

# CHINESE LITERATURE

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Two Short Stories by Yu Ta-fu:

Intoxicating Spring Nights

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Chronicle

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1957

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# CHINESE LITERATURE

QUARTERLY

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## SANLIWAN VILLAGE

Chao Shu-li

*Chao Shu-li is one of the most popular writers in China today, thanks to his simple language, lively plots and fresh, individual style. In Chinese Literature, No. 1, 1952, we presented his short story Registration. Of his earlier works, his short novels Rhymes of Li Yu-tsai (1943) and Changes in Li Village (1945) have been published in English by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking.*

*In 1951 Chao Shu-li went to Changchih in the province of Shansi, where some of the first agricultural producers' co-operatives in China were being set up as an experiment. He lived with the Shansi peasants for two years, and drew on his experiences there to write Sanliwan Village, starting the novel towards the end of 1953 and finishing it in the spring of 1955. First published in serial form in People's Literature, this book has been warmly received by Chinese readers and widely discussed by literary critics.*

*Sanliwan Village consists of thirty-four chapters in addition to its prologue "We Start with Flagstaff Compound." Owing to considerations of space we have selected twenty-four chapters only for this issue without, however, destroying the unity of the main plot.*

## *We Start with Flagstaff Compound*

At the south-east tip of Sanliwan Village are two connected courtyards known as Flagstaff Compound.

You won't find many flagstaffs like this nowadays, and some young folk may never have seen them. They're quite ~~simple~~ *really* — two slabs of stone to the right of the gate and two slabs of stone to the left, with a tall pole clamped between each two. Though ~~they're~~ *they're* called flagstaffs, they weren't really used for flags but just to ~~make~~ *make* the old landlords' houses look more imposing. It wasn't every landlord who could fix them up, though. You had to be a "provincial graduate"\* at least.

Sanliwan's provincial graduate was one of the Liu family, but no one knows how long ago he lived. Liu Lao-wu, who worked for the Japanese, did say the Liu family records showed that the provincial graduate came eleven generations before him. But no one else in the family had seen those records, and after Liu was seized and shot for helping the enemy no further interest was taken in the matter. Wang Hsing, now over sixty, heard his father say that all the houses for half a street near Flagstaff Compound used to belong to the Liu family. That must have been some sight! But now there is nothing to show that they ever produced a provincial graduate, except the tablet over the gate and stone slabs at either side.

Flagstaff Compound is the best building in Sanliwan. Before the anti-Japanese war there were several others just about as good, but they were all burnt during the enemy's "mopping-up campaign." Flagstaff Compound was left because the Japanese put up here each time they came to the village. That was why they didn't burn it even after old Liu was shot. After that — this happened in 1942 — the county government let the village take it over, and most of the rooms became offices — the village office, the local militia, the primary school, the peasants' night school, the reading room, the club, and the supply and marketing co-op all moved into these two courtyards. Only the back west room and both floors of the small house in the north-west corner of the back yard were made over to a woman in her sixties whose children were away all year working in government jobs outside. Because of her age and because she lives in the back, the young folk call her Backyard Granny.

Sanliwan is a model village. It was liberated early, and plenty of people here worked for the revolution, so they're a capable, experienced bunch. Whenever an important new job is given the county, they nearly always try it out first at Sanliwan. That's what they did with weeding out traitors, reduction of rents and rates of interest, land reform and mu-

\*One of the ranks in the old imperial civil service examinations.

tual aid, right down to 1951 when they tried out an agricultural producers' co-op. Before starting any new job, all sorts of local officials come here to pick up tips, so Sanliwan is used to putting up functionaries from outside. And because Backyard Granny has plenty of room, as well as a good temper, the village authorities generally send these visitors to her. She runs a sort of hostel for visiting officials.

The last few years, some of the rooms in Flagstaff Compound have changed hands. After the whole country was liberated, the militiamen stopped meeting so often and their office in the front east wing was often empty. So when the co-op was set up in 1951, they started borrowing it for meetings or to work out their accounts — in fact it turned into a sort of co-op office. But during the summer and autumn the militiamen still took it in turn to stand guard in the fields or at the threshing-floors, and since this was just the time when the co-op had to work out its members' shares, both sides wanted the place. Luckily the primary school and night school had holidays during the harvesting, so the militiamen could sleep in the classrooms for the time being. By 1952, however, the movement to wipe out illiteracy was going with such a swing and the county educational authorities were so impatient to finish the job that they made the mistake of forbidding holidays during the harvest. That meant another shortage of rooms, until the villagers decided to hold the literacy classes in the classrooms after supper, and then hand the place back to the militiamen.

### *1. The Holiday*

Straight after supper on September the first this year, Yu-mei, younger sister of the Party Secretary Wang Chin-sheng, went to the west classroom in Flagstaff Compound for her class. She was a model Youth Leaguer and one of the keenest in the movement to wipe out illiteracy. The first to arrive, she found the room pitch dark. But since she was always the earliest, she knew her way about. She knew the militiamen who were guarding the harvest kept all the tables against one wall to serve as beds, and all the stools by another wall, leaving a space between the windows and door. She knew the paraffin lamp and matches were kept on the window ledge by the militiamen's beds. She threaded her way successfully by memory to this window without bumping into a single desk or stool, struck a match and lit the lamp, then started to sort things out. Sturdy and quick on her feet, she whisked each table upside down to its place, set it lightly down and darted back for the next. She was dashing to and fro when she heard a call outside:

"Not bad, your acrobatics!"

She guessed without looking who it was.



"Why not come and help," she retorted, "instead of acting so high and mighty, Mr. Teacher!"

It was a lad called Ma Yu-yi, who wore a middle school uniform and hadn't cropped his hair like most of the peasants. The fourth son of Muddlehead Ma To-shou, he taught Class B in the village night school. Sanliwan had two teachers in the anti-illiteracy campaign: one was this lad, who had attended junior middle school for two and a half years but had not graduated; the other was Fan Ling-chih, daughter of the village head Fan Teng-kao, who had been young Ma's classmate and had just graduated from junior middle school this summer. She taught Class A. Since Yu-yi enjoyed Ling-chih and Yu-mei's company, he had slipped over to their classroom before his own students arrived; and now that his help was asked with the desks, he came in. But Yu-mei was moving so fast, he took care to keep out of her way to avoid a cracked skull.

"Better go and teach your phonetics!" she twitted him.

Soon they had all the tables and stools in place, and while Yu-mei cleaned the blackboard Yu-yi paced up and down by the window with nothing to do. When he strolled up to the light, he noticed how badly her name was scrawled on her exercise book.

"Say, Yu-mei! This *mei* of yours is lying on its back!"

She looked round to see what he meant.

"What can you do with a character that's so hard to write?" she demanded. "Written straight, it looks a mess. Slanting, it still looks a mess!"

She wrote a few *mei* for practice on the newly-cleaned board.

"See, Yu-yi! There's one written straight, and there's one on the slant."

"It doesn't have to slant so much! I'll show you how to write it."

He ran over to guide her hand and, sure enough, this *mei* was an improvement.

"Why use a name that's so hard to write?" he asked.

"You should talk! Your *yi* is much harder than my *mei*! Look at the length of it!"

"Let's see you write it."

Yu-mei laboriously traced an *yi*, about twice as long as her *mei*, which set the boy laughing.

"Just look how tall you've made me!"

"Well, you are tall."

"I may be tall, but you've made a mole-cricket out of me! Let me show you how to write it."

He was guiding Yu-mei's hand again when someone behind called out:

"So that's the way you teach! No wonder Yu-mei's come on so fast with her writing!"

When Yu-yi saw Ling-chih had arrived, he let go of Yu-mei's hand, and Yu-mei picked up a duster to rub out the *yi* which looked so like a



Shepherd Homeward Bound (51.5 cm × 69 cm)  
Painting in the traditional style by Yuan Hsiao-chen

mole-cricket. But Ling-chih had caught sight of the two names next to each other.

"You make a fine couple side by side," she chuckled. "Why rub it out?"

"What's funny about two characters side by side?" demanded Yu-mei. "Isn't it much more funny the way you two were classmates together and are now teachers together and in the same mutual-aid team?"

Before Ling-chih could answer, steps were heard outside and several students came in. Thereupon they changed the subject.

When there's work, it has to be done. Though they waited a long time, only five of Class A turned up and four of Class B. Finally losing patience, they went to the gate and climbed on the stone slabs to see if anyone was coming. Presently Yu-mei's cousin arrived, Wang Man-hsi, a young unmarried fellow known as Moody because his moods changed so fast you never knew where you were with him.

"That's all then!" said one young fellow.

"What do you mean by 'that's all'?" demanded the others.

"Five of Class A and five of Class B — five all!"

They laughed.

"Don't count me in!" cried Man-hsi. "I've come to ask to be excused."

"Haven't you had your supper again?" asked Yu-yi.

"I've not only had no supper — I've not started cooking it yet. In fact, I've not even had time to think of it."

"What's the rush?"

"I'm on duty today in the village. Section Chief Ho's here from regional headquarters. I've just taken him food, but I haven't found him a billet yet."

"What about Backyard Granny?" suggested Yu-mei.

"Full up!" replied Man-hsi. "The water conservancy survey team, Comrade Liu from the county committee, the deputy district head, old Liang the artist, and the team to reckon harvest work-points are all there, besides that health inspector and the insurance man. She's no room left. I've been running round the village calling on everyone with a room to spare, but at harvest time they're all chock-a-block."

"You can't have been everywhere!" put in Yu-mei. "I know a family with room to spare!"

"Which?"

"Yu-yi's. Have you been there?"

"Them! With all respects to Yu-yi, have they ever put anyone up? I don't want a dressing down from his ma!"

"Yu-yi!" exclaimed Yu-mei. "Can't you help out by going home and talking to her?"

"Not I! Don't you know my ma's temper?"

"Is that the way Youth Leaguers talk?" chided Ling-chih.



"If you make him go," said another lad, "I bet he won't finish three sentences before his ma stops his mouth with a string of cuss-words!"

"I've got an idea," announced Yu-mei after some thought. "Man-hsi! Go to Aunt Tien-cheng first to ask for the use of her west room. . . ."

"That's no use!" broke in Man-hsi. "That room's so packed with dried bean pods, dried egg-plant, tobacco, millet and peas . . . you can't even get your toe in!"

"Wait till I've finished!" said Yu-mei. "Asking for their west room is just a trick to make Aunt Tien-cheng find a place for you! Don't talk to her old man. Just call her out and tell her in confidence that an officer has come from the regional court to look into some lawsuit, but he can't find a room in the village so you want to borrow her west room. If she says she can't clear it, ask her to go to Yu-yi's ma to borrow their east room. I'm sure she'll get it for you without any trouble. Because. . . ."

"I know!" cried Man-hsi. "That'll do the trick! But Yu-yi mustn't warn his ma in advance."

"I won't," promised Yu-yi. "Still, she's bound to find out later."

"Once the man is in, all she can do is scold. Hard words never broke any bones." Saying this, Man-hsi left.

When there's work, it has to be done. The nine of them waited and waited, but still no one came. Man-hsi had at least asked for leave, but the others didn't even do that—they just stayed away.

"That rule the county made was a bit narrow," remarked one student. "They forbade the teachers to ask for leave, forgetting that the students might play truant!"

More footsteps sounded, west of Flagstaff Compound.

"They're coming!" cried Yu-mei. "Quite a crowd this time!"

Sure enough, a number of people came into view from behind the house on the west and headed for their gate. The first was Wang Chin-sheng, secretary of the local Party branch and deputy head of the co-op. Just behind him came the deputy village head Chang Yung-ching, the leader of the production team Wei Chan-kuei, the co-op head Chang Loyi and the woman deputy head Chin Hsiao-feng. There wasn't a student among them—only village and co-op officials.

"It's no use waiting," announced Ling-chih. "No class again today. We may as well go."

They started leaving. Two of the students were militiamen whose turn it was for duty, so they went to the classroom to move back all the tables which had just been put out.

"Can't we have a few days' holiday?" Ling-chih asked Chang Yung-ching.

"They've all stayed away of their own accord—isn't that the same as a holiday?"

## 2. The Handy Man

Leaving Flagstaff Compound, Yu-mei walked west down the street, and after a short climb reached her own door. Her home was at the foot of the west hill, so the gate faced east. The courtyard was rectangular. Four caves had been hollowed out in the cliff, but the front of each cave was of brick, and inside was brick-lined too. The small side wing, formerly a stable, had been empty after their donkey was taken to the co-op this spring until recently when Yu-mei's second brother and his wife set up on their own and started cooking here. Opposite this were three rooms, used as the offices. There was a shed on each side of the gate, too small to live in, but handy for storing grain, tools or furniture. The southernmost cave, South Cave, was where Yu-sheng lived with his wife Hsiao-chun. Next came Middle Cave, used by Chin-sheng, his wife and children. Then North Cave, where the old folk lived. And last of all Inside Cave, with only one big window, which you entered by a small door in North Cave. This was Yu-mei's room.

As she drew near the gate, Yu-mei heard a clanging—*ti-tung-ti-tung*, and guessed that her father and younger brother Yu-sheng were forging iron. Once in the yard she was sure of it, for she saw intermittent flashes from the kitchen window. She went in to watch the fun. Yu-sheng was not among the five people in the room, but her uncle Wang Shen was there, helping her father. And her elder brother Chin-sheng's three children were there: seven-year-old Ching-miao, the girl, and the two boys, Li-ming and Ta-sheng, aged five and three.

The two old fellows were among the best workers in Sanliwan. Yu-mei's father Wan Pao-chuan was known as the Handy Man. As a lad he had worked for Liu Lao-wu, and learned to drive a mule and look after an orchard; and though he was never apprenticed to any trade, he could make shift as a carpenter, smith or mason. Wang Shen was about as clever with his hands and head as the Handy Man, but he was a fairly well-to-do peasant. His father and grandfather before him had owned fifteen *mou* of land, never more, never less, and he still had that fifteen *mou*. A hard worker and a skilled one, he disliked having to team up with anyone else, though he had to hire one or two hands in the busiest season. Since he always touched up anybody else's handiwork, grumbling as he did so, "No good! No good!" his nickname was No Good.

The only worker No Good respected in Sanliwan was the Handy Man, and vice versa.

So when any job turned up that called for skill, they usually tackled it together.

They both knew the value of good tools. "When the tools are poor," said the Handy Man, "I feel like pitching them over the wall." And whenever No Good used borrowed gear, he kept muttering, "No good! No

good!" Neither of them had all a jobbing workman's tools, but they were adepts at making do. To forge this iron, for instance, the Handy Man had four pieces of makeshift equipment: for bellows he used the small kitchen bellows, for furnace an old iron pan caulked with mud, for anvil a sawn-off tree stump covered with a big, flat metal weight, and for hammer an axe—which was what caused the *ti-tung-ti-tung* sound instead of the usual *ding-dong*. These makeshifts might look poor stuff, but they worked all right.

They were forging some of the drills that masons use. Real stone masons make their own instead of going to a smith, for these drills have to be sharpened every day—to go to a smith would waste time. They are made of ingot iron, which is softer than steel but stronger than most wrought iron. You buy a short rod as thick as a man's thumb, and just shape one end. You forge a good few each time, and resharpen them when they're blunt, until they're too short to use.

When Yu-mei saw what they were doing, she asked what these drills were for.

"To fix the roller for the threshing-floor!" said her father.

"Why?"

"Because it's too small," said her uncle teasingly.

"You mean by chipping it you can make it bigger?"

"Ask your father if you don't believe me!"

"Can you make it bigger, dad?"

"Your uncle is right," said the Handy Man with a chuckle, "but he didn't tell you the whole story. We've combined all the small threshing-floors in our co-op into one big one; but our rollers are meant for small floors and can only be pulled in small circles. If we make the mules do bigger circles, the girth is going to chafe their back right legs. That's why we've got to fix the rollers."

"But how can you fix them to make a bigger circle?"

"If we make the large end smaller, won't they turn in a bigger circle, silly girl?"

"I see!" cried Yu-mei with a smile. "You'll just make one end smaller."

"Who told you to start a co-op?" Her uncle was joking again. "If there wasn't any co-op, we wouldn't have all this work."

"It's to get a bigger yield! Say, uncle, why don't you join our co-op? Don't you want a bigger yield?"

"Your uncle is very particular how he sows each furrow," said the Handy Man. "He's afraid other folk would mess things up for him."

"You're right there, brother," responded Wang Shen. "I don't mind working with you or your Yu-sheng, but I don't want to muck in with anyone else!"

"Then why did you let Chieh-hsi join the mutual-aid team?" asked Yu-mei.

"He can do what he likes with our five *mou* of low land, so long as he doesn't mess up the ten *mou* on the hill."

"Have you shared your land with him, uncle?"

"He's given his son a share of the land," said the Handy Man, "but he won't allow him his share of grain. Your uncle doesn't think anything of your cousin's farming, but he doesn't mind how much grain he takes off him!"

"I don't use it all myself, do I?" protested Wang Shen. "Doesn't he eat with us?"

Once they started an argument, Yu-mei knew there was no stopping them.

"Where's Yu-sheng?" she asked her father. "Why isn't he helping you?"

"While your father plays blacksmith here," said Wang Shen, "your brother's playing carpenter in South Cave."

"What's he making now?"

"A roller!"

"How can a carpenter make a roller?"

