!

But this love story of the emperor and Lady Yang is only the splendid outer garment of this drama. *The Palace of Eternal Youth* was written not very long after the fall of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The Manchus, a foreign race, had seized control of China; but the Chinese people continued for many years to resist the invaders. During Hung Sheng's lifetime there was still armed resistance along the coast, and secret societies to oppose the Manchus existed all over the country.

The hatred of the people for the invaders and their foreign rule was expressed consciously or unconsciously in writings of that time. Thus the whole of *The Palace of Eternal Youth* is permeated with the spirit shown by Lei Hai-ching in the scene "The Patriot and the Rebel." Severe as was the censorship of his time, Hung Sheng cursed the traitors and turncoats who served the enemy, particularly the scholars who filled official posts:

Yet those rotten courtiers, those good-for-nothing curs,
Who talked so much of loyalty and piety,
As soon as disaster came just turned their coats
To grab at wealth and position.
They wag their tails when they accept new titles,
Taking their deadly foe as their benefactor.
Have they no sense of shame?

II

The Palace of Eternal Youth was written in 1688, during the reign of Kang Hsi. The Manchus had tried ruthlessly to suppress the Chinese people's opposition to foreign domination. From 1658 to 1795, a period including the reigns of Kang Hsi, Yung Cheng and Chien Lung, all literature which could be considered even slightly anti-Manchu, whether essays, poems, novels or dramas, was proscribed and destroyed. Works which had been in existence for some time and were well known could not be entirely banned; but they were cut, altered or rewritten. And all who had any hand in writing, printing or circulating banned books

were punished. The Manchu censorship was extremely strict. If a single word or sentence, never intended as an attack upon the government, could conceivably be interpreted as an insult or a thrust at the Manchu Dynasty, then the author would be thrown into jail. This happened many times. The aim of this investigating, banning, burning and altering was to stamp out the anti-Manchu feeling and patriotism of the Chinese.

The vivid and lively operas which were performed in various parts of the country could be appreciated by everyone. Moreover, since the drama was so popular, it was potentially a very effective means of spreading anti-Manchu feeling. The Manchu rulers, therefore, paid special attention to the content of the drama. If any opera was considered unsafe, the author, the actors, and even the audience, would be punished. The Manchus decreed that the function of drama was to entertain, not to express social criticism. At the beginning of the reign of Chien Lung, Chang Chao and other dramatists were ordered to write operas for the palace extolling loyalty and filial piety, or praising the achievements of the Manchus. The rulers hoped in this way to change the popular taste. But the native drama still persisted, and still exerted a great influence. In 1777, a bureau was set up in Yangchow, under the direction of high officials, to revise the traditional opera. The choice of this city was due to the fact that Yangchow's citizens included many rich salt merchants who kept private repertory companies, hence Yangchow was the centre of the traditional drama. Official scholars spent four years in examining 1,013 *kun chu* operas, including *The Palace of Eternal Youth*. In 1780, Emperor Chien Lung decreed that since there were many operas of the late Ming and early Manchu Dynasties which might contain disrespectful references to the Manchus, all such native operas should be revised, prohibited or destroyed. Thus operas other than *kun chu* came to be banned too.

Emperor Yung Cheng, who reigned from 1723 to 1734, was the son of Kang Hsi and the father of Chien Lung. He was not an enthusiast of the opera, but once he watched the opera *Hsiu Ju Chi* (The Embroidered Coat). One character in this opera was Governor Cheng of Changchou, who lived during the Tang Dynasty and whose son loved a singsong girl. Admiring the singing and acting, Yung Cheng gave the actors a meal. Then one actor was careless enough to say: "I wonder who the present governor of Changchou is?"

The emperor flew into a rage, and shouted: "Actors are low people. How dare you ask what official fills a certain post!"

The unfortunate actor was immediately beaten to death.

This case was typical of the Manchu rulers' contempt for and persecution of actors. Many of the Manchus enjoyed seeing operas, and after the reign of Kang Hsi Chinese operas were frequently performed in the palace, while later a special office was set up to handle the drama. But although the Manchus sometimes tried to promote certain operas by

having them performed in the palace, they always looked on it with suspicion, fearful of hidden attacks on themselves. During the reigns of Kang Hsi, Yung Cheng and Chien Lung, it was very easy for writers to get into trouble, and the savage repression of these reigns was unprecedented in history. It was in this period of ruthless censorship that Hung Sheng wrote his masterpiece *The Palace of Eternal Youth.*

Hung Sheng whose other names were Hung Fang-ssu or Hung Pi-kuei, was a native of Chientang County, Chekiang Province. He was born in 1645. According to his friend, Chao Chiu-ku, Hung Sheng came from a well-known family which had got into trouble and moved to the capital. His wife was the granddaughter of a prime minister, and was a competent musician. A contemporary account of Hung Sheng describes how his wife played the accompaniment when he sang. They were evidently a very happy couple. During the reign of Kang Hsi, Hung Sheng became a scholar of the imperial college. He was well known as a poet and dramatist; but *The Palace of Eternal Youth,* which won him most of his fame, nearly ruined him too. In 1689, *The Palace of Eternal Youth* was performed during the period of imperial mourning, and a censor reported this to the authorities as a case of "gross disrespect." Emperor Kang Hsi read the drama, and felt that it contained thrusts at the Manchus. He was very angry, and ordered the Board of Punishments to have Hung Sheng and the spectators arrested and punished. A prime minister intervened to transfer the case to the Board of Civil Affairs; and Hung Sheng's friend Chao Chiu-ku who had produced the opera declared that he was largely to blame, and that he should assume complete responsibility. The result was that Chao was dismissed from his post, Hung Sheng was expelled from the imperial college, and nearly fifty other scholars were struck off the official list.

Hung Sheng was proud of his talents, and behaved carelessly. When living in the capital, he often criticized past and present events; and when he went back to Hangchow he spent most of his time on the West Lake, behaving unconventionally and drinking heavily. In 1704, on a pleasure trip at Wuhsing, he got drunk on a boat, fell overboard and was drowned. He was then nearly sixty. In addition to his dramas, he has left a volume of essays and poems.

Hung Sheng declared that he worked for more than ten years on *The Palace of Eternal Youth,* rewriting it three times; he was forty-three when the opera was completed. This is only one of many operas he wrote. *Hui Wen Ching* (Words Embroidered on Silk) is the story of the wife of Tou Tao of the Chin Dynasty (265-420). Longing for her husband, who was away from home, she wrote a poem and embroidered it on silk to send to him. *Hui Lung Chi* (The Dragon Returns) is the story of Han Yuan-jui, a loyal subject with a faithful wife and filial son. The characters in this opera are not historical figures. *Nao Kao Tang* (Revolt at Kao Tang) is based on the novel *Shui Hu* (Water Margin). In the preface to this opera, Hung Sheng states that he chose this subject

because one character in it was an official who did not love money and another a fighter who was not afraid of death. *Tien Yai Lei* (Tears on the Horizon) is said to have been written to express Hung Sheng's longing for his parents, who were dead. Nothing is known of *Hsiao Chieh Fang* (The Arch Commemorating Filial Piety and Chastity) except the title. *Ssu Chan Chuan* (Four Beautiful Women) is a collection of four one-act operas about four women who excelled in poetry, calligraphy or painting. The fourth opera in this group, *Painting the Bamboo,* describes Chao Meng-fu, a scholar of the Yuan Dynasty who had a wife named Kuan Tao-sheng. They were both artists, and Kuan Tao-sheng excelled in drawing bamboos. One autumn day, while out boating, they painted bamboos by the stream; and while her husband was admiring her painting, Kuan Tao-sheng wrote a poem urging him to retire; for Chao, although a descendant of the Sung imperial house, had accepted office under the Yuan Dynasty.

It is evident that Hung Sheng wrote on a great variety of subjects, but that he had strong views of his own. He was not content to be a playwright or poet who wrote only about flowers and moonlight.

The Manchu rulers would not tolerate the writing of political satire by Chinese scholars, but the emperors Kang Hsi, Yung Cheng and Chien Lung, who liked to write essays and poems themselves, sometimes ordered their officials to write poems to a set rhyme or metre. Thus officials in the capital who were poets spent all their time praising the emperor's virtue, and had no time to think of the preceding dynasty which had been Chinese. This was another way of stifling feeling against foreign domination. But those poets had to write under difficulties. They must produce poems which attained a certain standard of elegance and would not disgrace them, and at the same time must avoid reference to anything which might get them into trouble, cause their names to be struck off the official list or even cause their execution.

It was during this period that the poet Wang Yu-yang founded a school of abstract poetry. Reference to this may be found in the eighteenth volume of his *Notes North of the Pool* written in 1689, one year after *The Palace of Eternal Youth.* Wang gave no systematic account of abstract poetry, but he mentioned certain things which poets should avoid. According to him: "One who wants to display his genius will be blinded by it. One who attempts too many logical expositions will be encumbered by them. If a parade is made of scholarship, poetry will become pedantic, while if too much attention is devoted to detailed descriptions, poetry will become stereotyped." This was Wang's theory, which was certainly difficult to grasp! Wang Yu-yang also urged people to accept the idea that beauty in a poem should not be explicit, and implied that those poets were best who said nothing and did not reveal their real thoughts. This theory of a poetry above politics and reality would obviously make poets abandon their resistance to foreign domination.