"It's a wooden roller! That's the crazy sort of notion your co-op gets!"

Yu-mei turned to her father.

"Is it true, dad?" she asked.

The Handy Man chuckled again.

"Just like last time. It's true, but your uncle hasn't told the whole story. He's making. . . ."

"Cut the cackle! They're melting!" Wang Shen pointed to the drills in the furnace.

The Handy Man dropped the subject of the roller. He put down the bellows and picked up the axe, then extracted the sputtering drills with the tongs in his left hand.

"I'll go to South Cave and have a look," said Yu-mei.

As she turned to go, her father laid one white-hot drill on the anvil, levelled the axe and brought it lightly down. The iron was so hot that a great shower of sparks shot up, and one fell on Ta-sheng's leg. The three-year-old started howling. The two men dropped their work to turn to the child, and Yu-mei ran back to see how bad the burn was. Wang Shen picked Ta-sheng up.

"Little fool! Who told you to stand by a forge with bare legs?"

The Handy Man saw the burn was not serious—nothing but a small red spot.

"Take him back to his mother!" he told Yu-mei.

As Yu-mei carried him out, his mother ran up and took the child herself.

"Where was he burnt?" she asked.

"It's nothing," answered Yu-mei. "A spot on his leg! A bit of ointment and it will be all right."

She followed her sister-in-law to Middle Cave.

### 3. Some Odd Notes

Middle Cave had two windows, and under the right window as you went in was a large *kang*. Chin-sheng's wife put Ta-sheng on the *kang* while she looked for some ointment, and Yu-mei showed him her exercise book to stop him crying. Ta-sheng couldn't sit still. The moment his tears dried he started running naked all over the *kang*. By the time his mother found the ointment he was standing by the wall, out of reach.

"Isn't he sweet, sis, without a stitch on him!" cried Yu-mei.

"If he'd wear clothes he wouldn't get burnt!" replied her sister-in-law. "I got out his clothes, but he wouldn't put them on, however much I scolded!"

"No clothes could look as sweet as that little bare bottom! Come here now! Let's have a look at that burn!"

When Ta-sheng still didn't come, Yu-mei picked up a red notebook from the window ledge.

"Look at this pretty red book!" she coaxed.

This was new to Ta-sheng, and he ran over to grab it.

"Don't give him that!" said his mother. "Your brother sets such store by that book!"

But the child had already snatched it.

"Don't play with that!" Yu-mei crawled on to the *kang*. "Aunty'll give you something much nicer!"

She produced a thimble from her pocket, slipped it over her pencil, and rattled it in front of Ta-sheng till he let go of the notebook. As he did so, a sheet of paper dropped out. While Chin-sheng's wife took the boy on her lap to apply the ointment, Yu-mei picked up the paper to put it back in the diary. But the odd notes written on it caught her eye.

Most of the writing had been crossed out, but not the bottom line. She read it aloud:

"More — big — good — exploit — split."

Just then the bamboo curtain over the door was lifted, and in walked Chin-sheng.

"Finished your meeting?" inquired his wife.

"Haven't started yet!" He pointed at the notebook in Yu-mei's hand. "I came back for that."

Yu-mei showed him the sheet of paper.

"What's this written here, brother? I can't make head or tail of it."

"That's village and co-op business. It's so boiled down, no one else can understand it."

"Why have you crossed some words out?"

"I cross out whatever's been settled."

"So this bottom line hasn't been settled yet! What's this mean — 'more — big — good — exploit — split'?"

"I can't explain it now. Here, hand it over. It's time for my meeting."

"No need to go into details. Just tell me the general idea."

"I can't. It wouldn't do much good, anyway."

Chin-sheng was not being lazy: it really wasn't easy to explain. One great weakness of their co-op was the fact that they had too many people to too little land — and poor land into the bargain. After discussing the reason for this with the other village leaders, Chin-sheng had jotted down these five words: more, big, good, exploit, split. The first four stood for four types of family. "More" meant those who had got rather more than they deserved during land reform. "Big" meant the big families, "good" those with good land. "Exploit" meant those who still hired some labour. All the first type had been poor before land reform. Some of the second, third and fourth types had been poor, some not too badly off, but they had one thing in common — they were not keen on the co-op. Most of them hadn't joined, and the few that had weren't working hard. Since very few households with much land or good land had come in, if you considered the amount of land and output per head in the village, of course the co-op was short of land, especially of good land. But though these families wouldn't join the co-op, most of them were in long-term mutual-aid teams, while some were team leaders or deputy leaders. Not wanting to be singled out for their backwardness, a few of them not only refused to join the co-op themselves but were urging others in their team to refuse as well.

To remedy this situation, the village authorities had made two proposals. One was to persuade all the most enterprising members of the teams to join the co-op, so that there would be fewer of these four types of family left and they would have to think things over again. And since some "big" families were dividing up their land because of this issue, all should be encouraged to do so, for then those who were backward couldn't hamper the more forward-looking.

The other proposal was to give the mutual-aid teams better leadership, so that when they were sufficiently advanced, they could join the co-op collectively, letting the one or two who wanted to stay out form a new team or work on their own. If all go-ahead people were brought into the co-op, there would be no one to lead the rest of the peasants. As for the "big" families, they should be advised not to divide up their land. It wouldn't do to have people saying the co-op had caused family splits.

These proposals were contradictory, one for splitting up teams and families, the other against any split. Chin-sheng himself had been thinking along the lines of the first, but he felt there was something to be said for the second when he heard it. So he just wrote down "split," meaning to reconsider the question later. This was the meaning of "more, big, good, exploit, split." Of course he couldn't explain it in two or three sentences. Besides, this wasn't a subject to discuss with Yu-mei.



When Chin-sheng told her this was not her business, Yu-mei stopped pressing for an answer and returned him his notebook and paper. He pocketed them and left.

"Sis!" said Yu-mei, when he had gone. "Uncle Shen says Yu-sheng is making a wooden roller in South Cave. Is that true?"

"He's making a wooden wheel. I don't know what it's for."

"I know!" cried Ta-sheng. "A big, round wheel that goes round and round like this!" He described a circle with his chubby hands.

"Is that how it turns?" asked Yu-mei. "Aunty's going to look at it."

"I want to go too!" cried Ta-sheng.

He crawled to the edge of the *kang*, turned over and slid to the ground.

"It's time for you to sleep!" His mother caught him. "You've seen it already, haven't you?"

The child insisted that he wanted to go.

"Go to sleep!" said Yu-mei. "Aunty isn't going either." And she sat down on the *kang*.

"Hurry up and go to sleep!" said Ta-sheng's mother. "I'm going to sew shoes for you. Look at those two little sparrows peeping out of your toes!"

"Ta-sheng!" Yu-mei laughed. "How many days does it take you to wear out your shoes?"

This was a sore subject with her sister-in-law.

"Why, Yu-mei!" she exclaimed. "When you talk about shoes, I feel like giving him away to some childless couple."

"If you really want to, I'll find a family for you. Huang Ta-nien's wife is dying to have a child! Will you go and live with the Huangs, Ta-sheng? They'll give you new shoes every day."

"No! Ma!"

"It's all right," his mother soothed him. "Aunty was only teasing. Yu-mei, I just can't keep up with all my chores. All three children's shoes are worn out, and your dad's and Chin-sheng's won't last out the harvest. I've cut out two pairs of cloth soles for the men, but not a stitch have I sewn. Tomorrow and the day after I've got to help at the mill, because as soon as the harvest is in they'll need the co-op animals for ploughing, and we'll have to turn the mill by hand. And before we know where we are, it'll be autumn, when big and small alike will need new clothes. I've the meals to get every day, besides helping your mother twist hemp rope in the yard, shell peas, pick cotton and dry vegetables. . . . Then in the evening the children won't go to bed till late, and it's hard to snatch a moment for sewing. I have to sit up at night when they're all asleep."

"I'll help you in the evenings," promised Yu-mei. "Give me Ta-sheng's shoes to start with."

"You're out in the fields all day, and you have your class in the evening. What time have you to sew?"

"The last four or five days we haven't had a proper class because of the harvesting. Less and less people are turning up. We had no class this evening again, and the next few days will probably be even worse. We may just as well wait till after the harvest. Don't be so polite, sis! You've mothered me all these years, and it's only right that I should lend you a hand. Besides, now Yu-sheng and his wife are on their own, there's more. . . ."

"Don't mention her to me! She makes me see red! What has she done all this year since she came here? She hasn't been out in the fields once. When it's time to go to the mill, she sneaks home to her mother. She never swept the yard, and when it was her turn to cook she grumbled, 'Who can wait on a great crowd like that?' Yu-sheng was only ten when I married Chin-sheng, and if anyone's waited on him it's me—I fed and clothed that boy for a good ten years. Wasn't I the one who stitched all his wedding clothes and shoes last year? I was longing for him to marry—but all his wife can do is lose her temper. She hadn't been here three days when she felt I was bossing her round! She wanted to keep house just for the two of them. I said the sooner she cleared out the sooner we'd have peace, but your brother's scared stiff of making 'a bad impression.' He kept trying to patch things up and wouldn't hear of a split. He insisted that Yu-sheng could talk her round. But they've split away now after all. 'It wouldn't look good,' he used to say. Well, does it look good now? I've no patience with her. We get on much better without her."

"Everybody knows what she's like. Let's not talk about her. If she hears, she'll make another scene."

"She rushed off after supper without even washing the bowls. You don't expect *her* to stay at home, do you? I don't mind saying this to her face. Let her make a scene if she wants to. Let her make a few more scenes for the neighbours to hear, then they won't think it's my fault that we don't get on."

Chin-sheng's wife had never really lost her temper with anyone before, but the mention of Yu-sheng's wife threw her into a rage. Yu-mei was sorry she had brought the subject up, for now she had to wait for the end of her sister-in-law's outburst. She was just going to talk of something else when they heard a shrill cry from South Cave:

"You're the one making trouble."

It was Yu-sheng's wife, and they thought they were in for a scrap. But since Chin-sheng's wife was still fuming, she pushed Ta-sheng aside and started out.

"Stay here, sis!" said Yu-mei, stopping her. "Let her come to us! If you go to her, she'll say you started the quarrel."

So Chin-sheng's wife stopped where she was, and they heard Yu-sheng's voice.

"How can you just buy a thing like that, and then ask me for the money? Did I pick a quarrel with you?"

"Hear that?" said Yu-mei. "She wasn't talking to us. I bet she's been shopping again and asking Yu-sheng for more money."

Even before they set up house for themselves, Yu-sheng and his wife had quarrelled pretty regularly. So the other two felt it was none of their business. They fetched the work-basket and sat down by the lamp to sew. They had barely got started, though, when they heard more angry shouts, then blows. Chin-sheng's wife was a kindly soul. Much as she disliked her sister-in-law, she couldn't let them fight like that. She and Yu-mei hurried over to make peace.

#### 4. *"We Can't Go On Like This!"*

To know why Yu-sheng and his wife were quarrelling, you have to know what sort of people they were.

Yu-sheng was a bright lad, rather like his father. At ten he could plait a small wicker basket, at twelve he could beat a ring out of copper, while by his teens he could do such skilled work that he was known as the little Handy Man. West of Sanliwan was Sandy Creek, which flooded every year, leaving a deposit of sand on the fields near by. In 1949, by hitting on the idea of using a fence of live willows to keep out the sand, Yu-sheng saved two of the fields belonging to his mutual-aid team from being silted up. The next year everybody did the same, preventing damage to all the land usually spoiled by sand. At a model workers' conference in the county town, he was awarded a certificate of honour for his outstanding contribution to the work.

Yu-sheng's wife, Hsiao-chun, was the daughter of Yuan Tien-cheng of Sanliwan. First a chubby child, later a pretty girl, she had a ready tongue. Her marriage to Yu-sheng was based half on free choice, half on their families' wishes. A year younger than he, she had been his childhood playmate. And when Yu-sheng became one of Sanliwan's ablest young fellows—handsome too—the elder generation could not but treat him as a grown-up, while after he won his certificate they showed him special respect. When he walked past folk would say:

"That's a smart young fellow."

"Even cleverer than his dad!"

Nearly all the village girls at the time dreamed of finding a husband like Yu-sheng, and Hsiao-chun was no exception. Her mother thought well of him too.

"Why not marry our Hsiao-chun to Yu-sheng?" she said to her husband.

Since Yuan was notorious as a henpecked husband, of course he raised no objection, and his wife asked Fan Teng-kao to be go-between. It was still more or less the rule in Sanliwan that, as long as the women agreed,

the men would make no difficulties. Besides, Hsiao-chun was not bad-looking, and nobody had anything against her. Yu-sheng was knowledgeable in many ways, but he knew very little about girls. As Hsiao-chun was pretty and had no obvious faults, so he was willing to marry her. Chin-sheng's wife worried, it is true, lest the match turn out badly, not because she had any fault to find with Hsiao-chun, but because she didn't think much of the girl's mother and doubted whether any child raised by her could be much good. Once she told her husband her misgivings.

"Of course home education counts," agreed Chin-sheng. "But people can always change. Even if her mother has brought her up badly, Yu-sheng will have a good influence on her, won't he?"

That sounded reasonable, so his wife said no more.

At first the young couple hit it off all right. Then, sure enough, Hsiao-chun's mother queered their pitch. Her nickname was Mistress Sly, and she was the sister of Muddlehead's wife—their people had been brokers at Linhochon for several generations. When Mistress Sly married Tien-cheng, she despised all his relations because they had come down in the world and were living in a poor way. She kept flying into a temper, till the villagers said of her:

Her father-in-law died of anger,  
Her mother-in-law of vexation;  
Her husband will run to the river  
And drown himself in desperation!

When her daughter married, Mistress Sly gave Hsiao-chun the benefit of her own experience as a wife.

"Be sharp to your in-laws," she said, "but pleasant to everyone else. Don't let them take advantage of you in any way. You must show all your husband's family that you're a difficult customer. But speak nicely to all the neighbours, so that they think you easy-going."

Another of her precepts was: "Make your man knuckle under. That's the only way to get him to listen to you."

She did not altogether approve of the traditional virago's tactics for bringing a husband to heel—namely, tears, hunger-strikes and hanging.

"You mustn't think of hanging yourself," she impressed on Hsiao-chun. "You may really go off that way. And don't actually cry either—just pretend to sometimes at night after the light's blown out. Around New Year or some other festival, you can hide a little food and pretend to be too angry to eat for several days."

She had used both these methods herself. That was why Tien-cheng was so docile.

But these were simply general principles. There followed detailed instructions. For Hsiao-chun felt Yu-sheng's family was too large for her to have the say in everything.

"Why should you wait on that great crowd?" Mistress Sly asked her daughter. "You and Yu-sheng must set up house for yourselves. But don't you be the one to suggest it. Just see to it that they don't have a moment's peace till they let the two of you live on your own. Then your work will be much lighter, and you can give out that they forced you to shift for yourself."

Acting on these instructions, Hsiao-chun staged several quarrels with Chin-sheng's wife, till the latter did want them to live apart from the rest of the household. But Chin-sheng frowned upon the idea.

"Let her have her own way a bit," he urged his wife. "We don't want it said that we can't even get on with our own brother's wife."

His wife did as he advised. She refused to respond when Hsiao-chun tried to pick quarrels. Then Hsiao-chun was at a loss, and had to consult her mother again. Mistress Sly's advice this time was to goad Yu-sheng into breaking away from his brother.

"I can't wait on a huge family like yours!" Hsiao-chun told her husband on her return. "Tell your brother we want to be on our own."

"Everybody in this house works except the kids," retorted Yu-sheng. "It's not a question of anyone waiting on anyone else."

"Well, I don't get anything out of it, but when it's my turn to cook I have to cook a great panful."

"What d'you mean, you get nothing out of it? D'you think your food and clothes fly down from the sky?"

"I don't want to be beholden to them!"

"If you want to live on your own, you can. I shan't."

"What! Get rid of your wife like that? Let's make a proper break then—let's get divorced!"

"What's the sense of talking like that? Who suggested this in the first place? Did I try to get rid of you?"

"You mean I should split off all on my own?"

"Whoever wants to, can! I don't want to! I like it this way."

"I can't get on with your sister-in-law."

"My sister-in-law's a good sort. You're the one who's so difficult."

"If she's so good, go ahead and live with *her*! Why did you marry me?"

"Shut up!"

"Who are you shouting at now?"

"What did you say just then? Say that again!"

"We've already said quite enough! Just take your choice: either break away from them or we'll get divorced!"

"Let's get divorced then. I'm not going to break with them."

Yu-sheng told Chin-sheng why he wanted a divorce.

"There's no need for that!" said his brother. "You can set up on your own. Why not? You say you don't want to give folk a bad impression; but if you divorce her over this, won't it make a worse impression?"

So they started keeping house for themselves. This had happened just a few days previously.

These last few days, Mistress Sly had been teaching Hsiao-chun new maxims for taming a husband.

"Now there's no one over you, just the two of you. You must make him toe the line from the very start. Don't do anything for him that he can do himself—if you do, he'll always leave it to you. Don't consult him on anything you can decide for yourself—if you do, he'll think he's the boss!"

Hsiao-chun did as she was told. Two days before this, when the co-op bell rang after the midday siesta, Yu-sheng picked up his scythe to go to the fields.

"There's no water in the vat," announced Hsiao-chun. "Fetch some before you go."

"The bell's gone. You fetch it for once!"

"I can't carry water."

"If Yu-mei can, why can't you?"

"It's too bad you didn't marry Yu-mei!"

"Now we're on our own, but you can't manage alone! Well, if you can't carry water, you must think of some other way out. When the bell rings, I have to go to work."

He left without filling the water vat.

Hsiao-chun went straight home and told her mother what had happened. "If I don't fetch the water, how am I to cook supper?" she asked.

"You mustn't let him get away with this!" cried Mistress Sly. "No water, no supper! You can come here for a meal."

Hsiao-chun cooked no supper that evening. She ate with her mother, Yu-sheng with his brother. Chin-sheng had told Yu-sheng to have a good talk with Hsiao-chun now that they were on their own, but with Mistress Sly helping her to draw up rules for her husband, of course the girl wouldn't listen to him.

This was the background to their quarrel.

That evening, as soon as Wang Shen arrived to help the Handy Man with his drills, he announced that Fan Teng-kao's mules were back with a load of new goods. When Hsiao-chun heard this, she didn't stop to finish her rice, but set down the bowl and dashed to Fan Teng-kao's house. She found the table and *kang* piled with flashlights, galoshes, playing cards, fruit drops, woollens, blankets, caps for children and women, hair-clips . . . besides some other parcels not yet opened. The room was packed with those who had heard the news, Mistress Sly among them. Some woollen underwear took Hsiao-chun's fancy.

"Do you know what that costs?" she asked her mother.

"Ninety thousand. I asked."

"I'd like a suit, but Yu-sheng might not pay up."

"Once you're wearing it, he'll have to pay. Still, since this is the first time, you'd better not spend too much, or he really may not have the money. Buy the vest first—that costs forty-five thousand, same as the trousers."

Hsiao-chun chose a red vest. When Fan Teng-kao had wrapped it up for her, he held out his hand for the money.

"I don't have any money with me," she said. "I'll bring it over presently."

"All right. Bring it as soon as you can. These goods belong to several of us."

He handed her her parcel, and wrote down the price in his book.

Just then Ling-chih and Yu-yi came in.

"Aren't you going to the meeting yet, dad?" Ling-chih reminded her father. "All the others are there."

"I'm going right away!" Fan turned to his customers. "I've got to go now. Please come back tomorrow."

Having told Wang Hsiao-chu, the carter, to feed the mules extra early the next day, he left. And soon the customers scattered.

Hsiao-chun squeezed her way out among the first, and ran home. She arrived back just as Chin-sheng's wife and Yu-mei were discussing her in Middle Cave, but was so set on getting the money from Yu-sheng that she paid them no attention. She rushed straight into South Cave.

Ever since supper, Yu-sheng had been working here on his wooden roller. He hadn't even noticed Hsiao-chun's absence. This model he was making looked like a pair of wheels, consisting of a wooden disk at each end of a stick. But the two disks weren't the same size. He had started work that afternoon on the threshing-floor, where he could compare his measurements with the stone rollers; but not having finished it to his satisfaction when dusk fell, he had brought the work home to make certain modifications. Their co-op had three rollers, all different sizes, which needed smoothing; but it was too much trouble to make three wooden ones. He had therefore hit on the idea of making one as big as the largest—when they were through with that, he could make it smaller. The smallest of his wooden disks was the same size as the smallest roller, but the largest disk was not quite so big as the largest roller. How much smaller it should be, he was not sure. That could only be seen by using it. If it was too big, he could file a bit more off until it was right. But he was dissatisfied with this model for two reasons: the wood was so thick that it took a long time to file, and the hole in the smaller disk was slightly askew. Enlarging this hole would make it too big for the axle, while planing off some of the wood would make the wheel too small. He decided to make a new roller—that would probably take less time than correcting these faults. He was just measuring the central hole with his carpenter's square when his wife rushed in to ask for money.

Hsiao-chun was annoyed to find the room littered with shavings, sawdust and bits of wood.

"Can't you do that in the yard?" she grumbled. "Who's going to sweep up after you?"

"I will when I've finished, don't worry. There's a wind outside, so the lamp wouldn't stay alight."

"What's the use of making cranky things like that?"

"This isn't cranky. It's something very useful!"

Since Yu-sheng kept his eyes on his work as he talked, he hadn't seen what Hsiao-chun was carrying. Now she unwrapped the vest and shook it out.

"What d'you think of this?" she asked.

He just glanced up from measuring his wood, and caught a glimpse of something red.

"Not bad," he answered offhandedly.

"Look how thick it is!" Hsiao-chun fingered the vest.

Yu-sheng thought she meant his wood.

"Not too thick," he amended. "It's been changed for a thinner one."

Hsiao-chun could not think what he meant. Perhaps he imagined that someone had exchanged this vest for one of Fan Teng-kao's.

"It's just come," she said. "No one's swopped it."

"As if I didn't know—I swopped it myself."

"What did you swop it for?"

"A thinner plank."

"What are you talking about?"

Hsiao-chun screamed this so loudly that Yu-sheng raised his head.

"What are you talking about?" she demanded again.

"What are you talking about?"

"About this vest."



"Whose is it?"

"I've just bought it. Do you like it?"

"It's all right."

This point cleared up, Yu-sheng bent over his work again.

"I haven't paid for it yet!" announced Hsiao-chun.

"Why not?"

"I haven't any money!"

"Oh."

Yu-sheng did see what connection this had with him. His "oh" was meant to close the conversation.

But Hsiao-chun, of course, was not through with him.

"Give me the money!"

Yu-sheng sat up at that.

"How much?"

"Forty-five thousand."

"It only cost forty thousand the day before yesterday."

"This isn't from the co-op."

"It's exactly the same."

"Why didn't you buy me one then?"

"Five pecks of rice! Enough for a padded jacket."

"A jacket's a jacket, this is different."

"I'm sorry, I haven't the money. It isn't cold yet. Buy one a little later."

Yu-sheng went on with his work.

"It's all very well to say that!" Hsiao-chun flared up. "How can I take it back after bringing it home?"

"If it's not from the co-op, it must come from Fan Teng-kao. Why can't you take it back? You've got no money but you've got his goods, and you haven't worn it or spoiled it."

"I won't! I won't! I won't take it back! Give me the money!"

"Didn't I tell you I haven't any?"

"Think of a way to get some then!"

"Not I."

"You don't care if I starve or catch cold! All you care about is that trash!"

"What trash?"

She pointed to the wood in his hands.

"That!"

Hurt as he was to have a job to which he was devoting himself heart and soul described as trash, Yu-sheng was not able to explain its importance to her. He blamed himself for picking the wrong wife, and his brother for not letting them get a divorce. Determined not to say another word, he bent over his work again as if Hsiao-chun did not exist. When she saw how calmly he was ignoring her, she snatched his carpenter's square.

"If you don't care, I'll make you care!"

Yu-sheng could not bear to have any of his tools touched, least of all this one. He had made it himself, and it was more elaborate than most carpenters' squares, with a row of symmetrical holes for drawing circles. But since these holes made it unusually fragile, he took special care of it. He was furious with Hsiao-chun for grabbing it, but he did not want her to break it.

"All right! Have it your own way — just give me back that square!"

"Forty-five thousand! Give me the money first!"

"I don't care how much it is — I haven't any money just now."

"If you haven't any money, don't expect to get your square back!"

She slammed the square down on the *kang*, and sat on it.

"What have I done to you? Why make such trouble for me?" protested Yu-sheng.

"I spoke to you in earnest, but you made believe not to understand. You're the one making trouble!"

"How can you just buy a thing like that, and then ask me for the money? Did I pick a quarrel with you?"

Saying this, he rushed over to recover his square. But Hsiao-chun, knowing she was no match for him, whipped out the square before he reached her and hurled it into one corner.

"What's so wonderful about it?" she jeered.

Yu-sheng had not meant to hit her, but the sight of his instrument flying through the air made him lose his temper completely. He boxed her ears. Then Hsiao-chun shouted and screamed, kicking out at his wood and tools. And seeing what damage she was doing, he started beating her in earnest. This was the point at which Chin-sheng's wife and Yu-mei intervened.

"We can't go on like this!" fumed Yu-sheng as he strode angrily away.

"We can't go on like this!" echoed Hsiao-chun as she marched furiously out.

Yu-sheng went to Flagstaff Compound. Hsiao-chun went home to her mother.

## 5. To Break Up or Not to Break Up?

As Yu-sheng dashed into the front yard of Flagstaff Compound he saw lights in three windows. In one classroom the patrol leader was on duty while the other militiamen slept; in the east wing Li Shih-chieh, accountant for the co-op, was preparing forms for the distribution of produce; in the annex to the hall, a meeting of the chief officers of the village and the co-op was in progress. Hearing his brother's voice, Yu-sheng charged straight in.



The place was packed. In addition to the village officers, the meeting was attended by Assistant Secretary Liu from the county government, Section Chief Ho from the agricultural centre for that administrative area, and Chang Hsin, the deputy district head.

But Yu-sheng was in such a rage when he burst in, that he interrupted the meeting to blurt out his troubles.

"You're all here — good!" he cried. "You've got to settle this for me! I can't stick it any longer with Hsiao-chun! Last time I said I wanted a divorce, the Party, the Youth League, the village administration, and the Women's Association — all talked me out of it. You told me to teach her better. But I'm just not able to teach her. All I've taught her is to make life hell! Today is the last time I'm going to raise this. If you agree, I'll ask the deputy district head to write a note vouching for me, and I'll go to the district office tonight to apply for a divorce. If you tell me to go on teaching her better, I'm sorry, but I just can't take it. I shall run away from Sanliwan this very night!"

"Is that the way Youth Leaguers talk?" chided Wei Chan-kuei, secretary of their Youth League branch.

"It isn't," admitted Yu-sheng. "But what can I do?"

"Do you want a letter of introduction from the Youth League when you run away?"

Yu-sheng had no answer to that.

The sight of his brother reminded Chin-sheng of the rollers.

"Wait a minute before we discuss your divorce," he said. "Have you finished that roller or not?"

"It's because she's smashed it that I'm here!"

Chang Lo-yi, the co-op manager, was worried to hear that the work on the roller had stopped.

"If that roller isn't ready," he told Yu-sheng, "we'll have to thresh those five hundred and twenty sheaves tomorrow the old way! And if that grain isn't threshed by the afternoon, we can't hand out shares in the evening. That'll upset our work for the day after, too!"

"Which is more important," Chin-sheng followed up, "that or getting divorced?"

The co-op chairman's warning had already made Yu-sheng decide to put off his divorce. So he answered his brother's question readily:

"That is, of course. But what can I do if she won't let me work?" Without waiting for a reply he went on: "Suppose I bring it here to the east wing?"

"Wherever you like," said Chin-sheng, "so long as you don't hold up tomorrow's threshing."

Without another word, Yu-sheng left to fetch his things. As he strode to the door, Wei Chan-kuei went through the motion of clapping — but silently, for the others to see, so as not to embarrass Yu-sheng. They

kept a grip on themselves till they guessed he was through the gate, then burst into hearty laughter.

"That's a good lad," commented Section Chief Ho. "When there's work to be done in the co-op, his divorce can wait!"

"Yu-sheng doesn't lose his temper easily," remarked Chin-sheng. "I'm afraid things have gone too far to be set right." He turned to Chin Hsiao-feng, chairman of the Women's Association, "But try to find time tomorrow morning to fix it up between them, will you? We don't want them to do anything desperate. All right then" — this to them all — "let's go on with our meeting."

Having decided how to organize the harvesting, they went on to discuss enlarging the co-op and making a canal.

"These two questions haven't much to do with the village administration," said Fan Teng-kao, the village head. "My mules have to make another trip tomorrow, so I think I'll leave now."

"Both these things affect the whole village," protested Chin-sheng. "How can you say they've nothing to do with the village administration?"

"I thought enlarging the co-op was *your* business," retorted Fan. "How can outsiders butt in? Cutting a canal affects the whole village, it's true; but you haven't yet talked round all the people whose land it'll have to go through, and until that's done it's no use discussing anything else."

"The co-op's got to be expanded in the area under the village administration," pointed out Chang Yung-ching, deputy village head. "And that's a job the Party wants us to do. As for the canal, it can only be made by co-operation between the co-op and the rest of the village. You can't say either has nothing to do with our office. As regards the canal running through private land, that's one of the questions we're here to discuss this evening. You can't shirk your responsibilities like this just because you want to attend to your private trading. . . ."

This reference to his trading upset Fan, for other Party members had reproached him on this score, though he had never accepted their criticism. The county secretary had not been able to talk him out of it either, and was waiting for the winter, when there would be a campaign to consolidate the Party, to make the village head see reason. To justify himself to Liu, Fan had asserted among other things that his trading did not affect his work. Now Liu was here and might start asking questions. That was why Fan was upset.

"Let's stick to the matter in hand!" he cut Chang short. "Don't link that up with my doing a little business on the side! Since I only have half my time to myself, I have to give some thought to my own affairs. Every day that my two mules are idle at home, they eat a peck of fodder with nothing to show for it. If I don't send them out when I can, I can't even cover the cost of feeding them!"

Once Hsiao-chun was in, Chu-ying latched the door again. Hsiao-chun made for the north wing, where she could hear her mother speaking.

When had Mistress Sly come to call on the Ma family? She was on her way home after leaving Fan Teng-kao's house when she ran into Man-hsi.

"Aunty!" cried Man-hsi. "I was looking for you to ask you something."

Mistress Sly was known for her glib tongue. Anyone who came up against her had to let her do all the talking, and couldn't get a word in edgewise. But Man-hsi was the exception—he knew how to handle her.

"Tell me what it is, child," enjoined Mistress Sly. "If it's anything your aunt can do, I'm always glad to help."

"An important official has arrived from the district headquarters," Man-hsi told her. "We can't find a decent room for him, so I wanted to borrow that west room of yours."

"You mustn't think I don't want to lend that room, dear boy! If this were spring, I'd clear it out in a jiffy. But during the harvest it's chock-full of stuff and there's nowhere else to put it. If you don't believe me, come and have a look."

"I wouldn't trouble you, aunty, if this were just an ordinary functionary. There are plenty of rooms in Flagstaff Compound—they can always squeeze in one extra, can't they? But this man is someone rather special. . . ."

"What's his job?"

Now if Man-hsi said exactly what Yu-mei had suggested, and Mistress Sly already knew that the visitor was the chief of the agricultural section, she would not believe him; and even if she did not know now, he could hardly eat his words when she found out later. He decided to leave it vague.

He stepped up to her, and lowered his voice as he spoke:

"He claims he's from the agricultural office in the district, but they say he's actually been sent by the people's court to look into some case or other. That's a secret, aunty! Mind you don't pass it on!"

"Don't worry, child! You needn't be afraid I'll tattle, aunty's silent as the grave!"

Man-hsi assumed a casual air.

"If you can't clear that west wing, aunty, I'll have to look somewhere else. I'll see if Hsiao-chun's in-laws can't clear one of their small east rooms. If that can't be done, I'll come back to you, aunty!"

He made off, having left himself this excuse for coming back when she had had time to think it over. He had barely taken five steps, though, when Mistress Sly called to him.

"Wait a bit, Man-hsi!"

"That's done the trick!" he thought.

She hurried up to him.

"Have you been to the Ma house?" she asked.

"No! Aunty Ma has such a sharp tongue, and I don't like being snubbed!"

"If you get on the right side of her, my sister's not hard to talk to! Let me go and ask for you!"

"If you'll do that for me, aunty, I'll gladly invite you to a meal!"

"That's a good child! People who don't know me call me pig-headed, but I'm not pig-headed at all! I love helping people!"

"Who dares call you pig-headed? Would I ask your help if you were? If you'll do this for me, aunty, I'll go with you and wait at the gate."

Only Mistress Sly would pretend to be doing a favour when acting entirely from selfish motives, and only Moody Man-hsi would so enjoy tricking her that he could enter completely into the spirit of the thing. He tagged at her heels till they came to Muddlehead's house, then waited a little way off while Mistress Sly went in.

Ma To-shou was sitting in the yard with his wife, elder son, and elder son's wife. These four all had nicknames. Ma To-shou, as we know, was Muddlehead. His wife was called Always Right. His elder son, Ma Yu-yu was known as Skinflint, and his daughter-in-law as Spitfire. There were four more people in the household: Muddlehead's third daughter-in-law, Chu-ying, who was now making shoes for her daughter Ling-ling in her room; Ling-ling, aged four; Skinflint's eight-year-old son, Shih-cheng, who with Ling-ling was chasing a firefly in the yard; and Skinflint's two-year-old child, now at Spitfire's breast.

The four with nicknames greeted Mistress Sly.

"Will you sit in the yard, aunt, or inside?" asked Skinflint.

"Inside!" replied Mistress Sly. "I've something to say to you."

Without waiting for a response, she led the way into the house.

The rule of the Ma family was that if anyone came to discuss anything with Muddlehead, his sons could be present but not his daughters-in-law. So Skinflint alone followed his parents inside, while Spitfire carried her baby back to her room.

Always Right lit the lamp and, when they had all sat down, Mistress Sly passed on the secret Man-hsi had told her.

"As far as I know," she concluded, "the only lawsuit in our village is the charge you made against Chang Yung-ching two months ago, sister, at the district court. After you made your charge, the county just told the village to settle the case, and it never was heard in court. Now the county must have reported this to the higher-ups, and they've sent this man to look into it!"