Chao Chiu-ku saw the danger of Wang Yu-yang's theory. He declared that poetry should not simply be elegant, but should express the poet's character and reflect objective reality. In his book of critical essays, Chao said, "A poem should express a man's ideas. A poem should have the poet in it, and be set in the framework of the outside world." He was clearly proposing that poetry should deal with contemporary affairs. "Pai Chu-yi wrote many topical poems," he said, "to criticize abuses of his time. A poet is right to comment on current events, and his poems may serve as a warning to readers. This is true poetry. But our modern poets (meaning Wang Yu-yang and others) no longer do this." Chao Chiu-ku was a young official, well known for his talent. He allied with Hung Sheng already famous for *The Palace of Eternal Youth,* and together they proposed that literature should deal critically with contemporary affairs. As no tolerance was shown in *The Palace of Eternal Youth* for An Lu-shan, the tribesman who devastated the land through rebellion, the natural conclusion was that in his drama Hung Sheng was deliberately propagating the idea of resistance to foreign domination. The Manchu rulers could not tolerate this. That was why Kang Hsi was angry and had the names of Hung Sheng and Chao Chiu-ku struck from the official list. The fact that the opera was performed in the period of imperial mourning served only as a pretext for punishing them.

III

The first half of *The Palace of Eternal Youth* is based on historical facts and records of the Tang Dynasty, while the second, with its supernatural elements, is a creation of the author's imagination. Thus the two parts do not seem very closely knit. If we examine the drama as a whole, however, we find realistic features in it. It sympathizes with the sufferings of the people under cruel rulers. In the scene "Delivering the Fruit," for instance, we see envoys galloping to deliver lichee fruit to Lady Yang, trampling on the crops and killing people. Again, in "Looking at the Stocking," an old man blames the emperor for spending all his time in pleasure and forgetting affairs of state, because this resulted in a revolt breaking out and the people suffering. This brings out clearly the ugliness of the ruling class. Other scenes describe the licence of Ming Huang and the Yang sisters, while "The Bribe" and "A Quarrel Among the Mighty" show the greed and rivalry of Yang Kuo-chung and An Lu-shan. "A Spring Excursion" and "The Writing on the Wall" expose the luxury of Lady Yang's sisters and the way in which courtiers squandered the people's wealth.

Of special significance are all the scenes dealing with An Lu-shan's revolt, which reflect, to varying degrees, the hatred of the Chinese for the invaders at the beginning of the Manchu Dynasty. "The Patriot and

the Rebel," "The Writing on the Wall," "The Envoy's Report," "Suppressing the Rebels," and "The Assassination" all contain powerful expressions of hatred for the enemy. And these scenes, which express the feelings of the people, are the most positive sections of *The Palace of Eternal Youth.*

But this opera has its imperfections too. It dwells with relish on Lady Yang's petty jealousy towards the Duchess of Kuai and Lady Plum Blossom; while "The Bath" contains passages unworthy of scenes like "The Patriot and the Rebel," which detract from the high seriousness of the work. It is clear that Hung Sheng's style of writing was influenced by other scholars of that day, and that he could not free himself from the current tendency to write according to a romantic set pattern. In his treatment of the hairpin and jewel box which the emperor gave to Lady Yang as the pledge of his love, Hung Sheng shows a sickly sentimentalism; and this is even more marked in "Crying over the Image," "Complaint to the Gods," "Rhapsody" and "Reburial."

The Palace of Eternal Youth is a *kun chu* opera. The *kun chu* school developed from the musical tunes then current in Chekiang and Kiangsu Provinces during the reigns of Chia Ching and Lung Ching (c.1550-1570) of the Ming Dynasty. Flutes, reed organs and pipes formed an accompaniment for the musical drama, and the tunes were elegant and tender. *Kun chu* opera has now had a history of four hundred years; but although once quite popular it is seldom played today.

Actors in *kun chu* opera adopt different kinds of voice and of dancing movements to portray characters of different ages and types. There is a strict division of parts, the characters being divided into *sheng, tan, ching, chou* and so forth. In this drama we find the following categories:

Sheng. In this drama the *sheng* (Emperor Ming Huang) wears a crown and a black beard. (Another type of *sheng, chin sheng,* wears a scholar's cap and has no beard.) The *sheng* is the chief male character, the hero of the drama. He should be noble, gentle or elegant, but he may be either old or young.

Hsiao sheng. This is the male character next in importance to the *sheng.* The *hsiao sheng* is a young man. In this drama Li Mu, the cowherd, a country gentleman, the blind fortune-teller, and some of the barbarian generals are *hsiao sheng.* The *sheng* and *hsiao sheng* use the same tone of voice and gestures. *Sheng* and *hsiao sheng* are usually lovers, except when they are subsidiary characters.

Tan is the chief female character, who is generally chaste, intelligent and virtuous. The *tan* in this opera is Lady Yang.

Ching are fierce or rough fellows, who are not necessarily bad characters. The *ching* may be a woman. An Lu-shan, the alchemist, the country woman and the blind woman are all *ching.*

Wai or *lao sheng* are elderly or middle-aged characters, often

elderly relatives of the *sheng* or *tan*, or men who have rather high social status. Kuo Tze-yi, Lei Hai-ching, a gentleman, the peasant, some barbarian generals and attendants are *lao sheng*.

Mo or *fu mo* are subsidiary characters who are also middle-aged or old. They are a type of *lao sheng*. Usually the *mo* recites the prologue of the play, but he may also be a character in the play. Li Kuei-nien, Chen Yuan-li, the alchemist's spirit, one of the envoys and some of the barbarian generals and attendants are *mo*. (*Lao sheng* are usually worthy characters. Eccentric characters, such as *ching*, *fu ching* or *chou*, have their faces painted. An old servant is generally a *mo*, not a *wai*; however, in one scene of *The Palace of Eternal Youth*, where two servants appear, we have both.)

Fu ching appear when there are too many *ching*. A *fu ching* is not only fierce or rough, but may be an object of ridicule. Yang Kuo-chung, the envoy who trampled on the blind fortune-teller, some barbarian generals, a maid and the station master are *fu ching*.

Tieh tan or *hua tan* are minor female characters, who may be either old or young. Nien-nu, who is young, Yung-hsin, who is old, the Duchess of Kuai, and a country woman are *tieh tan*.

Lao tan are elderly women, the counterparts of *wai*. The Duchess of Han and the old woman who keeps an inn are *lao tan*.

Chou are clowns who may be male or female, old or young. Kao Li-shih, Ko-shu Han, Chang Chien, the groom, the man disguised as a woman worker and the maid servant are *chou*.

The cast also includes crowds and soldiers.

The structure of *The Palace of Eternal Youth* has been highly praised by *kun chu* experts, because the same tunes are not repeated in consecutive scenes, and the chief characters alternate from one scene to another. This means that the plot is planned in such a way that the actors do not become unduly tired and the spectators find endless variety. From a technical point of view, no *kun chu* opera has surpassed this.

Critics have claimed, however, that because Hung Sheng aimed at such a balanced structure, with twenty-five scenes in each half, he has introduced too many supernatural elements and unnecessary incidents into the second part of the opera, to pad it out. This makes the opera a little loose and dull, and there are many scenes in the latter half which are never performed unless the whole opera is being staged.

The language of the drama, although a little weighted with allusions and not entirely free from artificiality, is, on the whole, quite magnificent. There is not a word which cannot be sung, and some enthusiasts claim that every single word is excellently fitted to the music. *The Palace of Eternal Youth* is outstanding in this respect.

Many dramatists succeeded Hung Sheng, but few produced works which could rival *The Palace of Eternal Youth*. For the theme, plot, setting, language and music all reach a high standard, and the just hatred of the Chinese people for foreign domination at the beginning of the

Manchu Dynasty is expressed. After the reign of Chien Lung, the *kun chu* began to be superseded by other forms of drama. The reason for the popularity of other local operas, according to contemporaries, was that their themes were closer to real life, a clear distinction was drawn between right and wrong, between good characters and bad, and the language was simple enough for even illiterate people to understand. The tunes, too, were more stirring. *Kun chu* melodies are more intricate than those of other forms of Chinese opera; but although the music is very fine, unless the spectators have read the play they cannot follow the songs.

Another factor to account for the decline of the *kun chu* opera is this: After the Manchu rulers' cruel suppression of scholars, men who could write dramas were afraid to take the risk, and many of them laid aside their pens; while those who did write wrote for the most part about frivolous or stereotyped romantic themes, or even on licentious subjects. It was only the common people who composed operas filled with life and satire. In this respect, *The Palace of Eternal Youth* is the last of its kind, marking the highest development of the *kun chu* drama.

Uncle Chao, The Stockman

Ma Feng

When I arrived at the agricultural producers' co-operative of Chaochiakou, the autumn harvest was coming to an end. All the members of the co-op were out in the fields that morning, but I found Chairman Chang Ming-shan and a young woman accountant in the office checking accounts.

Chang Ming-shan was a peasant, slightly over thirty. Small and lean, he seemed keen and capable. He welcomed me, and set about making tea, telling me all the while about his co-operative, stopping only to answer the accountant's questions.

While Chang was talking an old man of about sixty burst into the room. He was clean-shaven, and wore a felt cap and a pair of old leather shoes. Otherwise he was dressed like an old peasant—blue jacket and trousers, with a belt of white cloth round his waist.