"Maybe!" agreed Skinflint. "When I went to town a few days ago, I heard all the government offices were fighting something called 'bureaucracy,' so the higher-ups sent someone to find out how many cases the people's court had left unsettled."

"When I told Man-hsi I couldn't clear my west room," continued Mistress Sly, "he wanted to ask the Handy Man for the use of his east room. . . ."

"You'd better agree, sister!" put in Muddlehead. "If he stays with *them*, he won't hear anything to our credit. And you know that field of mine lies right next to your land. If I can't stop them digging their canal through my land, they'll dig through yours as well."

"Even if I didn't have a field there," protested Mistress Sly, "I'd have to pass on a piece of news like this! Your wife's my sister, isn't she? But I really can't clear that room. I thought your east wing was pretty empty — can't you put him up there?"

"We can," agreed Muddlehead. "Of course, that would suit us better. But do you think he'd agree?"

"If he can't find anywhere else, of course he will. Man-hsi is on duty today. I told him I'd talk this over with you, and he's still waiting outside."

"All right," acquiesced Muddlehead, Always Right and Skinflint.

"Ask Man-hsi to come in and clean the place up," suggested Muddlehead. "Then they can bring in that man's baggage."

"Come back when you've spoken to him," said Always Right. "We've got to decide what to say to the man."

Her mission accomplished, Mistress Sly went for Man-hsi.

As soon as she was out, Muddlehead turned on his wife:

"We can decide for ourselves what to say to the district officer! Why talk it over with her?"

"My sister's not an outsider!"

"But what a tongue she has! Faster than a telegram! Telling her anything is the same as broadcasting it from Flagstaff Compound! Don't breathe a word, now, about that! Talk about something else."

Muddlehead was reputed to be afraid of his wife, but that was merely a pose. If he did not want to agree to any request, however, he would shift the blame for refusing to Always Right, and say she was boss. In actual fact, she had to fall in with his wishes. So when Muddlehead told her to keep quiet about the lawsuit, she had to obey.

Mistress Sly found Man-hsi, told him what a favour she had done him, brought him in, latched the gate, and went back into the house.

Man-hsi asked Always Right for a key and a lamp, so that he could clean up the east wing. But they did not like to leave him in there alone, for fear something might get lost.

"First Son's Wife!" Always Right called to Spitfire. "Go and help Man-hsi sweep the east wing!"

"Baby's not asleep yet!" was the reply.

"Third Son's Wife! You go!" Always Right shouted for Chu-ying. "Your sister-in-law's baby isn't asleep yet."

Chu-ying put down the shoe she was working on, and came out. She knew Man-hsi well, for they worked in the same mutual-aid team.

"Fetch me a broom, will you, sister!" Man-hsi requested.

Chu-ying fetched a broom while Man-hsi lit the lamp, and they went into the east wing followed by Shih-cheng and Ling-ling.

The question of who was to clean the room being settled, Mistress Sly sat down again. And having been forbidden to speak of the lawsuit, Always Right asked after Hsiao-chun. How had she fared since they started keeping house for themselves? Mistress Sly had barely embarked on her answer when there came another knock at the gate, and they heard Chu-ying ask Shih-cheng to open it. The boy would not go, though, so she went herself. Mistress Sly had just stopped for a second, and now she went on:

"Ah! Being on their own is no better! That Yu-sheng won't do as he's told. He's like the rest of that family. . . ."

At that moment, in burst Hsiao-chun.

"Ma!" she panted. "I can't stand it any more!"

"What!" cried Mistress Sly. "Wouldn't he pay up?"

"He wouldn't pay, and he even started beating me!"

"No! How dare he beat you?"

"I tell you he did! I'm not staying with him any more!"

"Well! After setting up on your own, he's even worse than before! Go to the village office and ask them to decide between you!"

"He's got in first!"

"Never mind if he has! It's not being first that makes you right! We'll wait at home."

Mistress Sly had no sooner said "right" than she thought of something not altogether right.

"Did you take that woollen vest back to Fan Teng-kao?"

"Not yet, ma! It's still in the house."

"Stupid! You took that yourself, so it's you Fan will ask for the money! Take it back right away! We'll deal with young Yu-sheng later."

Hsiao-chun realized now how foolishly she had acted.

"I'll take it straight there, then!" She started off, but called back from the yard: "Ma! Hurry up and go home. When I've returned it, I'll wait for you at home."

Without stopping for an answer, she opened the gate and hurried off. Of course, Always Right ordered Chu-ying to close the gate.

Mistress Sly was in no state now to advise Always Right. Instead she wanted her sister's advice on Hsiao-chun. So she analysed Yu-sheng's family according to her lights.

"Sister!" she began. "I really made a mistake over Hsiao-chun's marriage! I don't know what's got into Yu-sheng's family. Chin-sheng is a great busybody, poking his nose into things that are none of his business

—like starting this co-op or digging this canal. Anyone else would treat such things as a joke, but he can't let well alone! Yu-sheng is even more of 'a loafer at home and a hustler outside.' He's for ever trying out this and inventing that, and as he's one of the patrol leaders in the militia, at harvest time, New Year or any festival he sleeps outside. He's not fit to be head of a family. And that Handy Man has no more sense than a baby. Instead of teaching his sons to fend for themselves, he encourages them to meddle with all sorts of nonsense. Put those three together, and what sort of family have you? When things became quite impossible, I told Hsiao-chun to make them let her keep house for herself. Yu-sheng is one of those young fellows who just takes what comes without caring about his home, and doesn't know how to keep a wife; but I thought once he had his own home he'd understand. Hsiao-chun had to keep at him for a year, before he'd consent to a split. But though he moved out, he left his heart behind—he's still on the side of his father and Chin-sheng. He puts village or co-op business before his home. Hsiao-chun often tells him off. But if she speaks nicely he pays no attention, while if she speaks sharply he wants to divorce her. Aren't I unlucky, sister! How could I find my girl a family like that? She might as well get divorced and be done with it!"

Muddlehead gave his wife no chance to get a word in.

"Sister!" he cried. "Since you've brought this up yourself, I can speak frankly. Of course a divorce is best. Folk say I'm feudal, but not on a question like this. It's just as you say—none of the men in that family are any good. It's a poor sort of life for Hsiao-chun with them."

"Right!" echoed Always Right. "None of that family are any good! My Yu-yi often larks about with their Yu-mei. I scold him, but he keeps right on. Isn't Yu-mei cut from the same cloth as her father and brothers? If the two youngsters ever took it into their heads to marry, we couldn't take that baggage in here! But Yu-yi won't listen to me. If only I'd taken sister's advice earlier, and married him to Hsiao-chun, that would have been best for both sides!"

"Sister!" cried Mistress Sly. "If Hsiao-chun really divorces Yu-sheng, I'm still willing, and of course she'd be only too glad. But Yu-yi has friends he likes better—girls with book-learning too. You and I are just feudal-minded, sister. Why should he listen to us?"

"You mean Ling-chih? She's even worse! That's no bird to keep in our cage! With all this talk of free choice nowadays, I can't forbid him outright. But I want to see what girl he chooses. If he brings Yu-mei or Ling-chih here, I'll send him packing quickly enough! If Hsiao-chun and Yu-sheng really get divorced, I don't see why we shouldn't do what we thought of then! It's free choice nowadays, but you can get Hsiao-chun to choose him, can't you?"

Muddlehead feared his wife's frank way of talking might offend Mistress Sly.

"An old woman of nearly sixty," he scolded Always Right, "yet you rattle on like that."

Mistress Sly did not mind in the least, though.

"Don't you worry!" she assured him. "We sisters understand each other. And the two young folk aren't here, so it does no harm speaking of it."

Muddlehead wanted them to reach an understanding, but had been afraid Mistress Sly might feel embarrassed. Since this was not the case, he said no more, just let the sisters run on until finally Mistress Sly made it clear that she was going to goad Hsiao-chun into leaving Yu-sheng. Now Muddlehead had heard all he wanted, but his wife was so carried away by the conversation that she somehow led the talk round to her brother.

"Why bring up that ancient history?" protested Muddlehead. "Hsiao-chun's waiting for her mother at home!"

Mistress Sly suddenly remembered that she had important work to do, and stopped rambling on.

"Ai! Aren't I a fool? There's Hsiao-chun waiting for me! I'm off!" And with that she left.

Muddlehead, Always Right and Skinflint simply saw her to the door.

"Third Son's Wife! See your aunt to the gate!" shouted Always Right.

As Mistress Sly left the house, Muddlehead grumbled to his wife: "Once that woman starts talking, there's no stopping her. What a job it is to get rid of her! Hurry up now and let's get down to business."

The three of them sat down once more, and carefully prepared the arguments to use before "the officer from the people's court."

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## 8. The Competition

Acting on her mother's advice, Hsiao-chun hurried from Muddlehead's house to Yu-sheng's home, to fetch the vest and return it to Fan Teng-kao. She found Ling-chih and Yu-yi talking and laughing with Mrs. Fan. When she showed them the vest, Mrs. Fan thought she wanted to change it.

"What's the matter?" she asked, and stopped smiling. "Doesn't it fit? They're all in that cupboard—just pick out another."

Not wanting to tell her that Yu-sheng refused to pay, Hsiao-chun said she wanted a blue one, knowing there were none of that colour.

"There aren't any blue ones," Mrs. Fan told her.

"Then I won't buy one now. I'll wait till next time."

She handed the vest to Mrs. Fan, and after a few more words left.

"My guess is Yu-sheng wouldn't pay up!" announced Yu-yi as soon as she had gone.

He and Ling-chih proceeded to discuss Hsiao-chun and Yu-sheng, then the nicknames Hsiao-chun's parents had, and those of their own families. . . . One topic led to another.

Yu-yi and Ling-chih had been having these chats for three years now, but never so often as this autumn. Though they had attended the same middle school, the boys and girls studied in different classes and had few chances of talking — they had more when they were home for the summer or winter holidays. They usually met in Fan Teng-kao's house, because the Ma family's strictness about the gate and their large brown dog made calling there very awkward. Besides, Mrs. Fan had no son, and welcomed the neighbours' boys to her house. So Fan's home became the young people's regular meeting-place during the holidays. Mrs. Fan often joined in their discussions and acted as a sort of chairman, smoothing things over if the two of them quarrelled.

This year, Yu-yi's father had summoned him home in the middle of the term, and Ling-chih had left school too after graduating that summer. As they were both teaching the literacy classes in the village, they had many occasions to meet. And the tone of their talks had changed too, for since they were nearly grown up now, each had thought of the other as a possible partner in marriage. This had not escaped Mrs. Fan's notice, and she had sounded Ling-chih out. The girl replied that she had not yet made up her mind. The fact was that she was not altogether satisfied with Yu-yi—he knuckled under too easily to Muddlehead. Still, he was a member of the Youth League, and might improve. So she kept on friendly—but not too friendly—terms. Unfortunately she had not seen any improvement in Yu-yi during the last few months, and this often upset her. Both of them worked on the land in the same mutual-aid team, and they often had serious discussions about work or study; but every few days they would meet at Ling-chih's house to talk of everything under the sun, or find a fourth to play cards with them and her mother, just like on a Sunday at school.

Before Hsiao-chun came in with the vest that evening, the three of them had been reciting tongue-twisters. After she left, they fell to discussing her case. From that they got on to the subject of nicknames, and Ling-chih and Yu-yi mentioned the nicknames of the people in each other's families.

"Your dad's called Muddlehead," began Ling-chih. "Your mum's Always Right. Your elder brother. . . ."

"Your dad's called Fly High," announced Yu-yi at the same time. "Your mum's—" He glanced at Ling-chih's mother and laughed.

"All right! All right!" put in Mrs. Fan. "As if everyone didn't know all of us old folk have nicknames!"

Actually hers was not a bad name at all. Mrs. Fan was called Ever-green because, having no child but Ling-chih, she was spruce and trim from one end of the year to the other.

After this exchange of nicknames, Ling-chih said: "I can't understand the reason for certain names, ma. Take Yu-yi's dad, for instance. Why should anyone so sharp be called Muddlehead?"

"Your dad's name is easy to understand," pointed out Yu-yi. "It's because he got so much in the land reform!"

"He didn't really get so much more than other folk," objected Mrs. Fan. "He just got a few *mou* of good land, yet everyone started calling him Fly High."

"Well, he did pretty well out of it," was Yu-yi's rejoinder.

"Not all that well. Take those two mules. He didn't buy them till later. Don't you remember? In those days, our mutual-aid team was bigger than the co-op is today. Everyone wanted to use those mules, but no one wanted to feed them. When the big team split into small teams, the mules were pushed out. Not a soul wanted them. And so we scraped together enough to buy them."

"I remember all right," responded Yu-yi. "It wasn't that no one else wanted them, but no one else could afford them! Only Uncle Teng-kao could afford to buy mules, because after a few years with such good land he'd put a little money by."

Mrs. Fan's remark that the mutual-aid team had been bigger than the co-op set them discussing the latter.

"If they'd only worked out how to run a co-op then," said Ling-chih, "there'd have been no need to break up."

"That wouldn't have worked!" objected her mother. "Folk had only just got organized, and there wasn't any sort of system. More people would just have meant more larking. It couldn't have been like their co-op is now—smooth and steady, every detail nicely planned."

"Aunty!" Yu-yi appealed to her. "Since you think they run the co-op so well, will you be joining after the harvest?"

Ling-chih and her mother both answered at once.

"Of course!" was Ling-chih's reply.

"That depends on your uncle," was Mrs. Fan's rejoinder.

"I bet you won't!" declared Yu-yi. "There are three of you altogether, and aunty does what uncle says. The democratic way of doing things is for the minority to give in to the majority, so if uncle doesn't want to join, you won't!"

"How do you know my dad doesn't want to join?"

"He told *my* dad!"

"When was that?"

"When the wheat was harvested."

"What did he say?"



"My dad asked him if he'd be joining the co-op this autumn or not, and he countered: 'What about you?' My dad said: 'Not I!' Then uncle said: 'If you don't, I won't. When you're willing, we'll join together.'"

"Well, that doesn't mean my dad isn't willing. He just wants to get your family to join too!"

"But I've never heard him urge my dad to join."

Ling-chih thought for a moment.

"That does look rather bad," she admitted. "No wonder the Party branch criticizes him for his capitalist outlook!" She heaved a sigh. "Why did we two get saddled with fathers like this?"

"You can't change them to suit yourself," pointed out Mrs. Fan.

"We can't change them," agreed Ling-chih, "but we can reform them!" Facing Yu-yi, she raised her clenched fist and shouted: "Let us struggle against capitalist ideas!"

"If your dad were home, you wouldn't shout like that!" observed her mother.

"Maybe not. But that doesn't mean I'm not going to tackle him!"

"First time I heard of Youth Leaguers tackling Party members!" remarked Yu-yi.

"If Party members are in the wrong, anyone has the right to say so. And Youth Leaguers have a special duty to speak up!"

"Your dad made a big mistake spending all that money on your schooling," said Mrs. Fan. "It's just taught you to find fault."

"I'm not finding fault, ma! I'm trying to cure him. And he's getting his money's worth, because now I can act as his doctor." She turned again to Yu-yi. "Uncle To-shou sent you to middle school for two and a half years as well. You should try and cure him too!"

"Aren't I always trying?" Yu-yi sighed. "But he never gets any better. I don't know if he's too far gone, or if I'm just a bad doctor."

"Don't be so defeatist! Let's both make a pact to cure our dads for sure!"

"All right," agreed Yu-yi. "We must lay down conditions first. What happens when I've cured him?" He glanced meaningfully at Ling-chih.

"If you cure him, he's cured—what more do you want? Would you like him to have a relapse?"

"That's not what I meant." Yu-yi grinned.

"I know that's not what you meant," came the grave response. "It's the duty of a Youth Leaguer to try to help reform anyone in his family who's backward—how can you talk of conditions? If you must have one, all right, say: 'The winner is the *first* to complete the cure,' not 'What happens when I've cured him?' What you were saying amounted to: 'Unless you do something for me, I won't try to cure him.' What way is that to talk?"

Yu-yi did feel a little ashamed.

"I was only joking!" He quickly changed his tune. "Did you really believe I'd do it only upon certain conditions?"

"All right. We'll take it you were joking. Now let's talk seriously. Didn't my dad say to your dad they'd join the co-op together? We've got to see to it that they make good their word. I'll be responsible for my old man, you be responsible for yours. We must see to it they both join the co-op this autumn."

"Their cases are quite different," objected Yu-yi. "Your father's a Party member. The Party will help him. But my dad hasn't joined a single organization in the village, so nobody thinks it his business to interfere. How can I win him over all by myself?"

"There are two Youth League members in your house, you and Chu-ying. That ought to count for something."

"It doesn't. Don't you know my dad? He treats us as children. If we two were to tackle him on a big thing like this, he'd simply ignore us. He'd screw up his eyes and say: 'Off with you now—back to work!'"

"That's about the size of it," agreed Mrs. Fan. "And if you caught him in a bad mood, he'd swear at you!"

Ling-chih reflected again.

"That may be true," she admitted. "But if you go on following his example, won't you both turn into young Muddleheads? Even if you two Youth Leaguers can't take the whole family with you, you mustn't let the others drag you backwards! I'll give you some advice. Never mind if he ignores you. If you persevere long enough, he may finally pay some attention. And if all your arguments have no effect after all, then the only thing—to avoid being pulled back by him—is to ask for your share of land and set up on your own."

"Wouldn't Yu-yi's old man just burst with rage if he heard you!" commented Mrs. Fan. "It's because he wanted to clip Yu-yi's wings that he called him back from school half way through. He's always saying: 'Of my four fledgelings two have left the nest. I can't let this one fly away too!' If you advise Yu-yi to set up on his own, isn't that asking him to fly off?"

"Of course he ought to fly off," asserted Ling-chih. "If he doesn't hurry up and learn to fly, but crawls along with his dad a few more years, he'll never be able to do more than crawl!"

"And will you fly too, if your dad doesn't do as you want?" Mrs. Fan asked her daughter.

"My position's quite different. Whether dad does as I want or not, I shall fly off sooner or later, shan't I?" She hid her head in her mother's lap, and giggled.

"Let's fly together, shall we?" suggested Yu-yi.

"Why must you always lay down conditions for doing the right thing?" retorted Ling-chih, raising her head. "If I don't fly, I suppose you'll go on crawling!"

When Yu-sheng had given her the figures she needed, Ling-chih wrote down the problem.

"You do one," she said to Yu-yi. "I'll do the other two!"

They set to work separately. Soon Ling-chih had calculated the measurements for the roller Yu-sheng had already tried out, and told him the results. Chang Lo-yi asked Yu-sheng if they were correct or not.

"All correct, apart from some of the decimals which I couldn't get by measuring. Anyway, those don't matter."

"See the use of more schooling!" commented Chin-sheng.

"That's right!" agreed Yu-sheng. "If we could do mathematics, I needn't have spent so long on making that model!"

Soon the measurements for the other two rollers had also been worked out, and this problem was smoothly solved.

## 9. *The Exchange*

The window of North Cave showed barely a gleam of light the next morning when the Handy Man got up to prepare his tools, then woke Yu-sheng and set off with him for the threshing-floor to fix the rollers. While the little ones were still asleep, Chin-sheng's wife called her daughter Ching-miao to help her sweep the courtyard. Yu-mei, too, got up to fetch water. But no one disturbed Chin-sheng, who had gone to bed so late the night before.

Back from the well, Yu-mei told Chin-sheng's wife:

"Hsiao-chun's ma is at her gate using awful language again!"

"There's no stopping that woman's mouth once you offend her!"

"It's not us she's abusing—it's Man-hsi. When I've emptied these buckets I'll tell you all about it."

She carried the water into the kitchen and emptied it into the vat, then came out with the empty pails and went on with her story.

"When Man-hsi came along, Mistress Sly gave him a regular dressing down! 'A fellow who cheats an old lady will never find a wife!' she said. Man-hsi paid no attention."

"Man-hsi must have played some trick on her."

"I'll tell you what he did. . . ."

Yu-mei described how she had put Man-hsi up to finding Section Chief Ho a lodging with Muddlehead.

"If you were in it," teased Chin-sheng's wife, "you'll share in the penalty too. You'll never find a husband either!"

"Why, sis, are you taking Mistress Sly's side?"

Yu-mei lifted one of her buckets, as if to knock her sister-in-law on the head.

"Don't make so much noise! You'll wake your brother up."

"I've been awake for some time," called Chin-sheng from behind the door curtain in Middle Cave.

Yu-mei shot out her tongue, and the two of them started giggling.

Yu-mei had just slung the buckets on her pole to make another trip to the well, when Chin-sheng spoke again, and she had to stop.

"Can't you learn to behave a little better?" he demanded. "It's hard to win a man over, but the easiest thing in the world to set him against you. Your Youth League has been taking steps to bring old Ma To-shou round, but at one stroke you've cancelled out months of patient work and persuasion."

"Seems to me it's all the same whether you set him against you or not," retorted Yu-mei. "There are two Youth Leaguers living with him—Yu-yi and Chu-ying—but it makes not a scrap of difference however hard they try to win him over. Muddlehead was just born muddle-headed! You'll not win him over this side of the grave."

"Then must we keep them out permanently, even when we reach socialism?" asked Chin-sheng. "Winning a man over takes a long time. But as long as he's not an out-and-out enemy, we've got to keep on trying." He had finished dressing now, and joined them in the yard.

"Didn't you say that to bring someone round we have to struggle with him too?" asked Yu-mei with a smile.

"Yes, but it's got to be decent and above-board. Now you've tricked them, they're not going to trust us next time. Don't play any more tricks like that, see?"

Yu-mei picked up her buckets and started off, thinking her brother had finished. She had only taken a couple of steps, though, when Chin-sheng called her once more. This time, he looked less solemn.

"Put those buckets down, Yu-mei," he said cheerfully. "I want to talk to you about something else."

Relieved to find the subject of Muddlehead dropped, Yu-mei set down her buckets and asked what he wanted.

"Our co-op's got to divide up the grain today. Last year we'd only about two dozen households, yet one accountant couldn't handle the work. This year we've grown to fifty households, and if we don't get another accountant, I don't see how we'll manage. I was thinking of roping Ling-chih in to help—what do you say?"

"Of course, that would be good, but she doesn't belong to our co-op."

"We'll do it on an exchange basis. If we give her team someone in her place, they shouldn't mind. Ling-chih's a member of the Youth League, and we'll be making good use of her talents. I don't think she has any reason to refuse."

"Who will take her place?"

"That's what I want to talk to you about. I was thinking of sending you. Are you willing to go?"

For a moment, Yu-mei had nothing to say. She kicked herself for having so little education, but she knew quite well she was way below Ling-chih. She did not mind her own ignorance so much, but why exchange *her* for someone better?

"Why pick on me of all people in our co-op?" she asked.

"There are reasons," Chin-sheng told her. "Each team in the co-op works on the contract system, so none of the men can be spared. If we send a woman, she's got to be good—we can't have them saying we think only of ourselves. We have quite a few women hands, but apart from you and Hsiao-feng—one in the Youth League, the other in the Party—the rest might be hard to persuade. But the grain's got to be divided as soon as it's threshed this morning—we've no time to talk anyone round. That's why I thought of you. Hsiao-feng is our deputy chairman, so it's out of the question to send her. This is for the good of the co-op, and it won't hurt you. How about it?"

"Of course it's good for our co-op, and I know you must have thought it over carefully, brother. But I'm not sure whether I can do it. Suppose I give you my answer when I've filled these two buckets?"

"All right. Go ahead."

As Yu-mei shouldered her pole and set out, her mother came out of North Cave.

"Who are you exchanging our Yu-mei for?" she asked.

Chin-sheng's wife liked to joke with her mother-in-law.

"We're exchanging her for a bolt of cloth for you!" she said.

"I wish she were worth that much!" The old lady chuckled.

Once out of the gate, Yu-mei's first feeling was still one of regret that she had missed a proper schooling. She and Ling-chih were the same age, and had both been fourteen in 1947 when the people's army crossed the Yellow River. Since the enemy had been driven out of the Taihang Mountain region by then, the primary school in the county town started classes for the upper grades again; and because there were not enough students, the educational authorities tried to recruit a few in every village. Originally she and



Ling-chih were to go from Sanliwan, but then Yu-mei's mother said a silly fourteen-year-old girl would never be able to manage on her own outside, and Yu-mei did not want to leave home and live in town. So Ling-chih was the only girl to go. Now Ling-chih had gone through junior middle school, while she, Yu-mei, had forgotten the little she had learned in the village school and was having to learn it again in the evening classes. She felt resentful each time she thought of this. She was just as intelligent as Ling-chih, surely, but by making a wrong choice she had fallen behind her friend.

As a child, Yu-mei had heard the story of a girl who was taught by a fairy in the mountains, who finally presented her with a magic gourd which could give her whatever she wanted. Now Ling-chih seemed to possess a gourd of this sort, and Yu-mei could have had one too, but she had let slip her chance. Once she started on this track, memories would crowd to her mind, and she was powerless to check them.

Lost in such thoughts, she reached the well. There were three women there before her, who had not yet drawn water, and she set her buckets down next to those of the third. Realizing that she had been day-dreaming again, she pulled herself up sharply.

"What use is it letting my imagination run away with me like that?" she asked herself. "How can I say this to Chin-sheng?"

She started thinking along different lines. First of all, in Muddlehead's team she would not find the work too hard. Chu-ying was the only young woman in that team, and the elder women either did not work on the land or did very little—she was not afraid of them. The second thing to occur to her was the dearth of young people in that team, which would make it dull; but this would be fully made up for by the chance she would have of seeing more of Yu-yi. She had begun to take an interest in Yu-yi after starting evening classes, and while she doubted whether he had quite as much in his magic gourd as Ling-chih, there was still more than she could empty out at present. He was quite good enough to be her teacher. The third thought to strike her was the fact that the mutual-aid team paid wages, instead of sharing out profits, so she might lose out a little there. The fourth was that, according to Man-hsi, the team members ate with whoever they were working for, who deducted three catties of rice from their pay. Muddlehead liked them to eat in his house, but never prepared enough food. . . . By this time, the three women in front of her had drawn their water and left, and a later comer was urging her to hurry. She realized again, with a start, that she was getting nowhere.

"Curse it!" she thought. "Why do I always think only of myself? I can't talk like this to my brother when I get back."

She hooked her buckets on the rope and swiftly filled them one after the other, then started home. This time she concentrated on essentials.

"There's no need to mull over it so long! If the co-op can exchange me for a good accountant, I'll be doing a good deed by going."

As soon as she reached home, Chin-sheng demanded:

"Well? Will you do it or not?"

"All right. Do you want us to change places right away?"

"Wait till I've consulted everyone concerned. I'm going to the threshing-floor now to ask old Chang."

"Wait a bit!" called his wife, as he started to go. "Take this sack of wheat to the mill if you're going that way. Yu-mei, when you've finished with the water, will you take the crate and winnowing fan along for me? I'll go on ahead to the co-op to fetch the donkey." Then she asked her mother-in-law: "Will you keep an eye on the kids for me, mum? When Ta-sheng wakes up, bring him over to the mill."

Chin-sheng threw the sack of wheat over his shoulder, and left with his wife and little girl. Yu-mei emptied her buckets, then collected a pile of stuff and carried it off—the crate, winnowing fan, sieve, stand for the sieve, and broom.

After delivering the wheat, Chin-sheng went to find Chang Lo-yi, while his wife harnessed the donkey to the mill. When Yu-mei had delivered the things for grinding the flour she left to thresh the millet, and on her way met her mother leading five-year-old Li-ming towards the mill. When the old lady saw Yu-mei, she said to her grandson:

"Go with your aunty to the threshing-floor, sonny! You'd only be in your ma's way at the mill."

## 10. The Need for More Reshuffling

When the harvest starts, there is not much to see on the threshing-floor. It is not like towards the end, when the place is a medley of red, gold, black and green. Most in evidence now were the unthreshed sheaves freshly piled up on the threshing-floor. After these came the stalks of *kaoliang* and beans; but since these were not staple crops, the piles were smaller, and often the stacks of wheat hid them from sight. Still, you could tell at a glance which floor belonged to the co-op, which to the mutual-aid teams, and which to the peasants working on their own.

The most conspicuous was the co-op floor, seven or eight times the size of the smaller floors near by. The sheaves stacked there like a wall were taken away one by one by about thirty women who sat down in different places. By the time they finished threshing, the whole floor was covered with grain. Chang Lo-yi, chairman of the co-op, was standing on one rick, pushing down sheaf after sheaf and telling the women exactly where to go. Whenever he had time to spare, he helped spread out the grain with a rake made from a mulberry tree. Laughing and shouting children were racing across and around the threshing-floor, while the Handy Man and Yu-sheng were working on two of the stone rollers which they had moved to an empty plot near by.

"Here! . . . There! . . ." Chang was shouting. "A bit further! . . . Nearer! . . ."

The women were gossiping at the top of their voices. The children were fighting or turning somersaults on the sheaves. And the ding-dong-ding-dong of the hammers and chisels of Yu-sheng and his father seemed to be marking the beat amid all this hubbub. Liang the artist was standing on an old roller set on end on a small threshing-floor adjacent to this, making a sketch of the harvesters.

The mutual-aid teams were working collectively too, of course. But they could not compare with the co-op either in the size of their threshing-floors, the length of their ricks, or the number of their workers. As for the individual peasants, one or two were threshing quietly on their own—a job which would take half their morning. There were not even children with them to liven things up, for the small fry paid no attention to economic categories—they had long since joined the troop of co-op youngsters.

The excitement was at its height as Chin-sheng walked up to Chang Lo-yi, and told him of his plan for switching Yu-mei and Ling-chih, who could serve as a second accountant. The chairman clapped his hands.

"I was wishing we could borrow her," he cried, "when I saw how smartly she worked out the size of those rollers yesterday evening. But I didn't think of this exchange!"

Tickled to have had the same idea as Chin-sheng, he had spoken rather loudly. Now he remembered that Ling-chih was threshing on Muddlehead's floor next to them, and might well have overheard him. He turned to look. Sure enough, Ling-chih had paused in spreading out the stalks of early wheat, and—pointing in Chang's direction—was saying something to Yu-yi. He was pretty sure she had caught his remark.

"They've heard us!" he said to Chin-sheng, jerking his head towards Ling-chih.

Chin-sheng looked across just as Ling-chih and Yu-yi glanced his way, and they all laughed. He walked to the edge of the floor.

"Since you've heard, I'll ask you first." He kept his voice down. "Don't spread the news, though. What do you think? Will you do it?"

"I'd love to have a chance like this!" exclaimed Ling-chih. "Will you speak to my father about it?"

"Of course! How could I go over your team leader's head? I asked you not to spread the news, because I don't want to announce it till everyone's agreed. But Yu-yu is your deputy team leader. What do you say, Yu-yu?"

Whenever Skinfint heard people talk in undertones he suspected them of discussing his family's backward ways, so he always pricked up his ears. Not having caught the beginning, however, he was puzzled, though he dared not ask questions. Now he pretended to have heard nothing.

"What's that?" he inquired. "Something to do with me?"

When Chin-sheng explained, Skinflint consented at once.

"That's all right! We can't make use of her skill—you can make better use of her!"

He had seen at once, of course, that the change would be to his advantage—Yu-mei was a much better farmhand than Ling-chih.

"Would you go too," Ling-chih whispered to Yu-yi, "if they found someone to replace you?"

"My old man wouldn't let me!" he whispered back.

"This side has agreed," Chin-sheng told Chang Lo-yi. "I must look for Fan Teng-kao now."

"Hold on!" said Chang. "There's still her team leader Wei Chan-kuei, you know." "Never mind," he added after a moment's thought. "You can go. I'll tell him when he comes with the next lot of sheaves."

Thereupon Chin-sheng left.

Soon ten young fellows came up, each carrying a load of wheat.

"Is that the lot?" asked Chang.

"There are still eight more loads," said the leader, Wei Chan-kuei.

Since they were bringing in what had been left from the previous day, instead of stacking it separately they dumped it in front of the women doing the threshing, then drew out their pointed carrier-poles, and left.

"Wait a bit, Chan-kuei!" called Chang. "I've something to ask you."

When Wei came up, Chang explained the scheme for switching Yu-mei and Ling-chih.

"All right," agreed Wei. "But you must give us someone else."

"I like your nerve! Your team already has two-thirds of the young fellows in the co-op. Can't you make up one woman's work between you during the autumn?"

"We lost out on our contract this year. Just take the grain from these four *mou*, for instance. In our contract, we reckoned there would be sixty loads. Now we've carried seventy, and there are still eight left. . . ."

"That only means two extra trips. It doesn't make such a difference."

"It's not just a question of carrying. There's reaping, stacking, binding—it all takes time, doesn't it?"

"You're not the only ones. Everyone's in the same boat—we all underestimated our output this year."

"I'm not saying we're the only team in a hole, I'm just afraid we may not get the harvest in on time. The day before yesterday was the last day of August, so we worked out where we stood. According to our contract, we should have only four hundred and two workdays left. Judging by the size of our team, we can do five hundred and ten by the end of this month. But judging by the crops in the fields, we can't finish the harvesting in less than six hundred workdays. Yu-mei's one of our best workers too. Apart from carrying loads, which is against the rules for a woman, she's as good as any man. . . ."

"You must put the good of the co-op before that of your team!" cut in Chang. "If you dole out the work better, and all waste less time on the threshing-floor after each trip, you can save a lot of man-hours. Remember how put out everyone was last year when the accounts still weren't ready by mid-winter?"

"I see the reason all right. I'm all for this exchange. But it's a real question, too, whether we'll be able to finish our work or not. Show me a way out, Mr. Chairman! Suppose you give some of our land to another team?"

"That would be no way out. If I could do that, I could find you someone else. Let me think a moment."

He considered the problem.

"They may be able to help at the market garden. They've sold all their cucumbers and pumpkins, so they've nothing on hand but celery and egg-plant. They can't sell their turnips and cabbages for another month yet, and now it's cooler there's not so much watering to do. They should be able to spare a man. I tell you what: I promise to give you someone. You hand Yu-mei over first."

"When?"

"They want Yu-mei right away. You'll have someone else by tomorrow at the latest."

Wei raised no further objections.