"I've had enough!" he shouted, "I'm off to Taiyuan to find a better job! You'll let me go, won't you?"

"No," replied Chang quite casually.

Cap in hand, the old man voiced his protest with a snatch of Shansi folk-opera: "His answer makes me tremble with fury!"

The woman accountant, who had been working quietly all this time, now turned round.

"Uncle Chao," she remonstrated jokingly, "why do you have to come here every day and create such an uproar? You'll talk our heads off!"

"What d'you mean, Hsiu-mei? Talking your head off?"

At this, Uncle Chao flopped into a chair and shut his eyes, as if taking thought. When he opened them again, it was to inquire about me.

"Where's our visitor from, eh?"

Chang introduced us: "Comrade Ma from the county government. Comrade Ma, this is Uncle Chao, who looks after the livestock on our co-op."

"I beg your pardon for not welcoming you appropriately. I did not know Your Highness was expected. . . ." Uncle Chao persisted in his comical imitation of the stilted dialogue of Shansi opera.

We couldn't help laughing at him.

Keeping a straight face, Chao started shouting again: "I've had enough! I must go to Taiyuan, now. Do you hear me? I'll pack my things and go."

"Please yourself," Chang answered with a smile. "You know you have the right to leave any time you want."

"Very good," said Chao. Clasping his hands before him in a ceremonious greeting, he bowed slightly and started to go. But on the threshold he halted, turned around sharply, and, quite serious now, asked Chang:

"Is anybody going to town these days? Several collars are worn out and we want some cloth to mend them."

"Someone will be going tomorrow," Chang answered. "How much do you reckon we'll need?"

"Oh, five feet'll be enough, I think. But it must be good and strong."

With that, the old man left. When he had gone, I asked Chang whether Uncle Chao clowned his work too, or if he was doing a good job.

"A first-rate job, couldn't be better," said Chang. "He keeps on saying he's fed up and all that, but he couldn't bear to be parted from his animals!"

He went on to tell me how Chao had actually taken a trip to Taiyuan this spring, at the invitation of his eldest son. The son had joined the Eighth Route Army in the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. He'd fought ten years and more, up and down the country. Now he was in Taiyuan, vice-director of a factory. After being away from home so long, he wanted to see his father. Since his work kept him too busy to ask for leave, he invited his father to Taiyuan instead.

Uncle Chao arrived in Taiyuan in two minds. His thoughts turned so often to his animals that within three days he was dying to get back to them.

When he arrived at the co-op with a bundle of his son's cast-off clothes under his arm, the villagers naturally wondered why he had come back so soon.

"It's not often you get the chance of seeing a big city," said someone. "Why didn't you stay longer?"

"Well," said Chao, "you see, both my son and daughter-in-law are busy from morning till night. Everybody in the factory is up to the eyes in work. I couldn't stand loafing around, with everybody else working so hard."

At this point the accountant chipped in. "Another funny thing happened while Uncle Chao was in Taiyuan. You see, his son lives on the third floor of a modern building. But one night, when everybody was asleep, Uncle Chao suddenly got up, pulled on his clothes in a hurry and hunted round the room for something or other. His son was wakened by the noise and asked him what on earth he was doing at that unearthly hour.

"'Looking for my basket,' says his father. 'It's time to feed the animals. . . .'"

"The old man really cares more about the animals than anything else." Chang spoke with real admiration. "You won't find another like him in the whole co-op."

"Then why should he talk about quitting and all that, as he did just now?" I asked.

"Oh, he was pulling my leg, taking me off," interjected the accountant, a bit sheepishly. "This summer I had a row with another member of the co-op over the number of his work-days. I was so wild at his thinking I didn't know my job, I offered to leave. It's been a standing joke with Uncle Chao ever since."

The more I heard about Chao the more interesting he seemed. I wanted to have a good talk with him. Chang offered to take me. But I refused. "You carry on with your work," I said, "and tell me where I can find him myself."

He gave me directions and off I went. I came to a wide, clean yard where hay was piled in two stacks against the eastern wall. To the north was a row of newly built stables. The animals were all out at work. The yard was very quiet.

Uncle Chao was sitting by the door of his room to the west, weaving a basket and singing Shansi opera. A young chap of about twenty, blind, was sitting beside him, cutting the willow branches for him. I stood watching the two for some time without being noticed. Finally I announced my presence by asking, "Uncle Chao, what is it you're singing?"

"Oh, all sorts of things," he said, without looking up. "If you don't like it, you don't have to stop and listen."

The blind chap gave him a gentle nudge and said, "Uncle Chao! That's a stranger's voice, it isn't anybody from our village!"

Chao looked up sharply. "Well," he said, "if it's not Old Ma! I thought it was one of our fellows."

"I thought you were quitting," I teased. "How comes it you're still weaving a basket?"

Uncle Chao chuckled. "It'd be a dull life without a bit of fun. I only said that to amuse our chairman and accountant, who've been busy all day, to give them a break. Now, take a seat and have a smoke." He handed me his pipe and tobacco pouch, and began telling me his story.

The name of his blind assistant was Wang Ken-so. His handicap didn't stop him from being good at almost any kind of work—cutting grass, fetching water and all sorts of odd jobs round the stables. He was really a great help. At first, Chao alone had taken care of the animals; then, as the co-operative got more of them, he got Wang to help him. They now had thirteen animals to look after: four mules, six donkeys, two oxen and a mare.

When he mentioned the mare, Uncle Chao's face lit up.

"Now, there's a good mare for you!" he exclaimed. "She foaled last spring, and she'll foal again this autumn!"

His enthusiasm was cut short by an old woman who hurried up through the front gate.

"Uncle Chao, please come with me right away! He's so ill, I don't know what to do. . . ."

"Who's ill?"

"The ox, my ox," stammered the old woman, perspiration streaming off her. "He hasn't touched his feed all day, and his belly is as tight as a drum. He's such a fine ox. I paid eight piculs of grain for him. . . ."

Without waiting for the end of her tale of woe, Uncle Chao rushed into his room and came out with a small white cloth bundle. He told his assistant to let the animals rest a while when they returned from work before feeding them. Then he set out in a great hurry with the woman.

By the time I got back to the co-op office, I found the chairman and accountant had finished their work.

"Why, you're back quick," said Chang. "Didn't you find Uncle Chao?"

I told them what had taken Uncle Chao away. They thought for a minute and guessed that the woman who had come to ask the old man's help might be Mrs. Ko from a family that hadn't yet joined the co-op. Their ox had been ill this summer and been cured by Uncle Chao.

"Does Uncle Chao really know anything about veterinary science?" I asked.

"Why, he's an expert," said the accountant with a smile. "All the people in the surrounding villages swear by him."

"At one time he didn't know a thing about vetting, but he has picked up a lot in the last two years," added Chang.

"It's not easy to get a capable chap like him to look after livestock," I remarked. "I know many co-ops have a job to raise their agricultural production because they can't find people who know how to take care of the animals."

"That's true enough," said Chang. "When our co-op was first set up, the animals gave us a lot of worry."

I learned that the co-op had been running three years, and Uncle Chao was its third stockman. The first had had only two mules and four donkeys to look after. He was experienced enough, but lazy and full of excuses. Within six months, the animals were worn to mere shadows. All the co-op members were dissatisfied with his ways. Some even threatened to withdraw from the co-op. Finally the board of directors decided to replace him.

The second stockman was young and active enough, and within a couple of months the animals began to look much better. But after a

while, he insisted on quitting. "I don't mind doing odd jobs, cutting grass, carrying water or preparing the feed. But getting up three or four times a night to see to the feed is killing me! Can't get enough sleep. If I don't wake up in time, the cattle starve. If I do, I work myself to death."

Nobody wanted the job. Then, at a meeting of the Communist Party branch Uncle Chao was recommended for the post. "All right," said Chao, "I'll do what the Party wants. Somebody must look after the animals. We can't allow the co-op to break up over that."

Uncle Chao was an old peasant. Though he had been fond of animals from his childhood, he had never tended any—too poor to buy a bit of hide, let alone a live horse or an ox. To tell the truth, he was really a complete stranger to this livestock business. When he first took the job on even his second son, who was also a member of the co-op, doubted if he could make a success of it.

But Uncle Chao said: "Nobody's born capable. The old proverb's right: 'Where there's a will, there's a way.'"

Right from the start, Uncle Chao put every minute of his time and every ounce of his energy into his work. He often went to ask the advice of people who had had the care of animals at one time or another, and several conferences of old peasants were called to exchange experiences. When Dr. Liu of the county veterinary station came to inspect the animals, Uncle Chao would follow him around, asking all sorts of questions which the doctor answered with great patience. Every time Uncle Chao met Dr. Liu, he'd salute him gratefully, raising both hands ceremoniously up to the eyebrows.

Once Dr. Liu gave him some popular pamphlets such as *How to Look After Cattle* and *Veterinary Science A.B.C.* Uncle Chao treasured them and, whenever he had time, he asked someone to read these pamphlets to him. Last winter he'd joined a short-course literacy class and managed to learn a thousand characters in three months. Since then, he no longer needed to be read to. He'd put on his spectacles and read to his blind assistant after the day's work. When he came across new words in his reading, he asked what they meant; and he was always eager to try out any new method of feeding animals he found in the precious pamphlets.