## 11. Fan Teng-kao's Secret

Upon reaching Fan Teng-kao's gate, Chin-sheng walked a few paces away, for he heard Fan quarrelling with Wang Hsiao-chu, his mule-driver. He did not try to catch what the quarrel was about—indeed all that could be heard was a shout here and there: "All right, we'll settle then!" or "You can't have it both ways!" He decided to stay outside till they had finished, in order not to butt in and put them out before they had settled their differences. But though he waited for some time, they went on wrangling and showed no sign of stopping—they might keep it up all day. Then Chin-sheng, who was too busy to wait indefinitely, hammered on the gate and called out. At once the wrangling stopped.

"Who's there?" demanded Fan Teng-kao.

Chin-sheng went in.

Fan was quite taken aback when he saw who it was, for fear Chin-sheng had heard what the argument was about.

"What brings you here so early?" He hastened to offer him a seat.

If he hoped to divert attention from the quarrel, with Wang standing there and the issue between them unsettled, that was quite out of the question.



"Finish my business first!" put in Wang before Chin-sheng could answer. "I must go home to get my grain in. Just for one day and a half!"

All Fan asked at this point was for Wang to say no more. He was willing to agree to anything.

"All right, go!" he conceded at once. "The mules can make another trip the day after tomorrow."

When Wang had left, before embarking on his own business Chin-sheng asked casually:

"What was this row between master and man, so early in the morning?"

Since Fan knew a Party member had no right to hire labour, he dreaded nothing more than this description "master and man."

"Didn't I tell the Party," he protested quickly, "that the two of us are partners in this side line? I supply the mules, he puts up the capital. How can you call him my man?"

"Come off it, old fellow! You couldn't fool a child with that story. Everyone knows Wang Hsiao-chu didn't go home till 1950, and all he got was three *mou* of left-over land. What capital could he supply you with?"

Wang Hsiao-chu had been left an orphan at twelve in Hillback Village, ten *li* due west of Sanliwan. He went to work as a stable-boy in Linhochén, where experience of so many horses, donkeys and mules made him a fair judge of them. So eventually he became a horse-dealer in the market town, married a local girl and settled down there. When land was distributed in 1947, the Hillback Village authorities sent to ask whether he would like a plot or not, but he refused, not wanting to work on the land. Most of the brokers in those days were shady characters. And because he cheated a customer in 1950, he was sentenced to six months of labour reform, after which he was forced to go home and farm. By this time all the land had been distributed except for certain plots reserved for landless soldiers after demobilization. With the consent of the committee in charge, Wang was given three *mou* of this land. He could have had more, in fact, but he would not take it, being afraid he could not grow enough to pay his tax.

Even two good husbandmen would find it hard to live off three *mou*, and as neither Wang nor his wife had ever worked on the land, of course it was harder for them. Still, they had joined a mutual-aid team and gained experience for a few years, and would be able to join the producers' co-op when one was set up in their village, so their life was improving all the time. But Wang never really settled down. Though he joined the mutual-aid team, they had no control over him, and every few days he would slip back to Linhochén to get up to his old tricks with other crooked brokers there.

One day in 1951 after the autumn harvest, while driving his mules to Linhochén to deliver some goods, Fan happened to fall in with Wang.

Wang greeted him and asked: "Would you like to take me on as your mule-driver?"

Fan had long been wanting to find a driver, but Party members were not allowed to hire hands—if such a thing were discovered, he might be expelled from the Party. Besides, since the land reform there were very few men for hire. He had never come across anyone suitable.

"Why not?" was his joking reply. But he was thinking: "If I did take someone on, it wouldn't be you, I can tell you!"

By the time they had covered another stretch of road, however, Fan was having second thoughts. "There's such a shortage of labour that you can't pick and choose," he reflected. "Everyone has his faults." From this he went on to consider Wang's good points—since he had worked in a stable, he would certainly feed the mules well; and having been a horse-dealer, he would know at once if anything was wrong with them. Then the fact that he was always in and out of Linhochén meant that he could buy things there without being cheated. Yes, he was worth considering! Before the journey was over they reached agreement on the following terms: Wang was to be paid two hundred thousand a month; he was also to receive five per cent of all the profits; he would not work on Fan's land; and he was not to disclose that they were master and man, but to say they were partners doing a little trading on the side.

The reason for this quarrel, according to Fan, was that Wang had not kept his part of the bargain, while Wang said this was not included in their agreement. It had come about like this: the mules usually carried stuff for other people, but sometimes they fetched goods for Fan; and when this happened, Fan decided what he wanted, while Wang had the authority to buy something else if he spotted a better bargain. This time Fan had decided to buy woollen underwear. As luck would have it, the central consumers' co-op for the district was buying the same underwear from the firm with which Fan dealt; so Wang bought at the wholesale price agreed to by the co-op, and thought he was doing well, buying a small order at the same price as a large one. But when Fan knew it, although he did not blame Wang outright, he resented his not having shown more initiative. For now they had stocked the same goods as the co-op, and since Wang had made a trip for someone else before coming back, their goods arrived two days after the co-op underwear reached Sanliwan. The co-op sold at the wholesale price plus only the cost of transport and handling; but while Fan could buy at the same price he could not sell for the same without losing all his profit.

"What happened yesterday goes to show how hard it's going to be to get rid of them even at cost price," he thought. "They'll have to lie in the cupboard, cutting down my turnover."

Irritation over this had kept him awake half the night, and as soon as he got up the next morning Wang asked for leave. This did not suit Fan either. Brokers have a saying: "To make money, work through the

harvest and New Year." The busier the peasants were, the fewer the draught animals to spare, and the higher the price of carrying.

"If the mules stay at home now," thought Fan, "I shall not only miss a good profit but have to feed them a peck of black beans a day. I shall lose out both ways."

He felt Wang should show more consideration, and explained why he could not let him go.

"I've worked for you nearly a year now," rejoined Wang. "You've got to think of *me* too! That three *mou* is all we have, and my old woman's sent word that it's to be threshed tomorrow. You've got to let me go home to see to things!"

"Your mutual-aid team will see to everything for you. Whatever they thresh, they'll give you. You don't think they'll cheat you, do you? It's not as if I don't treat you well—two hundred thousand a month, plus a bonus—I call that pretty generous. Yet you want to go off now, when there's money to be made. That's a shabby way to behave."

"I sweat for that pay and bonus—you can't call it generous."

"All right. But since you take my money, you ought to be more considerate. I didn't hire you just to spend money on you."

"I don't waste your money—I work!"

"If you want to farm, stay at home. If you work outside, you mustn't just up and leave when you're most needed. You can't have it both ways!"

"I'm not your slave! I don't care what you say, I've got to go back today! If you don't want to keep me on, let's settle up and part."

"All right! Let's settle up! Pay me what you owe me!"

"I can't pay back that advance till I've earned some more. But don't think you can use that two or three hundred thousand as a whip over my head!"

They grew more and more heated, and neither gave way an inch. Knowing that Wang could not repay the wages he had drawn in advance, Fan took a firm line with him. As for Wang, well aware that Fan could not let it be known that he was hiring labour and would never dare take the matter to court, he dug his heels in too. But for Chin-sheng's arrival, there is no saying what might have happened.

"It's no use telling you the truth," protested Fan, when he saw Chin-sheng had guessed his real relationship to Wang. "You just refuse to believe me!"

"I'm not the only one," retorted Chin-sheng. "Nobody would believe you. Never mind, we can discuss that later in a Party meeting. I've another small matter to talk over with you now."

He explained the proposal to switch Yu-mei and Ling-chih, so as to get an extra accountant. Fan was heartily thankful for this sudden reprieve. He felt proud, too, that his daughter's talents were being recognized by the Party secretary, chairman of the co-op, and other village officials.

"Of course, if she can do it!" he assented readily.

Just then Chin-sheng's daughter, Ching-miao, came running in.

"Dad!" she called. "Section Chief Ho and Deputy District Head Chang want to see you!"

"I must be going," Chin-sheng told Fan. "So we can leave it at that?"

"Sure!"

Then Chin-sheng left with his daughter.

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## 16. *Chu-ying's Troubles*

Not far from the foot of the slope outside Chin-sheng's door were two mills. By the time Chin-sheng's wife had harnessed the co-op donkey to one of them that morning, Chu-ying was using the other. In milling, the second grinding is the slowest; so when both women were on their second grinding, in the intervals between sifting flour they chatted. Chin-sheng's wife began with the question of Yu-sheng's divorce, and from that Chu-ying led up to the way Ma To-shou's family treated her.

She passed over the quarrel with Spitfire the previous night, though, to speak of her real troubles.

"Seems to me, sister," she said, "Hsiao-chun just didn't know how lucky she was! Your family pulls together, the old folk as well as all the rest of your in-laws. Each does his share of the work, and gets his whack of what's going—it's share and share alike. What wouldn't I give to live in a home like that! But look at the in-laws I'm landed with!"

"It's no good saying that," replied Chin-sheng's wife. "Ten fingers can't all be the same length. You envy our family, but one Hsiao-chun was enough to lead us a dance every day. Show me the house where the pan never knocks into the bowls! You've quite a few good folk in your family too: a county government worker, a Volunteer, a middle school student, two members of the Youth League—you and Yu-yi. That's not a bad lot, is it?"

"A far-off well is no good to a thirsty man. None of them has any say at home, and those with a say still run things the way our ancestors did. Just take the business of clothes. Since we've had mutual-aid teams in the village, what girl who can work on the land wants to go on spinning those strips of homespun which don't even pay for your keep? But our family sticks to its old rule, giving me five catties of raw cotton a year and expecting me to make my own clothes out of that."

"What about your sister-in-law?"

"On the face of it, of course, she's in the same boat; but *her* husband carries weight in the house. I've never seen her spin an inch of cloth,

yet she's never short of clothes, and she uses the cotton given her to make new quilts."

"Have you never said anything?"

"They find fault enough as it is, without my saying anything! It's not as if I can't spin, but what time do I have for spinning? My sister-in-law lugs that baby about all day as an excuse for doing nothing, leaving all the housework to me — milling, cooking, sweeping or dusting. Don't talk about spinning — our shoes are all worn out, but I shan't have time to make new ones till I go home to my mother. Our clothes are in rags, but I've no time to wash or mend them. Each summer and winter when I go home, I have to take cloth to make two thick pairs of shoes for the old man and Yu-yi. After that I make clothes, shoes and socks for myself and Ling-ling, and by the time I've washed and patched our old things it's time to come back again. But even then they say: 'This daughter-in-law won't settle down, she's always running home to take life easy.'"

"Did you get that cloth you're wearing from your own home then?"

"What else can I do? My parents were just unlucky, having a girl who costs money even after she's married. But my in-laws don't like me any the better for that. My mother-in-law often says in front of me: 'It's her fault if we don't treat her better. Who told her to fool her husband into leaving?'"

"I heard some talk about that. What happened actually?"

"It's true that he left from my home, but it was his own idea. I wasn't like some wives who encouraged their husbands to join the Volunteers; but neither was I one of those backward wives who urged them not to go. They hate me because I wasn't backward enough."

"Who got Yu-hsi to go then?"

"No one. It was his own idea. He wanted to join a work corps in 1949 to go south with the people's army, but Muddlehead wouldn't let him. It's a long story. I married Yu-hsi in 1948, when I was eighteen and he was twenty-one. He told me he'd left primary school when he was fifteen, and wanted to go to the Taihang middle school. But his old man said: 'Your second brother studied in middle school and became a government worker as soon as he left it — ran off and never came back. Do you want to do the same? You're staying here! You'll stick quietly at home and farm!' But two years after we married, after I had had Ling-ling, the old man suddenly packed him off to school. . . ."

"Everyone said it was to stop his joining up."

"That's right. In the spring of '49, didn't a lot of men join work corps in the War of Liberation? When they held that big meeting to sign on, his dad locked him and Yu-yi up at home and wouldn't let them out. And that summer he sent them both to the county middle school. Yu-hsi was twenty-two then, head and shoulders taller than anyone else in his class; and they laughed at him behind his back for coming to school to get out of joining the army. In '50 the Americans started the

war in Korea, and classes stopped for several days so that the teachers could take the students round the villages to explain about resisting America and aiding Korea, and encourage men to volunteer. Some villagers poked fun at him then. 'A great strapping fellow hiding among a pack of kids to avoid volunteering!' they said. 'He's got a nerve, calling on us to join up!' He told me his classmates accused him of letting the whole school down, and he couldn't look anyone in the face after that. He said he'd wanted to sign on long ago, but with a father like Muddlehead he couldn't. By autumn last year — '51 — the Americans were preparing another offensive while pretending to talk peace, and the students went out to do propaganda work in the villages again. But this time they wouldn't take him — he was left all alone at school. The more he thought, the surer he was that his father had done the wrong thing, and that he himself was too backward. He decided to volunteer. The trouble was that the school said students must have permission from home to join up, and of course he couldn't get permission. By winter, he simply couldn't stand it any more, and asked for two days' leave to go home; but instead he came to see me — I was with my mother then. He poured out all his troubles, and asked me if I agreed to his joining up. If I hadn't agreed, sister, they'd have kept him in leading strings till he died of shame! Don't tell anyone, but the truth is I agreed. I kept him for two days while I sewed him a new suit, then sent him off. When his family knew, his mother made a scene at the school till they told her he'd asked for home leave, and showed her the form he'd filled up. When she asked Yu-yi, he told her that was right, so she had nothing to say. I heard this from Yu-yi. She went straight to my home, but how dared I tell her the truth? I said, 'Yes, he did come. But he only stayed for one day, then went back to school.' She didn't say anything at the time, but later she insisted that I had made her son run away from home. After he left, this spring, Muddlehead wouldn't let Yu-yi go back to school — just six months before he was due to graduate. I don't know what makes those two old folk see eye to eye on everything like this! And as for my sister-in-law. . . ."

Just then Always Right came up, leading a small donkey. Chu-ying put out her tongue in dismay, and stopped talking abruptly.

Always Right took a look at the millstone.

"What! Not finished the second grinding yet!"

"What's there is all that's left," Chu-ying told her.

"The big donkey's been at it all morning, it needs a change. But the small donkey isn't strong enough for the second grinding. You ought to have finished by this time!"

Chin-sheng's wife tried to help Chu-ying out.

"I think the small donkey can do it, aunty," she said. "It couldn't manage more, but that little bit's all right. And the third grinding will be much lighter."

Always Right gave a grudging assent and unharnessed the big donkey, then Chu-ying harnessed the small one in its place. After satisfying herself that the small donkey could turn the mill quite easily, Always Right led the larger away. But before she went, she enjoined Chu-ying:

"Look sharp now! The donkeys are wanted at noon to pull the roller!"

"She'll hardly be through by noon!" predicted Chin-sheng's wife. "I'm already on my third grinding, but I doubt if I shall finish either. It's nearly noon now, aunty!"

Always Right knew it could hardly be done, but wanted to make things awkward for Chu-ying. Since Chin-sheng's wife spoke up, she changed her tune.

"Well, do as much as you can! If you really can't finish, go on a little longer."

Saying this, she made off.

"What way is that to talk!" burst out Chu-ying, as soon as Always Right was out of earshot. "If the donkey's tired, she gives it a rest. But are human beings made of iron? 'Go on a little longer' indeed! I've been working here since first thing this morning, with nothing to eat but one bowl of rice Yu-yi brought. I keep at it on a half-empty stomach till noon, yet she won't give me a break. What kind of behaviour is that?"

"If the donkey's weak, why not grind a little less?" asked Chin-sheng's wife.

"My sister-in-law put her up to this! They can't sleep at night if they haven't had a row in the daytime, but they gang up to bully me! While I'm at home they keep saying the rice is finished or the flour is finished, and send me here every other day to mill some more, putting by a secret hoard to last them all the winter — I'm back by the time it's nearly eaten. Ah, well, let's not talk about it. Once you start, there's no end, I can tell you."

Presently the Handy Man's wife hurried up to tell her daughter-in-law that Hsiao-chun had left, taking a big bundle from Yu-sheng's cave. What could she be carrying off in that bundle?

"Why not go and tell Yu-sheng, mum?" suggested Chin-sheng's wife.

"I have, but he won't do anything. He says: 'So long as she never comes back to plague me again, I don't care if she takes the cave!' It's all very well to talk, but suppose she's gone off with his clothes, what will he wear?"

"If she really wants a divorce, mum, I don't think she'd take Yu-sheng's clothes — that would show her up badly, you see. I think Yu-sheng is right: if she's actually breaking with him, it's cheap at the price. When he goes back at noon, he can see what's missing. I'm sure she won't have taken anything big. Don't worry, mum!"

The Handy Man's wife never quarrelled with anyone, so after being given this assurance she exchanged a few remarks with them and left.

They were both on their third grinding now, and the middlings had to be pushed down the holes in the millstone at every second circle the donkeys made. Between brushing the runner and sifting the flour, they had no time to talk. The only sounds were the tramp of the donkeys' hooves, and the clatter of their sieves against the stands. Luckily seven-year-old Ching-miao lent them a hand, and saved them some running about.

Chin-sheng's flour needed only a couple more turns to finish, when old Hard-and-Fast arrived to take back the donkey. And at the same time Chu-ying completed her third grinding!

## 17. Three Threshing-floors

After the midday meal, they tried out the three new rollers on the co-op threshing-floor. The Handy Man, Wang Shen, Yu-sheng and Ling-chih — those who had helped make the rollers — ran over to watch the result. So did others who were interested.