Because Uncle Chao never tired of learning new things to improve his work, he had by now established himself in the co-op as quite an expert in his own line. "Yes, Uncle Chao's a model, not only in his work but also in his eagerness to learn," said the chairman. "He never complains of difficulties. Whenever anything crops up, he works out a way to overcome it."

"Let me give you an example," Hsiu-mei the accountant put in. "When he was new to the job, he was scared to go to sleep at night for fear he mightn't wake up in time to feed the animals. But after all, nobody can go without sleep night after night. So he hit on an idea.

Wu Teh-tsu: "That's my Dad's horse, and that's yours. Now they're both in our co-op."

Every night before turning in he used to drink water like a fish, so he just had to get up several times! However, later on he found a still better method. Can you guess?"

But she didn't wait for me to say anything. "You've already heard about his visit to Taiyuan this spring. When he wanted to come back, his son and daughter-in-law were going to load him with presents. The only thing he'd take was his son's alarm clock. It fascinated him because it could wake him up any time he wanted. 'I've mechanized,' was the way he put it when he came back to our co-op."

I laughed and said: "That Uncle Chao really is a fascinating character."

"In more ways than one," said Chang. "But you ought to see him at work."

The third day after my arrival, I took the co-op chairman's advice and went to see Uncle Chao at work in the afternoon. As I stepped into the yard, there he was carrying a basket of feed into the stables; the animals started braying and mooing the moment they saw him.

"Now behave yourselves!" Uncle Chao admonished them. "You'll all get your whack, so it's no good bellowing."

I swallowed a laugh and went along to watch.

Uncle Chao fed the animals one after another, talking to them the whole time. Patting a big ox with a broken horn lovingly on the head, he said,

"You must be tired, my One-Horn-Dragon. Three *mou* of land in a single morning! If only the others were as hard-working as you!"

Suddenly the donkey in the next stall stretched his neck and began to wolf the ox's feed. Uncle Chao pushed him back into place, and wagging an admonitory finger, shouted:

"You're always trying to get things the easy way! I keep on telling you, but I might as well speak to a wall! If you don't improve. . . ."

I couldn't help laughing. Uncle Chao turned to me and said, quite seriously,

"That donkey's a bloody loafer. He's backward. We only bought him this summer. He looks all right, but he's smart and tricky at heart. He never puts himself out pulling a plough or cart. When he works on the grind mill, all he thinks about is stealing something off it. At his rack, I have to keep him on the shortest possible tether, or he'll pinch his neighbours' feed after he has finished his."

Here Uncle Chao went out for more feed. Only then did I notice little labels on the racks with names like "Trouble-Maker," "Old Scholar," and "One-Horn-Dragon." Uncle Chao came up with another basketful of feed while I was still studying these labels.

"Do you give them these names?" I asked.

"Of course. If they haven't got names, it's difficult to know which is which," he replied, pitching the feed into a rack. "Animals are like humans in many ways. Everyone is different from the next." Pointing

to a black mule, he continued, "Take Old-Man-Virtue, for instance. He's so tame and decent he wouldn't kick, even if you took hold of his hind legs. Put him between the shafts, and a woman, a child even, can handle him. But God-of-Fire there, that grey mule, he's different altogether. Although he's energetic and hard-working, he kicks and bites when he is in a temper. If you don't look out, he'll even break loose and run off."

At this point, the grey mule started to bray.

"See, he doesn't like my criticism of him!" said Uncle Chao with a smile. And, turning to the mule, he added, "If you don't want to lose face before a guest, you'd better mend your ways!"

So he went on, describing the individual peculiarities of each animal with great gusto, as if they were a group of naughty children. The co-operative had put me up in a guest room. So whenever I was free, I went to see him at work, helping him while chatting. I found it was his practice to praise one of the animals and criticize another while feeding them. One nod or sound from the animals while he was talking sent him into ecstasies. "See, they understand me," he'd exclaim happily. "Knowing, they are!" After the feeding was over, when he was in a particularly mellow mood, he'd sing opera to them, accompanied by his assistant on the Chinese violin.

Once the accountant Hsiu-mei said to me jokingly, "Uncle Chao is in love with his animals." This was no exaggeration. They were in his thoughts all the time and he referred to them constantly, whether making a public speech or having a private talk. The only time he took off was for his own meals, otherwise he was busy with the animals, tending them, feeding and watering them with sedulous care. But his favourite of favourites was the mare Golden Queen.

Golden Queen was big and strong. Her coat really looked golden, glittering like yellow satin in the sunlight. Uncle Chao treated Golden Queen particularly well. He fed her at a separate rack for fear the other animals would upset a mare in foal. He didn't allow her to do any heavy work and, every time somebody took her out to the fields, Uncle Chao would remind him to be careful. The moment she got back, he would groom her till she shone.

One summer afternoon, Golden Queen had gone out to work in the wheat fields. All of a sudden, a southeasterly wind sprang up and the sky was overcast. Flashes of lightning were followed by roars of thunder that shook the windows. Uncle Chao was having a haircut and had got only halfway through when there was a heavy downpour of rain. Ignoring everything, he hurried to his own room and, grabbing a blanket from his bed, rushed out. He reached the wheat field in a twinkling and quickly spread the blanket over the mare. By the time they got home, Uncle Chao was soaked to the skin, but the mare was safe.

Uncle Chao was always jovial, as if he hadn't a care in the world. He talked and laughed easily, wherever he was. But woe betide anyone

who roused his righteous anger. I remember witnessing one of his outbursts during my two months' stay at the co-operative.

The autumn ploughing was coming to an end. One evening, Chang Ming-shan and I were discussing how best to assess the year's work when a row broke out in the stable yard, with people shouting at the top of their voices.

"Listen, that's Chao! Somebody must have got the wrong side of him. . . ."

Chang ran out and I followed. There was Uncle Chao, standing in the middle, holding the tether of One-Horn-Dragon, roaring and stamping with fury:

"Meant to kill him, didn't you? An ox is flesh and blood, not iron. How would you feel if I beat you like it?"

Uncle Chao's face was red with anger, the blue veins bulged out on his forehead.

"All right, kill me instead if you like," muttered his younger son who was squatting on the ground.

But that only added fuel to the fire. Pointing an accusing finger at his son, Uncle Chao shouted more vehemently than ever.

"Oh! You think you've a right to do what you did? The co-op'd go bankrupt in no time if everybody behaved like you! We'll see the chairman about it!"

Suddenly, Uncle Chao saw us. Pulling at One-Horn-Dragon he called out, "See how badly my son thrashed him!"

The ox was covered with sweat. Whipping marks were still visible on his back. He went on lowing softly, mild-eyed, his tongue licking the back of his protector's hand, as if appealing for justice.

Patting the animal on the head, Uncle Chao said very sadly, "What a cruel beating you got!"

We had to make detailed inquiries before we got to the heart of the matter. That afternoon, Uncle Chao's son Shu-yi had taken Dragon out to plough the sorghum fields. By sunset, there was still half a *mou* to do, so to save another trip the next day, he drove the ox hard to get done, plying the whip freely. The work was completed, but the ox was the worse for it. As soon as his son brought the ox back in this state, Uncle Chao had gone for him with a vengeance.

Now Uncle Chao turned to the co-op chairman and demanded that the case be taken up immediately.

"All right," grunted his son. "Have your own way. You can't send me to prison for that, though."

The son was usually very quiet and devoted to his work. But in a fit of anger, he could be awfully stubborn.

"If you're found guilty of cruelty to animals," retorted Chao, "you *can* be sent to prison!"

By now, their quarrel had drawn a crowd. Some tried to pacify the father, others criticized the son. Only after some neighbours had

dragged his son away did Uncle Chao regain his calm. But he insisted that the culprit be duly punished.

"Now, take it easy, Uncle Chao," said the chairman. "We'll take the matter up in the proper way so that it'll be a lesson to all of us."

It so happened that a co-op members' meeting was to be held that evening. Uncle Chao sat through it in gloomy silence. Many people stood up and criticized Shu-yi for his treatment of the ox and Shu-yi himself admitted he had been at fault. And there the matter rested.

When the meeting was over, Uncle Chao became his old cheerful, talkative self again.

"When you're angry, you're a completely different person," I said to him.

He agreed with a chuckle. "Yes. Just can't control myself, as if I'd had a drop too much."

Two days before I left the co-op, I was told that Golden Queen would foal that afternoon. I hurried to the stable yard where a big crowd had already gathered. A layer of fresh, dry hay had been spread on the stable ground. Golden Queen stood there stock-still, milk oozing from time to time from her teats. Uncle Chao was in a great bustle, beads of sweat all over his forehead, now running for a pair of scissors, now ordering his assistant to prepare some rice soup for the mare.

Everybody was excited. But evening came, and there was still no sign of the foal. We began to worry. Uncle Chao kept silent, his brows puckered. Now and again, he touched the mare's belly. She was trembling incessantly and wouldn't take any feed.

Another two or three hours went by and it grew quite late. People went their separate ways and only Uncle Chao, Chang Ming-shan and a few others were left in the yard, worried, silent and unhappy. Uncle Chao, I could well understand, was the most upset of all. His eyes seemed burning with anxiety and he trembled involuntarily, as if in sympathy with the mare's shivers.

Peasants in that locality usually put their mares to stud in spring. But Uncle Chao made Golden Queen an exception. He learnt that there was an expert in a village thirty *li* away, who put mares to stud in autumn. Uncle Chao confirmed this by a visit to the man, then insisted on trying it out. If the mare foaled again, it would mean extra income for the co-operative. Some members were opposed to the idea but the board of directors supported him. So far, the experiment had been a success. But now, right at the end, there seemed to be difficulties.

Another couple of anxious hours crept by. I felt sleepy and went to bed, but got up again at midnight and went back to the stable yard. The mare had lain down. Uncle Chao squatted in front of her, with a hurricane lamp.

"No sign yet?" I asked.

Uncle Chao looked up at me gloomily without speaking. I didn't

know what to say, either. After standing there for a few minutes, I walked back to my room.

About dawn, when I was in sound sleep, some one burst into my room and pulled the bedclothes off me. When I opened my eyes, Uncle Chao stood before me, deliriously happy. "Old Ma," he shouted at me, "get up quick! The mare's foaled at last!" The words were hardly out of his mouth when he rushed out again. I got up and hurried into my clothes. When I reached the stable yard, people were standing in a ring around the mare, talking delightedly. Golden Queen was leisurely drinking her rice soup. A red colt, with Uncle Chao's cotton-padded jacket draped over its back, lay close by her side, rolling its big dark eyes at the crowd.

Uncle Chao was as happy as a small boy, singing and jumping around all the time.

On the morning of my departure, I dropped in to say goodbye to Uncle Chao. He was shaving before a cracked mirror. Smiling I said, "Uncle Chao, you're growing younger every day!"

"If I don't posh myself up," he said, laughing heartily, "my old woman might turn me out!"

Putting the razor away, he suddenly asked, "Old Ma, do they have medicine in the Soviet Union that can make old people young again?"

I was disconcerted for a moment, for I knew nothing about it. I tried to pass the whole thing off by saying, "You're not old, anyway. In spirit you're a proper boy."

"How wonderful if I were twenty years younger! Old Ma, do you think I'll live to see a socialist society in China with my own eyes?"

"Of course," I answered without thinking.

"Maybe I can, too," he said. After a pause, he continued, partly to me and partly to himself, "If we work harder, perhaps we can see it sooner. . . ."

Suddenly he gave a start as he heard the animals braying and lowing in the stable. "They are crying for fresh air," he murmured. "I must see to them." Then turning to me, he added, "Sorry, Old Ma, I must leave you."

He rushed out without finishing his shaving, completely absorbed in thoughts of his cattle. I remained standing by the window for a while, looking out. The animals were now out in the yard. Uncle Chao, patting and talking to them in a language I could hardly understand, was smiling. . . . I knew what he felt.

Two Sketches

CHIN CHAO-YANG

WHEAT

The chairman of the village agricultural producers' co-operative and Wang, the district chief, conducted the visitors to the field. Lining up along its edge, the visitors stared, their faces masks of astonishment. For a long time no one spoke. The crop of wheat had struck them all speechless.

Indeed, this was wonderful wheat. Bending down, you could see that its stalks were thick and short, growing so dense there was hardly any space between them. The wheat ears were big and long, uniform in size, their beards a dazzling yellow colour, giving the field the appearance of a great fleecy carpet of gold. And when you stood erect again, the ears of wheat completely obscured the stalks below them, to say nothing of the ground on which they grew. It looked for all the world as though the wheat ears had been heaped on the field and spread out to dry in the sun.

"This isn't wheat, it's a granary!" someone muttered at last. The remark set off a torrent of comments.

"It's not a granary, it's growing gold!"

"How much do you think they'll harvest on these three *mou*?"

"At least six hundred catties per *mou*. Three sixes will be one thousand eight hundred—"

"Six hundred? I wouldn't be surprised if they got seven!"

"Comrade co-op chairman, what do you yourselves think you'll harvest?"

The co-op chairman rubbed his short beard and laughed. Suppressing the excitement he felt within him, he answered slowly in a voice held low.

"We were figuring eight hundred to the *mou*. But some of our members didn't have much faith in the idea at first and didn't want to put too much work into this plot of ground. We hoed one time less than we should have. Then there was that hailstorm. . . . I don't think we'll get more than seven hundred fifty catties per *mou*. . . ."

"Well I'll be—!" a man cried softly, sticking his tongue out in amazement.

The others fell silent and squinted closely at the wheat, but whether in tacit acceptance of the co-op chairman's statement or in disbelief, it was difficult to say. Some found looking at the waving wheat and into the sunlight at the same time too much of an eyestrain, and they walked around to the opposite side of the field. One sceptic, a mutual-aid team leader from a neighboring village, walked off to the field's other end and bent low over the wheat. Then he dropped to the ground on all fours. After a considerable time, he finally rose and came slowly back, nodding his head wisely.

"Well, did you find anything wrong?" someone asked him.

"Huh," he retorted. "The old-timers have taught us to leave room for fresh air to blow through our crops. But look at this wheat. It's planted so close, it's sweating!"

"I think you need a little fresh air to blow through your brain," teased the first man.

But the mutual-aid farmer wasn't listening. He was again bent over, measuring with hand spans the width of the furrows.

Farmers from surrounding fields left their work and gathered in the open stretch between the experimental plot and the river. They were local villagers and had seen the plot countless times. But today, noticing the visitors who had arrived from all over the district, and hearing that the co-op chairman planned to cut the wheat the next day, they were crowding around to enjoy one last look.

The hum of conversation rose warm and noisy. . . .

From the road came an old man with a manure basket on his back. Apparently he was in a great hurry about something. At the edge of the field, he flung his basket and pitchfork down, then ploughed through the crowd and seized the co-op chairman by the arm.

"I have to talk to you!" shouted the old man.

"What's wrong?" The co-op chairman was startled.

"Although this is my land, I've invested it in the co-op, and the co-op has planted it with wheat. So I have to ask you—will you or won't you let me pick a few ears?"

The old man's name was Li. At first, when the co-op decided to experiment with close-planted high-quality wheat on his plot, although his son agreed, he himself was opposed. He and his son nearly had a quarrel about it. The sprouts came up somewhat slower than on other plots, and he scoffed, "Get eight hundred catties to the *mou*? Sure, you can even get eight thousand—if you salt your harvest with sand!" He

passed the field every day with his manure basket, and it never looked right to him. With the coming of spring, the sprouts gradually pushed up. "Planting them so close together," snorted the old man. "It'll be a miracle if they don't rot. We'll be left with nothing to eat but stubble!" But after the wheat put out ears, and the co-op gave it a dose of good fertilizer, when the old man again compared it with wheat elsewhere, he had nothing to say. From then on, he spent hours in the field, looking at the crop in a daze. "He stands there like a scarecrow," people joked. "He never moves a muscle!" But what was the old man thinking all this time? No one really knew.

Now he had attracted everyone's attention. All eyes were on him and the chairman of the co-op.

"Old uncle," asked the latter, "what are you going to do with a couple of ears of wheat?"

"What'll I do with them?" The old man's glance swept the people around him. He seemed to be putting the question up to them. "I decided about this long ago. I want to take a few ears of this wheat and keep them. When I die, I want my son to put them in the coffin with me, over my heart."

"Uncle, you're getting me all confused!" The co-op chairman looked around at the others with a smile.

"Why can't you understand!" shouted the old man angrily. "Don't you know how I lived all my life? I've got five in my family, and just this small piece of land. Every year, the most we ever harvested was forty or fifty catties to the *mou*. 'Poor'—that's what you call 'poor'! Poor, poor, I was so ground down by being poor I never believed there was so much strength in the soil, that so much could grow out of it!"

He faced around toward the crowd, then looked at district chief Wang. He raised his voice as though making a speech.

"During the war with Japan, the government called on us to organize and increase our output. I didn't think it could be done. But after we organized, I kept getting bigger harvests every year—up to a hundred catties per *mou*. After liberation, I reached a hundred and fifty. This mountain land of ours isn't as good as the land on the plain, I thought to myself. I'm getting the limit out of it now, I can't squeeze any more! . . . But look at this! Why, why, you call this wheat? It's a grain mine, it's pure gold! I had been hoping for years I could stop being poor. But today, that day has already come! When I lie in my coffin, I want a few wheat ears on my chest. Then, when my soul awakes and feels them there, I'll be able to rest peaceful and happy. It'll mean I've died owning gold, and my children and grandchildren will never be poor!"

The old man wiped his eyes with the back of a trembling hand.

Everyone was watching him. His tears brought moisture to the eyes of some of the older men, but the young people were smiling.

"Aiya, old uncle!" The co-op chairman stepped back a pace, shaking his big hands downward, as though discarding something unclean. "You

ought to be thinking about living, not dying. You've got many years ahead of you. If the old lady heard you talking like this, she'd tell you a thing or two! You're really the limit! . . ."

The co-op chairman was used to looking forward. No matter what problems developed, he'd stick out his chin and promise, "We'll find a way!" Like last year, when the campaign started to produce more wheat, people said, "We've been increasing our output ever since the war with Japan. How can we raise it any more?" Again he had replied, "We'll find a way!" But actually at the time he had no plan to offer. He was worried and sleepless. That was when district chief Wang came to the village.

Wang had been even more worried about this problem than the co-op chairman, and had applied for and obtained permission to take a short course on the subject in the government agricultural school. Then he came to the village and announced—output could be raised, poverty could be beaten. With the help of the co-op chairman, he taught all the village farmers how to obtain an increase of one hundred catties per *mou*; three *mou* of the co-op's land were set aside for an attempt at a super-high yield.