Three men in charge of the threshing led up three large, sleek mules and harnessed them to the rollers which rotated easily and swiftly. As Yu-sheng had predicted, there was no need at all to tug at the reins, for after each round the rollers came back to exactly where they had started. The drivers were very tickled. Holding the reins and cracking their whips, they followed the mules with their eyes. The onlookers watched with satisfaction, too, as the mules stepped lightly and nimbly over the grain — a pleasanter sight than a couple of lumbering donkeys.

"Never mind how much they thresh," someone commented. "A big mule on a big threshing-floor like this makes you feel good just to look at it."

After watching for a while they scattered. The threshers went on threshing, while the other co-op members went back to work, as did Wang Shen and the rest. Chin-sheng sent Ling-chih and Li, the accountant, back to Flagstaff Compound to prepare for the grain distribution, while Yu-sheng was summoned there by the grievance committee too, in connection with his trouble with Hsiao-chun.

On a threshing-floor to the west, Skinflint was turning over his family's grain. The stalks were usually turned before lunch to dry in the noonday sun, so that winnowing could start in the afternoon when they were thoroughly dry. But since Skinflint's mutual-aid team had come back rather late from reaping his family's crops that morning, he was only now turning the grain while others had started threshing. Presently Yu-yi and Man-hsi arrived, and Yu-yi announced that their donkeys would not be available for threshing, as the big one was only just back and had not finished feeding yet, while the small one was still

at the mill. He grumbled about their family's bad planning, but could suggest no alternative. It was Man-hsi who proposed that since Fan Teng-kao's mules had not gone out that morning they should borrow one of them. As Fan was their team leader and the mules were at home, there should be no difficulty. Skinflint sent Yu-yi off to fetch one.

On his way back with the mule, Yu-yi met Yu-mei, and the two of them walked back together. Man-hsi harnessed the mule to the roller and started threshing the grain already turned, while Yu-yi and Yu-mei took a mulberry fork apiece and helped Skinflint to turn the rest. After several years at school, Yu-yi was a poor hand at farming and held his fork so clumsily that Yu-mei laughed at him. Man-hsi remarked that this was something he still had to learn.

"Go and have a rest!" advised Skinflint. "You turn it so unevenly that it's hard to husk!"

Yu-yi felt ashamed of his incompetence and, since the turning was nearly finished anyway, he did as he was told, put down his fork and went to sit in the shade of a rick of wheat stalks plastered with mud. As Skinflint and Yu-mei neared the end, there was no room for two forks; so Yu-mei put hers down and swept the grain into a circle, then went to the rick to rest. As the two youngsters had occupied the only shady spot on the threshing-floor, Skinflint went to the co-op floor to see how they were getting on there.

Meanwhile Yu-mei put a strange question to Yu-yi:

"Does anyone know how many characters there are?"

"Of course. Our teacher says there are over eight thousand Chinese characters, but only about four thousand are in common use."

"Then why does it take several years to finish middle school? Wouldn't a year, doing nothing else, be enough to learn them all?"

"Didn't you attend the first grades in primary school? You did more at school than learn characters, surely?"

"Yes. We had arithmetic, nature study, and all the rest of it. But in those times there was fighting every other day, so we didn't really learn anything properly. Memorizing new characters seemed to be the main thing."

"You have to learn quite a few new characters every day in primary school, but later on you get fewer new characters and more and more other lessons."

When she asked what lessons they had, he reeled off the names on his time-table: history, geography, algebra and geometry, zoology, botany, mineralogy, physics, chemistry and politics. He gave examples, too, to explain what each meant. But Yu-mei was quite out of her depth. All she could catch were isolated words: Chinese and foreign; ancient and modern; roots, stems and leaves; head, chest and bowels; soil strata,

crystallization, wind and rain; capitalism and socialism. . . . She was completely bewildered.

"All right! All right!" she signed to him to stop. "I shall be a dunce all my life."

Once more she inwardly cursed herself for making a wrong choice that year, and not going to school with Yu-yi and Ling-chih. Yu-yi saw how disheartened she felt.

"Don't you worry!" he reassured her. "The government plans to make night school a regular thing after the anti-illiteracy campaign. It'll be like an ordinary school, where you can learn grade by grade. They say that's the only way to consolidate the anti-illiteracy campaign and raise everyone's cultural level."

"You mean someone like me will be able to learn as much as a middle school graduate?" demanded Yu-mei, as if in fun.

"Of course! But by then Ling-chih and I won't be able to teach you — we'll have come to the end of the little we know."

"Oh, but *you two* will have learned much more by then!"

In talking to Yu-mei, Yu-yi always tried to avoid Ling-chih's name, because whenever it slipped out Yu-mei would make fun of him. Now he had done it again. Knowing that any explanation would only make matters worse, he hastened to change the subject.

Soon the mules were unharnessed at the co-op threshing-floor, and over a score of people pitched in to work. Some of them did not know that Yu-mei had changed places with Ling-chih.

"Yu-mei!" called one of these, when he saw her resting by the next threshing-floor. "Why are you sitting there? Come back to work!"

"Don't call Yu-mei!" bawled young Yuan of the militia. "Yu-mei belongs to them now!"

Yu-mei jumped to her feet by the rick.

"Wait till I slap your little egg face!" she shouted back.

The phrase "belongs to them now" is used when a girl marries and goes to live with her in-laws, and young Yuan used it because he knew Yu-mei was interested in Yu-yi, and wanted to get a rise out of her.

The grain stacked on the co-op's floor had been winnowed once by now, Ma To-shou's grain had been husked, and Huang Ta-nien and Yuan Ting-wei had turned up too. While Yu-yi took the mule back to Fan Teng-kao, Huang, Yuan, Man-hsi, Skinflint and Yu-mei tossed the husked stalks with mulberry forks. Huang Ta-nien was a giant of a man, generally called Big Ox. He could do the work of two. All his tools were specially made for him, and were half as large again as anyone else's. This was true of his fork as well — with one thrust he could toss up twice as much as the others. Yuan Ting-wei's nickname was Shilly-shally, because he kept changing his mind. If paid by the piece, he did a lot of shoddy work; if working in a group, he slacked whenever he could.

Now his fork rose once at the most for everyone else's twice. Yu-mei was an old hand at this, and she kept up pretty well with Skinflint whom she came after. Man-hsi had a stubborn streak in him. He was next to Huang Ta-nien, and it set him on his mettle to see Big Ox turn a swath twice as broad as his. He started forking faster — twice to Huang's once. Before one lot of stalks had fallen, another was on its way up, looking from the side like flights of swallows alighting. This display showed Shilly-shally up too badly.

"Man-hsi!" he twitted him. "What did you eat this morning?"

That put Man-hsi off, and his fork slowed down.

The mention of food was enough to irritate him. The rule of their team was that the family for which the others were working should provide them either with meals or an extra three catties of rice. Muddlehead's family liked to provide meals, but no one willingly ate there, only Man-hsi, a bachelor, who had no time to cook while working. And his account of their midday meal was not quite consistent with Always Right's. According to her, they had "two millet dumplings apiece, and any amount of noodles." According to him, they had "two millet dumplings apiece, and any amount of noodle soup." One emphasized the soup, the other the noodles, but neither was correct. Always Right put things in the best light, Man-hsi in the worst. The correct description would have been: "Two millet dumplings apiece, one bowl of noodles and any amount of soup." Each dumpling contained four ounces of flour, each bowl of noodles two. Big Ox could have tucked that away straight on top of a square meal. For Man-hsi it was not quite enough.

By the time they were nearly ready to make ricks, Yu-yi came back and Muddlehead also arrived. Muddlehead was impressed by the smart way Yu-mei handled her tools, but ran Yu-yi down for his incompetence.

The first rick was nearly stacked when Muddlehead saw the wind was dropping.

"Yu-yi!" he called. "Take someone home with you to fetch the winnowing fan!"

Yu-yi asked Yu-mei to go with him, but she was afraid of the dog.

"I'll go with you!" volunteered Man-hsi.

Yu-yi darted a meaning look at Yu-mei, which was caught by young Yuan on the co-op floor.

"Go on! Don't worry!" he shouted to Yu-yi. "She won't run away!"

By the time the grain on the Ma family's threshing-floor was stacked up, the co-op grain had already been winnowed twice. Shilly-shally saw how smoothly things were going there and how good their working conditions were; moreover he had been told that from the market garden alone each family would get about a million dollars.

"Look how swimmingly things are going for the co-op!" he exclaimed enviously. "Next year I'm going to join."

"They've no foreman to spare for you!" Man-hsi rallied him.

For Shilly-shally invariably had to be supervised. If you left him to work on his own, he nearly always slept in the field.

"When they give you your share of the grain," threw in Huang, "you'll threaten to quit if the measure isn't running over!"

Though they spoke so bluntly, Shilly-shally did not protest. This was one of his chief faults — meekly accepting criticism, but going on afterwards just the same as before.

Presently Man-hsi and Yu-yi carried the winnowing fan over.

"Go home as fast as you can, Uncle Ma!" cried Man-hsi. "Auntie and Yu-yu's wife are having a row with Chu-ying!"

Muddlehead and Skinflint were taken aback.

"What about?" asked Muddlehead.

"Hurry up and go!" urged Man-hsi. "You can find out from them. Don't wait till there's real trouble!"

He sounded so much in earnest that Muddlehead hurried back, not understanding what it was all about.

They were all so busy now that there was no time to talk, yet Yu-yi could not find himself a job. He picked up a wooden shovel and brush, but did not know where to start sweeping.

"Yu-yu!" came a shout from a small floor some way off. "Can you spare a man to lend me a hand for a bit?"

Skinflint paused in his shovelling, and saw that it was Yuan Tien-cheng.

"Go over and help your uncle!" he ordered Yu-yi.

As Yu-yi skirted the big co-op floor towards Yuan's small floor, one of the co-op men called out:

"Hey, old Yuan! Do you want the co-op to send another man to help you?"

Yuan pretended not to have heard.

Yuan Tien-cheng had joined the co-op, but had kept more land out than he had taken in, and since in busy seasons he insisted on tilling his own fields, the co-op could not count on him. Hence everyone had a low opinion of him, and the man who had just called out was glad to see him in a fix.

It was his wife, Mistress Sly, naturally, who had put Yuan up to keeping back so much land. According to the co-op regulations, you could keep back only one-fifth of your land; but Yuan had a younger brother in the army, and Mistress Sly made use of him. She went to Linhochon to get her own brother, who was a broker there, to forge a deed dividing the property, then announced that, before leaving, Yuan's brother had received his share of the land from their uncle. Since this uncle was dead now, there was no means of checking on this story. Mistress Sly made Yuan tell the co-op he could not decide for his brother



or bring in his brother's land as shares, and he also kept one-fifth of the land still in his own name. Other co-op members realized this was a put-up show, and did not want to admit him; but after some days' discussion they let him in.

Why did they admit him after all?

Yuan had been one of the first to join in the revolutionary work here in 1938, and during the reduction of rents he had received a little more than his fair share of good land. Moreover, when his brother left, Yuan looked after his land too, and people started calling him Two Fat Shares. He came under the heading "more" in Chin-sheng's notes "more—big—good—exploit—split." When the co-op was formed in 1951 and they asked him to join, he said he could not talk his wife round. This year—'52—when the co-op was enlarged, Chin-sheng prevailed on him by speaking of Party principles; then, at a loss for further excuses, he played this trick on Mistress Sly's advice. When the others guessed it, they did not want to have him.

"Each extra *mou* of rich land is all to the good," argued Chin-sheng. "I know he's kept so much back he'll only have time to farm his own land, not ours; but that means he'll do less than we do and earn less than we do. The co-op won't lose out. It's no use arguing with him. Let him try it out for a year."

When the others figured it out and realized they did not stand to lose, they finally let him join.

Now when Mistress Sly first drew up rules for her husband, it was not stipulated that she should help in the fields. Before there was a mutual-aid team, Yuan had hired a day labourer at the height of the season. When in a mutual-aid team, he relied on that. Now he had joined the co-op, and the village was so well organized that there was no one to hire, but Mistress Sly would not modify her rules, and he had kept so much land—he just could not farm it all.

Yuan had decided to thresh on the same day as the co-op. That morning he had husked his grain with the help of his thirteen-year-old son, who then took the donkey home, leaving him alone to turn the grain and stack it. The boy came back with a small broom, and started sweeping at about the same speed as Mistress Sly at home. When you winnow, you need someone to sweep up the leaves and stems which have not been blown away during tossing, but this is too difficult for a thirteen-year-old. After tossing the grain with the wooden shovel a couple of times, Yuan had to put the shovel down and pick up the broom. Thoroughly fagged out, he was still winnowing when others were taking home the harvest. He had a good look round, and saw that the Ma family had nearly finished winnowing, so asked Skinflint—as a relative—to lend him a hand. Knowing quite well that Yu-yi was not much use, Skinflint sent him over.



Goldfish (42 cm × 93 cm)  
Painting in the traditional style by Chung Ching-ping



Though slightly better than a thirteen-year-old, Yu-yi bungled his sweeping so badly that Yuan still had to put down his shovel from time to time to straighten things out. When about half the winnowing had been done in this slipshod fashion, the grievance committee sent for Yu-yi and Man-hsi to act as witnesses. Yuan readily seized this chance to let him go.

### 18. *Were There Noodles or Not?*

When Muddlehead reached home, Chu-ying had disappeared, but his wife, sitting on a stool by the stove, was talking to Spitfire on the steps in front. Unaware of what had gone before, he arrived just as Spitfire was saying:

"... The fledgeling wants to fly — she's got quite above herself!"

"Never mind!" cried Always Right. "She can't eat us! This isn't the first time she's rushed off to complain, but she can't do anything to us!"

Muddlehead realized Chu-ying had gone, quite likely to the village administration again. But since he was here, he might as well ask what had happened.

"Where's Chu-ying?" he asked his wife.

"Need you ask? She's gone to report us, of course!"

"What was the row about this time?"

"She's tired of our plain food. She'd like a feast!"

"Talk sense!" snapped Muddlehead impatiently.

"What sense is there in this business? Women are free now — free to make any trouble."

Muddlehead lost patience completely. His wife was not answering his questions and, if they delayed too long, Chu-ying might really go to complain to the army dependents committee.

"You'll just have to lump it!" he ordered them angrily. "We're out of luck now, see? We've got a bad name in the village."

Not troubling to ask any more, he stamped out to look for Chu-ying.

If previous occasions were anything to go by, Chu-ying was likely to have gone to Chin Hsiao-feng, head of the army dependents committee. But he found Hsiao-feng out. Then she might have called on Fan Teng-kao, the village head. But Fan was not at home either. The fact that both were out reminded him of the trouble between Hsiao-chun and Yu-sheng the previous evening, and it struck him they were probably all at Flagstaff Compound. So there he went.

Once in Flagstaff Compound, he saw a crowd outside the front north wing. Some of them were young people with baskets, sacks or tools, who had dropped in on their way to the threshing-floor to see what decision was taken — any question connected with marriage aroused their

interest. Elbowing his way through them, he found it even more crowded inside; so instead of pushing straight to the desk, he stood on tiptoe to have a good look round. There was no sign of Chu-ying. He was forcing his way out again when Chin Hsiao-feng, at the desk, caught sight of him.

"Uncle To-shou!" she called. "Wait a bit! Don't be in such a hurry! When we've written this letter for Yu-sheng, we're going to go into your case."

Realizing that Chu-ying must have been here, Muddlehead asked one of the onlookers where she was. He was told she had left for a meal.

"She's not been home," said Muddlehead.

"What's to stop her from having a meal with someone else?"

Many of the crowd had been meaning to leave when they saw that the question of Yu-sheng's divorce was settled. He and Hsiao-chun had not made it up, but the grievance committee was writing to the district office to say that they could not reconcile the two parties, and that a divorce should be granted. When Chu-ying came and complained to Chin Hsiao-feng, however, some of them decided to stay. As soon as Hsiao-feng knew that Chu-ying had not yet had lunch, she told her to borrow some rice for herself and Ling-ling from Backyard Granny before doing anything else. This was common knowledge to everyone there—they all knew where Chu-ying was—but because they resented the way Always Right and Spitfire bullied her, no one would tell Muddlehead. Since he knew it was no use asking, and futile to search blindly for her, he decided to wait in the crowd. But almost everyone else there was young, and most of them had taken time off from threshing to look in, so there was much coming and going, much squeezing in and out, and old Muddlehead felt quite out of place. He did not stand up too well to the jostling either, but staggered right and left as he was shoved. Hsiao-feng took pity on him.

"Make way there, can't you!" she called. "Uncle To-shou, come here and sit down!"

As the others let him through to the front, Yu-sheng stood up and offered him a chair.

Presently the letter vouching for Yu-sheng was written, and he and Hsiao-chun left. About a third of the spectators scattered too, and the tension in the room relaxed. Fan Teng-kao, as head of the grievance committee, started questioning Muddlehead.

"Well now, what happened?" he asked.

"I just don't know," replied Muddlehead.

"If you don't know, what brought you here?" demanded a man of about his own age in the crowd. "You surely are muddle-headed!"

A shout of laughter went up.

Muddlehead explained that he had only just been home.

"We must ask your wife and elder daughter-in-law over," said Hsiao-feng.

The orderly for the day was sent to fetch them.