The plan was announced and the wheat was planted, but was the co-op chairman one hundred per cent sure of himself? He had faith in the administration, and that the future would be better than the present. He hoped that the high-yield plan would succeed. But deep in his heart he was very concerned about those three *mou* of wheat land. And hearing the dire forebodings of people like old man Li did nothing to increase his optimism. Several times, he got up in the middle of the night and stole out with a ruler to measure the height of the stalks. A month ago, the night of the big rain and hailstorm, he went to the field three times. The third time it was already dawn, and he met district chief Wang coming from the highway. Wang was soaking wet, having sloshed seven miles through the dark in the heavy rain. The two men walked together to the experimental plot. Both were delighted by the sturdy power of resistance the wheat had demonstrated in the storm.

Now the co-op chairman wanted to impart some of his feeling of triumph and joy to the old man. "Old uncle, you shouldn't see things so narrowly," he began.

District chief Wang interrupted. Stepping up to Li, he asked, "How old are you this year, old uncle?"

"Sixty-two," replied Li, indicating with his fingers.

"You can easily live another ten years. You're going to see some very good times!" said Wang, smiling. He took the old man's hand and shook it hard. He liked Li, and was cheered by his own optimism.

A peal of hearty laughter burst from the co-op chairman. This is what he had been wanting to tell the old man.

"In another ten years if our co-op doesn't average more than 1,000 catties per *mou* I'll be very much surprised!"

"Over a thousand catties? Is that what you're saying?" Hastily dropping the district chief's hand, the old man hopped over to the co-op chairman and stared at him.

"That's what I'm saying!" retorted the co-op chairman, straightening up and slapping his chest. He was more than hopeful—he was determined.

"Ha, ha!" chortled the old man, flinging his hands wide. "Then you'll have to wrap a mat barrier around each field. Otherwise the grain will all spill out! My, oh my! Heh, heh, heh, heh. . . ." Squinting up at the sky, the old man laughed with all his heart. "Aiya, aiya, if I can only live to see that day!"

"Old uncle," the chairman of the co-op deliberately assumed a serious expression. "Let me ask you—do you or don't you believe all our village farms will average an increase of a hundred catties to the *mou* this year?"

The old man's eyes roved over the field. He too became serious.

"From the looks of this wheat—yes."

"In the future—let's not say a hundred—suppose we increase fifty catties a year? If we add that to what we're getting already, won't that be over a thousand catties in ten years?"

Old Li was thunderstruck. He looked at the people around him. They were smiling at him. He looked at the district chief. The district chief was smiling at him too. The old man stared again at the wheat on all sides.

Li's face grew solemn; again his eyes were damp. Finally, he turned to the co-op chairman and said in a trembling voice:

"I'm not going to talk about death any more. I want to live another ten years! But even so, I still must ask you for a few ears of this wheat."

"What do you want them for?" The co-op chairman's eyes were round.

"What for?" The old man shot a glance at district chief Wang. "I want to take them home and wrap them in red paper. Outside I'm going to write the year and the month, how much we raised per *mou*, how we did it. . . . And how I didn't believe we could do it at first, and how later. . . . I want my children and my grandchildren to know . . . when it was that people stopped being poor!"

As he pronounced the last two sentences, the old man lifted his face to the sky. There was great fervor in his tone.

"Ha, now you're talking!"

"Every one of our villages will be getting big wheat harvests this year. They all ought to keep souvenirs like that."

"We ought to make a little packet at each harvest and write the record on the outside. Then, in years to come. . . ."

All the visitors were talking at once.

Suddenly, a middle-aged woman clambered on top of a big boulder.

"I have a suggestion," she shouted. "All of us here are leaders of

co-ops and mutual-aid teams. Why doesn't each of us take home three ears to remember this crop by? What do you say?"

"Fine! Agreed!" cheered the visitors. Several of them applauded.

"Maybe the co-op chairman won't have the heart to part with so many!" someone yelled with a laugh.

It was in fact a bit of a wrench for the chairman of the co-op to consent. Not that he minded the few ears of wheat, yet he hated to have the weight of the crop diminished even a little at harvest.

Wang felt differently about it. He thought this would be excellent publicity, what's more, it started him thinking that they ought to hold an all-district exhibition of rich harvest samples in the autumn.

"I agree with the lady," called Wang. "But don't anyone take more than three ears. Too many will affect the harvest figures."

His joy heightened by everyone's enthusiasm, old man Li began to clown, picking ears with exaggerated gestures and sticking them in his mouth, after holding each one up to the sun. When his face was nearly covered by the dancing ears of wheat, and only his white eyebrows and a pair of gay flashing eyes remained visible, he straightened up. He pushed through the crowd, then, poking out his abdomen like a fat landlord, he walked bowlegged with crooked arms. Swaying his shoulders, he moved ponderously, step by step, to the other side of the field. There he picked up his manure fork and basket, waved them gaily, and strolled off toward the village.

The people rocked with laughter. And their laughter and the sound of the wheat rustling in the breeze blended into a harvest paean.

District chief Wang was deeply stirred. All you have to do is work for the people sincerely, he mused, and they'll give you a return of immense happiness and encouragement! . . . He turned to see the co-op chairman, a big smile on his face, looking off into the distance. From the way the chairman's face muscles were moving, Wang guessed he must be experiencing the same emotions.

THE OLD SHEPHERD

Feng Chang-fu, the old shepherd, drove his flock to a shady spot, out of the heat, then sat down and rested his back against a boulder. It was noon, and the powerful rays of the summer sun glaring down on the mountains and valleys forced his old eyes closed to two mere slits. "Hola, hola, hola . . ." he kept mumbling, slowly turning his head from one side to the other, as though talking to the sheep. Actually, he was admiring the beauty of the brilliant mountain scene.

The mountains—they were his whole world. In his eyes, the moun-

tains were not lifeless—they had character, emotions. Sometimes they were as peaceful as a placid lake in the night; sometimes they went mad with rage. Sometimes they smiled like early morning clouds; sometimes they pulled long dark faces. Depending on the hour of the day, on the wind or snow, clear weather or rain that came with the different seasons of the year, the mountains were constantly changing their expressions. There were also times when old Feng—perhaps tired from talking too much to the sheep, or baked lazy by the summer sun, or soothed into languor by the soft spring breeze—there were times when he thought and saw nothing at all. Then he felt himself blended into one with his flock, like a light floating cloud. And when he would wake with a start, before his eyes could focus again, in the glittering sunlight all the mountains, far and near, seemed translucent, made of glass.

It was in just such a dreamy state that the old man now sat. After he had been muttering "hola" for no one knows how long, he suddenly awoke. Peering off into the distance, he could see two men at the foot of the mountain climbing towards him. They looked like tiny white insects moving shakily up the path. Who could they be? Was the agricultural producers' co-op sending him flour? No, they had done that only yesterday. . . .

The old man got to his feet and walked a few paces down the slope. His sheep, at once bleating and baaing, all ran after him. The old man turned around. "Oho, oho!" he commanded sharply, then again faced the down-slope to stare towards the approaching men.

But when they reached halfway up the mountain, the men stopped to talk with another shepherd—young Li Ken-erh.

"Mm, so it's the infant they're looking for. . . ." The old man was disappointed. In the silent mountain vastness, how often he wished someone would come and talk with him!

But the two men had come seeking that baby Li Ken-erh. What about? Could something have gone wrong in the boy's home? . . .

He went back to his boulder and sat down again. There was an inexpressible loneliness in his heart. He closed his eyes. In a little while, he dozed off. . . .

Suddenly, he was aware that someone was shaking his shoulder. He opened his eyes, and there was a man standing before him. Of medium height, with an honest face, the man was wearing a shirt and trousers of coarse white cloth, both soaked through with perspiration. On his head was an old straw hat. The man smiled.

"Sleeping, old uncle?"

Who is he? I've never seen him before, thought the old man. His eyes fastened on the small red notebook and the black fountain pen showing at the top of the man's breast pocket. He couldn't figure out what sort of person this was, nor did he know how to answer him. The wrinkles on the old man's face moved into what he hoped was a pleasant smile. But it didn't quite succeed.

The visitor sat down on a stone opposite Feng and clasped his hands around his knees, as though wanting to chat. Then the old man noticed that his sheep had scattered. He put one hand on the boulder behind him to raise himself, when the visitor leaped up, took the long whip from Feng's hand, and raced around the sheep like an expert. "Oho!" he cried. Excited into action, the three big sheep dogs went bounding along the perimeter of the flock. In a trice, as though in response to an order, the two hundred sheep were tightly bunched and grazing in a cool shady spot. The man came trotting back, handed the whip to the old shepherd and again sat down, wiping the sweat from his face with a handkerchief.

"Looks like you've handled sheep before." Feng Chang-fu was delighted.

The visitor laughed. "I did when I was small."

"How old were you then?"

"From the time I was thirteen until I was fifteen. Two years."

"Ha, I started at thirteen too. That's fifty years ago."

"Old uncle," the man leaned closer and spoke in a loud voice. "I hear you've got a lot of experience with sheep, and I've come up here specially to learn from you."

"To learn from me?" This time the old man really smiled.

"Uncle, did you know that in our Seventh District alone we lost more than five hundred sheep between last winter and this spring? Over eighty of them were in your Shuimen village flocks. That's a very big loss! What I want to learn from you is how to take good care of sheep, how to make sheep raising in our part of the country develop fast."

"You're from the government? The district or the county?"

"District."

"Where are you coming from today?"

"I went to Shuimen from the village of General's Tomb. . . ."

"Why you've come miles! Just from Shuimen to here is a couple of miles of steep mountain paths!" The old man's enthusiasm rose. His eyes, reddened by the mountain winds, stared larger, his voice climbed in pitch.

"You want me to talk about sheep, eh? All right. I don't know about other villages, but I do know how things are with us. Take that young fellow you stopped to talk to on the mountain side—Li Ken-erh. Last year after the snow I looked over his flock. I could see that some of his sheep were going bad. 'You're ruining those sheep,' I said to him. 'You'll be eating mutton soon!' He didn't like to hear that. He just walked away. Later he told people, 'Feng Chang-fu is blowing his own horn again. How can he tell if sheep are going bad?'" The old man shook his head.

"Then guess what happened. In less than a month, thirty sheep died on him, one after the other. He felt he had let the agricultural producers' co-op down, and he cried! He knew I was right. He asked me how I could tell. Can you guess how I do it? After it snows, the flock gets

cold and the sheep all bunch together. If you don't keep them moving in the fold, they get too warm and damp. It's easy for them to catch a chill in their lungs. When they've got it bad, their body fleece shines. . . ."

The old man could see the visitor scribbling rapidly in the red notebook. Feng Chang-fu's enthusiasm mounted as he talked, so much so that he failed to observe the arrival of the Communist Party secretary of the village of Shuimen. The secretary stood looking at him with a smile, his head cocked to one side as he wiped the perspiration from his neck.

With a forced cough, the secretary broke in on the old man's flow of words.

"Uncle," he said loudly, "you're really pouring out all your secrets this time! But do you know who this comrade is that you've been talking to so long?"

"No. Who is he?" The old man edged closer, squinting to get a better look at the smiling comrade with the notebook.

"He's district chief Wang, also serving as deputy magistrate of our county!"

"You're district chief Wang! Today's so hot, and you've come all that distance over the mountains just to see me!"

The old man stood up quickly. His whole countenance wrinkled in a network of smiles, he leaned so close to Wang that his beard almost brushed the chief's face. Still not satisfied with his view of Wang, the old man circled around him.

"Using that method you told us, our co-op harvested over 750 catties of wheat to the *mou*!"

The old man's hands were trembling, his beard was shaking; there was a drunken shine in his eyes.

"Old uncle," Wang put a hand on the shepherd's shoulder, "just think. Suppose the wheat harvest in our whole district, in our whole county, in the entire province, all over the country—could reach a thousand catties to the *mou*. How would that be for a harvest?"

"Wonderful, of course!" The old man stamped emphatically. But he found the abrupt question rather confusing..

"Now suppose all the lambs born in our district and county, and so on—suppose they all lived, and none of them ever got sick. In four or five years, in nine or ten years—just think how much our flocks would increase!"

"Why, why, we wouldn't be able to count them all!"

"So that if we got big harvests and our flocks grew quickly, the people would have a much better living, wouldn't they?"

"But—but can we do those things?" Staring at Wang, the old man spoke very low, as though not wanting to frighten himself with his own question.

The district chief removed his hand from the shepherd's shoulder. He pushed the wide-brimmed straw hat off his head so that it hung on

his back from the chin string around his neck. His shaven pate glistened damp and hot. Wang looked at Feng's sheep, then he laughed quietly.

"Old uncle, how many sheep did you have in this flock last winter?"

"One hundred and ninety-eight," the old man enunciated syllable by syllable.

"How many do you have now?"

"Two hundred eighty-six."

"How did they get to be so many?"

"Everybody knows that. The big sheep bore little sheep—"

"From last year to this, not one of them died?"

"Not one."

"Well, old uncle, what I'm trying to find out from you is—how do you do it?"

The old man stood frozen, his toothless mouth open, his red-rimmed eyes round and staring. The words of the district chief had brought him to a world he had never seen before.

"Ha!" The shepherd suddenly slapped his hands down sharply against his thighs.

After a silence, he again scrutinized the face of the district chief. "Can you get all the shepherds to learn my methods?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes!" Wang stepped forward confidently and grasped the old man's trembling hands. "You know, old uncle, you're a very remarkable person!"

Feng Chang-fu made no response, and Wang continued, "In a few days the district government is going to call a meeting of representatives of all the shepherds in the district. We want to invite you to give a report telling about your experience in sheep raising. After that, we'd like you to do the same thing at a county-wide conference of shepherds' representatives."

"Ah, a useless old bird like me at the same meeting with the county leaders? I can't do anything big."

"Why can't you, uncle? When you tell your experience to the representatives at the county meeting, won't that be a big thing?"

The district chief said some other things too, but the old man couldn't hear him clearly. His mind was in a whirl. He could only fix his eyes on the village Party secretary, as though trying to read from his expression whether all this was real. He could see that the secretary's lips were moving too, but old Feng couldn't make out what he was saying either.

The mountains, the sheep—all blurred into a misty cloud. The two men in front of him were walking through the cloud and going down the slope.

The eyes of the old man were filled with tears.

Ah, how the world had changed! . . . From the time he was thirteen, he had herded sheep for the landlord. The landlord ate fine white

flour noodles; he ate cakes of crude bran. In winter, the landlord lived in a room with a coal fire; but when Feng crept into the kitchen to warm himself, the landlord said he was a dirty shepherd pauper who ought to stay with the flock instead of coming into the house, and kicked him out. In summer, he spent three or four months at a time on the mountain without ever coming down. He slept in caves. He was very young and frightened, and used to cry half the night. The food the landlord sent to him he ate sometimes cooked, sometimes raw. He was afraid of wolves, afraid of panthers. Many times he climbed up into trees and rested there. When it rained, he was afraid the torrents might wash the sheep away. He drove them to the mountain top where thunder crashed above his head, rain pelted him breathless. . . .

From one end of the year to the next, no one ever said a word to him. Everyone ignored him, no one was dear to him. Only with the sheep could he be affectionate. He gave them nicknames—"Toughy," "Old Lady," "Little Fellow". . . . He called to them, talked to them, scolded, laughed at them, loved them, put his whole heart into them. . . . But he was a human being, not a sheep. He wanted to be with other people, to speak and act like a normal person. . . .

Then came liberation; but he felt he was old, useless. In the valley —that was the world of people. There people sang and chatted. Dust rose on the road, smoke rose from the chimneys. What a good world! But he? He was still on the mountain. . . .

And now—who would have believed it? Who would have thought that he still could be of some use? That he could go to the world of people and show his face! . . . Old Feng sat down with his back against the rock, lost in thought.

Suddenly, he remembered something very important he had to tell district chief Wang. He jumped to his feet and raced down the slope, calling:

"Li Ken—erh! Li Ken—erh!"

His voice echoed ringing back from the valley. The sheep and the sheep dogs all went tearing after him.

"Yi—!" Further down the mountain, young Li responded in a high clear tone.

By the time the old man reached the boy's flock, he was breathing hard.

"Look after my sheep tonight," he shouted. "I've got to go down the mountain."

"What for?" The old man looked a little queer to Li.

"I've got to do something!"

"Did the secretary ask you to go?"

"Yes."

"It must be that they're going to criticize you." The boy suddenly thought he understood. He laughed.

"Criticize me for what?"

The boy waved his whip. He sounded rather aggrieved.

"Didn't you see him a little while ago? I complained to him the minute he came. I said closing off all these mountains around here to grazing, and planting saplings on them, was making it too hard on us shepherds. 'Those trees will benefit everyone living in the mountain region,' he said. 'Besides, we haven't closed off all the near places, only some. The reason we tell you to graze further away in summer is because the grass out there is better. The sheep will grow fat and they'll earn more for the co-op.' He criticized me—just like that. Weren't you against all this tree planting on the mountains too? . . ."

The old man didn't wait for Li to finish. He shoved his drover's whip into the boy's hand and glared at him.

"Will you watch my sheep for me one night or won't you?"

"Of course. A little thing like that. . . ." Young Li was a bit frightened by the old man's manner.

The two flocks had already automatically blended into one. The old man virtually flew down the slope.

Feng Chang-fu had travelled these few miles of mountain road for fifty years. His sheep had manured every inch of the twisting, bumpy, rocky path. He was so familiar with every rock and bramble lining the way that he usually looked at them without seeing. But today everything seemed fresh and new. That mountain there—how dazzling it was where the sun shone; and see the thin blue mist draping the side in the shade! The gurgling brooks, the pebbles beneath his old feet—were they singing or were they laughing? . . .

The sky gradually darkened. A haze of purple grey smoke from many kitchen stoves hung over the village as wives began cooking the evening meal. In twos and threes, men of the mutual-aid teams and of the agricultural producers' co-operative returned from the fields.

"Going home?" the old shepherd hailed a young fellow at the head of one group. "How many times did the co-op water those six *mou* of corn in the experimental plot?"

The young man had received some training in agricultural science at a government school and was now applying this knowledge in the co-op. In the past, Feng Chang-fu seldom spoke to the youngsters. There seemed to be a wall between him and them. They didn't understand one another and found conversation difficult. Although he was also a co-op member, yet he had looked at things differently from them. He had retained a little of the old concept of employer and hired hand, even regarding the co-operative. When the co-op called meetings, he often didn't attend.

"I'm just living from day to day," he used to say. "The meetings will get on whether I go or not. All I want is to stick to my sheep herding. Why should I bother with things like that?"

Now struck by his change of attitude, the others stopped and looked at him. "What brings you here today?" they asked.

"District chief Wang asked me to come—about a meeting I have to go to in a couple of days." The old man wanted to spill the whole story out at once.

"What meeting?"

"An all-district conference. He wants me to talk about my experience as a shepherd."

Satisfied with his explanation, and since the sky was already quite dark, the men merely nodded and hurried off toward the village. Feng Chang-fu followed behind them. As he entered the village, he saw two old women sweeping the millstone on which they had just finished grinding grain. He halted and asked them where the district chief was, then told them all about how Wang personally had climbed the high mountain to learn from him, Feng, and how the chief had invited him to attend the all-district conference of shepherds' representatives!

When he reached the street intersection in the center of the village, Feng again stopped to chat with several people who had brought their bowls and chopsticks out-of-doors to enjoy their meal in the cool of the evening. . . .

At last, he began to feel rather hungry, and groped through the dark to his own house. From a crockery jug he scooped out a handful of millet, then brought a ladleful of water from the stream that ran in front of his door. He lit some kindling in the stove and cooked a couple of bowls of gruel. As he was sipping the gruel, he heard someone shouting outside, summoning people to attend a meeting. The old man's heart began beating hard. He quickly put down his bowl and hurried out the door. After stumbling through the dark for some time, he finally discovered the meeting place in the primary school at the south end of the village.

The room was close with the smell of sweat and tobacco. Feng silently pushed his way in and sat down in a dark corner in the back. Someone was speaking.

At first, the old man felt very disturbed. He couldn't hear clearly what was being said. It seemed to be something about pear trees.

Suddenly, there was a burst of applause, then a noticeable hush fell on the meeting hall. It was so still you could hear the sound of people breathing. Feng Chang-fu became all attention. He sat up straighter and craned his neck, peering toward the front of the room. A young fellow stood beside the chairman's table, where a small oil lamp was burning. Ruddy-faced, short and stocky, he hung his head and smiled shyly as a bride, every once in a while gently clearing his throat. After squirming bashfully for several moments, the young man began to speak. He spoke so quietly that Feng Chang-fu listened very closely and thus heard every word.

"Dear friends, I really don't have anything special to say," smiled the young man. "As a Youth Leaguer, it's my duty to serve the people. . . ." Here, he blushed scarlet and rushed to the side of the room and sat down, to the accompaniment of applause and cheers.

When the people had quieted down again, district chief Wang made his appearance in the lamplight. He mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Comrades, neighbors," Wang's tone was serious. He spoke low and slowly. "Ho Chih-an is an honest young man, though extremely shy. I know him well. When he was a child, folks used to say he was a little slow-witted. His family thought he'd never amount to much. But now look at him. Is he slow-witted? Stupid? Useless? He's been educated by the Communist Party. He's putting his whole heart and mind into bringing a better life to everyone in the village. The government has called on us to build and improve small local irrigation systems. The device young Ho has invented is a big help. Because of it, we can irrigate another forty *mou* of land. . . . There are other examples in your village. Old uncle Feng Chang-fu, the shepherd, for instance. He's a very remarkable man. . . ."

The old shepherd started violently, and his ears rang so he could hear no more. By the time he recovered himself, district chief Wang was concluding his remarks.

". . . The further society advances, the more capable the working people become of doing big things. . . ."

Old Feng Chang-fu wasn't quite sure when he got up or how he walked out with the others, after the meeting was over. The cool night breeze, blowing against his brow, brought him the sudden realization that he had already reached the schoolyard gate.

"District chief Wang!" The old man hastened forward and grabbed Wang's arm. "I've come down from the mountain especially to see you. . . ."

"Ah, old uncle Feng!" Wang grasped his hand and shook it. "So you've come down!"

"I've come down from the mountain especially to see you," the old man repeated. "It's very important. Like you just said in there—you're asking me to do something very big! I've got to think it all out clearly first! There's nobody on the mountain I can talk this over with. When I go to that conference and have to get up and speak. . . ."

"You mean that meeting of shepherds' representatives?"

"Yes. I never spoke to a lot of people before! When the time comes, if I don't speak well, I'll only spoil things!"

"Old uncle, you're absolutely right. I'll stay at your house tonight, and we can talk."

As the old man led the district chief to his home beside the rushing stream, they could hear young voices singing in the distance.

The next morning before dawn, the old man started back for the mountain, more concerned about his flock now than ever. He had the feeling that even though he was old, life still stretched before him in a long broad highway.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The year 1954 marks the 200th anniversary of the death of the novelist Wu Ching-tzu and the 250th anniversary of the playwright Hung Sheng. Both lived at a time when the Manchu government cruelly oppressed the Chinese people and tried in every way to crush their resistance. Many patriotic intellectuals who sympathized with the people were persecuted for the ideas expressed in their writings: the author of *The Palace of Eternal Youth* is an example. Since these works exposed the corruption and depravity of the ruling class, their circulation was discouraged and sometimes even stopped. Only after the liberation of the Chinese people have these books received the wide acclaim they deserve, and it is fitting that the Union of Chinese Writers plans to make the commemoration of Wu Ching-tzu and Hung Sheng an impressive event this year. *The Lives of the Scholars* and *The Palace of Eternal Youth* are long books and, due to space limitations, we can carry only some parts from them in this issue. But complete translations of these two works are to be published in book form by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking.

In this issue, two essays will explain the content and historical background of these two works to our readers. *"The Palace of Eternal Youth" and Its Author* is written by the well-known contemporary playwright and stage director Hung Shen whose name is almost the same in pronunciation as that of the author of *The Palace of Eternal Youth,* although the written ideographs differ. This is merely a coincidence and does not mean that they are in any way related to each other. Hung Shen, the author of the essay on Hung Sheng, was born into the home of a needy intellectual in Kiangsu Province in the year 1894. Even before 1916, when his first play, *The Tragedy of Paupers,* appeared, he had been staging modern dramas. In the more than thirty years since then, he has never given up writing or staging plays. Now he is vice-president of the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries.

Wu Tsu-hsiang, author of the essay *The Realism of Wu Ching-tzu* is himself a well-known writer. He first attracted attention more than twenty years ago when he published his first story *One Thousand and Eight Hundred Piculs,* which mercilessly satirizes and exposes the feudal ruling class. Since then his field has been literary creation as well as research. He is now professor of Chinese literature in Peking University.

The author of *The Golden Khingan Mountains* is the Mongolian youth Punsek. The Mongolians were prey to oppression under the reactionary regime of former days and had little chance to receive an education. Punsek joined the Chinese People's Liberation Army in 1947 when his cultural level was no higher than that of a primary school graduate. But nurtured by the Chinese Communist Party he was able to develop not only an interest in literature, but also his own talent for writing.

China is now steadily advancing towards socialism. The backward mode of individual peasant production is gradually being replaced by relatively advanced collective modes of production, that is to say, producers' co-operatives of various types. In the course of this transformation, men's lives are also changing, as are their thoughts, their feelings and attitudes towards work. And it is not only young people who are changing, but old people as well. *Uncle Chao, the Stockman* and *Two Sketches* carried in this issue show what old people feel about the new life around them and about their work.

Ma Feng, author of *Uncle Chao, the Stockman,* was born in Shansi Province in 1922. At the age of fifteen, he entered an art school attached to the army at Yenan. Two years later, he was sent to anti-Japanese bases in Shansi and Suiyuan Provinces with groups that popularized literature and art among workers and peasants. At the same time, he worked as newspaper correspondent for the *Shansi-Suiyuan Daily* and *Masses Daily.* After that, he began his creative work. *The Heroes of the Luliang Mountains,* which he wrote in collaboration with Hsi Jung, is one of the novels that has won great popularity in New China; and readers have a high opinion of his short stories too.

Chin Chao-yang, author of *Two Sketches,* is not new to our readers. The first issue of our magazine this year carried his *Village Vignettes.*

The Sung Dynasty (A.D. 960-1279) was a great age in Chinese painting. The anonymous painting *On the Way Home* we are presenting here, although a small work, is quite perfect in its own way. A buffalo cow has just forded the stream and is struggling ashore. She looks back anxiously at her calf which is lagging behind on the other side of the stream; while the calf, stretching its neck, seems to be appealing to its mother for help. In this little sketch, we find both the realism and the deep humanism of Chinese classical painting.

The picture *Forest* is by Li Hsiung-tsai, a skilled brush painter. Born in Kwangtung Province thirty-nine years ago, he is now an associate professor at the South China People's College of Literature and Art.

A Yak Caravan is by Ai Yen, a well-known young artist, whose woodcuts are in the traditional Chinese style.

"That's my Dad's horse, and that's yours. Now they're both in our co-op." is by thirty-two-year-old Wu Teh-tsu, a native of Shensi. In 1939, Wu went to Yenan where he studied at the Lu Hsun Arts' Institute. Later, he became an active artist, working for drama groups, film studios and illustrated magazines.

INDEX

Nos. 1-4, 1954

NOVELS, STORIES

OPERA

FOLK SONGS

SKETCHES

ARTICLES

PLATES

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