After a while Chu-ying came back. Then Always Right and Spitfire arrived.

"Good! You're all here," observed Fan Teng-kao. "We want each of you to give your account of what happened, and then we'll consider what's to be done. You start, Chu-ying!"

"Haven't I told you already?" replied Chu-ying.

"Go over it again for them, to see if you've got the facts right."

"It's very simple," declared Chu-ying. "I was at the mill first thing this morning, and all the breakfast I had was one bowl of gruel. Yet they wouldn't let me knock off at noon—I had to keep at it till they'd finished threshing. By that time everybody at home had eaten, and all they'd left me and Ling-ling was some noodle soup."

"May your tongue rot off, you liar!" exploded Spitfire. "Didn't I leave you any noodles?"

"You've got to have the same as the rest of us!" put in Always Right. "Milling flour doesn't make you an empress. I can't prepare seven or eight fancy dishes for you!"

"Steady on! Steady on!" Fan cut them short. "Don't speak out of turn. Go on, Chu-ying."

"I've finished," asserted Chu-ying. "She says there were noodles. I didn't see any noodles!"

"I suggest we send for the pan," proposed Hsiao-feng, "to see whether there were really noodles or not."

"What pan?" demanded Chu-ying. "She emptied that out hours ago for the donkeys. Yu-yi and Man-hsi saw whether there were noodles or not. You can't just take her word for it!"

"There were noodles, but you wouldn't touch them!" accused Spitfire. "I can't wait on you all day!"

"Go on," said Fan. "She's finished."

"I've finished too!" declared Spitfire.

Then Fan called on Always Right, who spoke as if certain that she was in the right.

"My sons are my sons, so of course I treat their wives like daughters. They're my own flesh and blood—why should I have favourites? But we're only farming folk, and except on festivals we eat plain, homely fare. I've been eating like that all these years, and never complained. And as everyone has the same, I've naturally never prepared anything different for my daughters-in-law—even my old man and I don't eat better than the others. Our midday meal today was millet dumplings and noodles. The men are doing heavy work in the fields, so each of them had two dumplings and any amount of noodles. The women are doing

light work about the house, so a good meal of noodles was just the thing for them. I had no complaint, and neither had the others — I don't know what Third Son's Wife wanted! If folk are at cross purposes, it's easy to stir up trouble! I don't see how we're to go on — the way she picks fault all the time! I know I don't put things well, but please decide between us."

Fan asked Chu-ying what more she had to say.

"You'd think, by what ma says, I didn't want to eat noodles," objected Chu-ying. "But I didn't see any noodles! I don't mind eating husks — I've done it before. But if you want me to eat husks, you've got to produce the husks!"

Chang Yung-ching was there but had not spoken so far, because Always Right bore him a grudge. Since the two accounts were so different, he now said:

"This isn't getting us anywhere. Didn't Chu-ying say Man-hsi and Yu-yi were there? I propose we call them as witnesses."

When the committee as well as the onlookers approved of this, and someone volunteered to fetch them, Spitfire grew a little nervous.

"They just looked in to fetch the winnowing fan, and left straight away!" she protested. "What do they know about it? It's no use calling on others if you tell lies yourself! How do you know they will speak the truth?"

"Why, sister!" Hsiao-feng reproved her. "That's no way to talk! It's not as if everyone was your enemy."

"Let's call them over," said Fan. "They can tell us whatever they know. If they don't know anything, no harm will be done."

So it was settled, and Yu-yi and Man-hsi were sent for.

When they arrived, Fan gave them a brief résumé of the case, then called on Man-hsi to give evidence. Man-hsi, still fuming after his quarrel with Spitfire, seized this chance to hint darkly at what had happened the night before.

"I saw the quarrel all right," he acknowledged. "But you can't call me in to give evidence. I'm a suspect!"

"Just tell us what you know," urged Fan. "How can you say you're a suspect?"

"I'm not talking about today's meal," explained Man-hsi, "but about Chu-ying's reputation as an army wife! Don't saddle me with the blame for spoiling that!"

When everyone naturally pressed to know what he meant, he repeated all Spitfire had said the previous evening about Ling-ling having "a mother and a father." Not a word did he leave out. Before he could finish, many army wives raised an outcry. One of them urged the committee:

"Leave this trouble today till you've cleared up what happened yesterday evening! Let's see what proof she has! If she hasn't any proof, we can't let her get away with such dirty slander!"

"Let's not go into something that's done with," Fan demurred. "Better keep to what happened today."

The other army dependents demanded that the matter be taken up, insisting that Chu-ying's reputation was at stake. She herself was against this.

"She can say what she likes!" she cried. "Who's going to believe her?"

"I'm an army dependent myself," observed Hsiao-feng, "and chairman of the committee in charge of their welfare. So I want to say a few words on behalf of army dependents and the committee. To my mind, too, anyone who makes an accusation like this should be held responsible. But if Chu-ying doesn't press the matter, why not let it go? If it happens again, we'll take the case to court!"

"Let it go — it's past and done with," agreed Fan. "Man-hsi! Tell us what happened today."

"Not I!" responded Man-hsi. "If I do, she'll accuse me of trying to get my own back. Yu-yi's one of the family — let him speak first."

"All right," agreed Fan. "Yu-yi, go ahead."

Before Yu-yi could speak, his mother issued a warning.

"If you saw anything, say so. If not, then say you didn't. Don't spin any yarns!"

Yu-yi looked at his mother, and then at Fan.

"I didn't see anything!" he blurted out.

"Didn't we bump into her carrying out the pan?" demanded Man-hsi. "Are you sure you didn't see anything?"

"I d-didn't pay any attention!" stammered Yu-yi.

"All right!" snapped Man-hsi. "We'll take it you didn't see anything. How many bowls of noodles did you have at noon?"

"Two!"

"Were there any noodles in the second bowl?"

Yu-yi shot a glance at his mother.

"Not many," he mumbled.

"Now then! Don't be so vague. Was there as much as an ounce?"

Yu-yi glanced at his mother again.

"Come, man!" protested Man-hsi. "Act like a member of the Youth League for once, and tell us the truth. Was there an ounce or not?"

"No!" Yu-yi was forced to admit.

A roar of laughter went up.

"What did I tell you?" pointed out Man-hsi. "You can't say there weren't *any* noodles. Each bowl must have held a dozen or so specks — as wide as they were long! If there was one-fifth of an ounce, let alone an ounce, I'm a liar!"

The crowd laughed again.

Nearly bursting with anger, Always Right put her head on one side, and pointed at Yu-yi:

"Did you weigh it, you bastard!" she screamed.

"These are the facts, then," said Fan. "We'll have a break now for the committee to decide how best to settle this. Now is the time for both sides to think what objections or demands they want to raise presently."

He stood up with the rest of the committee, and started into the inner room.

"Do you need the witnesses any more?" asked Man-hsi.

"No. Go back to your work."

Then the committee went into the inner room — the village office.

Always Right, foreseeing that she would have the worst of it, tugged at Spitfire's sleeve and took her home.

Muddlehead, still sitting there, produced his tobacco pouch and filled his pipe.

A crowd of army wives gathered round Chu-ying and, almost without exception, urged her to make a break with her in-laws and live on her own.

As it was nearly the end of the midday break and time to get back to work, most of the spectators scattered — all but the army dependents, who would rather hold up the harvest than miss the upshot.

Meanwhile a lively discussion was going on in the inner room. Fan Teng-kao proposed that they muddle through this muddled business by urging both sides to make it up, in the hope that there would be no further trouble. Hsiao-feng disagreed with him.

"The die-hards in that family are so strong," she pointed out. "If Chu-ying goes on slaving for them and eating their food, there is bound to be more trouble. It's not right to leave a young woman who can make her own living to be bossed of such backward in-laws."

"It's just because they're so backward that we want the young people to work on them," answered Fan.

This had to be taken with a grain of salt. In fact, Fan knew quite well that Chu-ying could not reform Muddlehead or the others. But he was afraid that if given her share of the property she might join the co-op and even talk Muddlehead into joining. This was why he tried to find reasons for keeping things as they were.

"Chu-ying will be in a better position to help them once she's independent," asserted Hsiao-feng. "Once she's on her own and they can't interfere with her, they can listen to her or not as they please, but can't force her to go their way. As long as they are one household, she's got to do what they say or have a row."

The other committee members agreed with Hsiao-feng. But when this argument was defeated, Fan tried another tack.

"We're the grievance committee. If instead of settling problems we cause a family split, the masses will have something to say."

"Didn't you hear the women quietly urging Chu-ying just now to break with her in-laws?" countered Hsiao-feng. "Practically the whole village knows that Chu-ying leads an impossible life. It's if we *don't* separate them that the masses will talk!"

As a last attempt, Fan produced the reason against splitting referred to in Chin-sheng's notebook.

"If our grievance committee breaks up families, we need never hope to win those die-hards over!"

"If we want to win them over," retorted Chang, "we must first make it clear that they can't get away with any dirty work. Pandering to their backwardness is only asking for trouble!"

"Is there no other solution but breaking up the family?" persisted Fan.

"Why, yes!" replied Hsiao-feng. "Make her mother-in-law and sister-in-law apologize to Chu-ying, admit their fault, promise never to do such a thing again, and beg her to go back. That would be the ideal solution. Do you think that can be done?"

"Not in a thousand years!" declared one of them.

The others agreed.

"It's no use!" continued Hsiao-feng. "No one can change overnight. But unless we separate them, Chu-ying will have to go straight back to live with them. Let's put ourselves in her place. If she can't set up on her own, she'll have to go back tonight. What sort of supper will she have? Her mother-in-law will be throwing pans about and breaking bowls, while her sister-in-law makes cutting remarks! Must she take it lying down, or start another quarrel?"

"There are certain things you have to close your eyes to," said Fan. "Just after a row there's bound to be some unpleasantness for a few days, but that will soon blow over if she's patient."

"You mean the one who's been ill-treated has got to bow down again before those who treated her badly?"

"Even if she gets her share of the property, it's too late to arrange for that today. She'll have to have supper with them anyway, won't she?"

"No! If she's to be on her own, we won't let her go back. She can stay outside for the time being, while they provide rice and flour for her. She needn't go back to her room till the sharing-out has been done. I agree with Uncle Yung-ching — don't let anyone get away with such dirty work."

Since the others supported Hsiao-feng, Fan withdrew his proposal. So the discussion ended, and they left the village office.

The meeting was resumed, but without two of those concerned — Always Right and Spitfire had gone home, and refused to come back when sent for. Muddlehead had to represent them.

When Fan asked Chu-ying what she wanted, her reply was to set up on her own. Some other army wives said the slander and cruel treatment should be dealt with, but Fan insisted that all they need do at present was arrange for a separation: there was no need to press the other charges.

It had never occurred to Muddlehead that Chu-ying might set up on her own. He was quite at a loss for a moment.

"Is there no other way out?" he asked.

Before Fan could answer, an army wife cut in:

"Yes! Get her mother-in-law and sister-in-law here to own up, promise never to do this again and beg Chu-ying to go back!"

"That's out of the question," thought Muddlehead. "That would go more against the grain than sharing out the property!"

"Brothers are destined from birth to set up different families," Chang reasoned with him. "You'll have to share out sooner or later, won't you? When you're together, one rubs the other up the wrong way, so why not split up and live in peace and quiet? With one less in the family, you'll have fewer worries, brother!"

Others added encouragement and advice. The elder ones pointed out bluntly how spiteful Always Right was, and how hard it would be to avoid serious trouble if Chu-ying went on living with them. This rather scared Muddlehead. Though he merely posed as a henpecked husband, when it came to managing the daughters-in-law his wife did not listen to him. And he would be in an awkward spot if Chu-ying were really driven to desperation. He saw something to be said for separating, but did not like the thought of parting with any land. He thought it over, and said to the committee:

"I can only give Chu-ying *her* share of land. Her husband isn't at home—I can't give away his share."

"Now, uncle, that doesn't make sense!" protested Hsiao-feng. "If you divide Yu-hsi and Chu-ying, how are you going to explain it when you write to him? If you do that, he'll suspect her of gadding about outside, when the fact is she was goaded into this!"

Others helped in the work of persuasion, till Muddlehead was silenced.

This minor case kept them all busy till dark, when at last they reached a decision. Within three days from the next day—September the third—Chu-ying must receive her share of the property. The grain already reaped should be divided, but each would harvest his share of the fields yet unreaped. Meantime rice and flour were to be provided for Chu-ying, so that she could cook for herself in Backyard Granny's quarters until the division of property was completed, when she would move back to her own rooms.

## 19. Some Paintings Are Commissioned

Given the lie as they had been, Always Right and Spitfire rushed home, pouting so furiously that you could have tethered a donkey to their lips.

"It was your Yu-yi that did for us!" grumbled Spitfire.

At that moment, Yu-yi happened to come home for some sacks, and Always Right, with no other way to vent her rage, called him over and gave him a thorough dressing down. Half an hour later, she was simply getting into her stride and capable of keeping it up for hours.

"They're waiting for these sacks at the threshing-floor!" ventured Yu-yi.

"You don't have to go! I don't want that grain! Tell me first what you grew up on—rice or dung? Is the Youth League father and mother to you? . . ."

This was how Skinflint found them when he came to see what was keeping Yu-yi. He wanted to know the grievance committee's decision but, her tongue going strong now, Always Right ignored him. Since the others were waiting, he let it go at that, and went back with the sacks, leaving his mother to work off her temper this way. Not till she slumped on the bed to thump her chest, could Yu-yi go back to the threshing-floor and help collect the husks.

Spitfire retired to her room to sleep, till Skinflint lugged home some grain and scolded her into preparing the supper for them.

At dusk, Muddlehead trudged sullenly back, having promised the grievance committee to let Chu-ying set up on her own. He called Skinflint to his room, and told him the committee's decision.

"Ten *mou* of land gone!" Skinflint shook his head.

Muddlehead threw out his hands.

"That's about the size of it!" He rounded on Always Right. "You're the smart ones who did this! To save one meal you throw away ten *mou* of land!"

For once Always Right could not point out how right she had been. But at supper she launched into another tirade against Yu-yi and Man-hsi.

In the middle of this, someone outside the gate called Yu-yi to a meeting of the Youth League.

"You shan't go!" swore Always Right. "But for those young fathers and mothers of yours, you wouldn't have done for me!"

As she paused for breath, Skinflint put in a word:

"Let him go, ma! You need a rest."

"Let him go!" agreed Muddlehead. "We don't want to set every soul in the village against us!"

Having just blundered by trying to be clever, Always Right dared not insist, and Yu-yi seized this chance to slip out.



He found quite a crowd outside the front north wing of Flagstaff Compound, and discovered that this was a joint meeting of the Party and Youth League. As he was about to go in, he heard Ling-chih's voice from the east wing, so he looked in there first.

This room now served as the co-op office, and Chin-sheng was there discussing the grain distribution with Li Shih-chieh and Ling-chih. The girl was gazing up with a look of concentration on her face, and Yu-yi asked what she was thinking.

Instead of answering, she demanded abruptly: "What can we use, apart from peck measures, to fill a sack at one go?"

Yu-yi's head was in a whirl after his mother's scolding, and this only confused him the more.

"Why do you ask?" he countered.

Just then they were called to the meeting.

"Go on," said Li Shih-chieh. "We must ask Yu-sheng to settle this problem for us."

Rather against her will, Ling-chih had to leave it at that.

They went to the north wing, where a crowd had gathered round a large painting on the north wall. The artist, Liang, was standing by it, asking for criticism, but no one had anything to offer but praise. Yu-yi and Ling-chih squeezed their way forward.

"Why, that's Sanliwan!" cried Yu-yi. As they drew nearer, he went on: "The Upper Flats, the Lower Flats, Lao-wu's Plot, Sandy Creek, Thirty Mou Field, Hilt Field, Dragon's Neck . . . it's all there to the life!"

"If you stand a little further off," remarked someone else, "you feel you could walk straight into it!"

"Don't just be complimentary," begged the artist. "Please point out some of the faults."

Still no one had any criticism.

"Comrade Liang!" said Yu-sheng. "Can you paint things that don't exist yet?"

"Things that don't exist in Sanliwan, or that don't exist in the world?"

"I mean something like the canal." Yu-sheng pointed at the picture. "It'll start from here in the Upper Flats, pass Sandy Creek, run south by the foot of the cliff, and then branch out to water the Lower Flats. All the water-wheels in the Lower Flats will be bunched by the canal here in the Upper Flats, and the water pumped up here will go through three channels and any number of ditches to the Upper Flats. When both Upper and Lower Flats are irrigated, we shall harvest much richer crops. Can you paint a Sanliwan like that?"

"Of course I can!" was Liang's answer. "A very good idea! We can call that 'A Better Sanliwan' or 'Sanliwan Tomorrow.'"

"Comrade Liang!" put in Chin-sheng. "Right now our job is to prepare a propaganda campaign to expand the co-op and make this canal.

If you could paint another picture like that by the tenth, it would be a great help!"

"Certainly!" promised Liang.

"There's another you might paint too," went on Chin-sheng after some thought. "By the time we are using tractors, things are bound to have changed again."

Several others chipped in at this point with their ideas.

"Goes without saying!" said one. "Once we have tractors, we should have trucks too."

"By then, to be sure, we'll have a highway as well."

"The trees on West Hill will have grown by then!"

"I bet the houses will have changed too."

"Two-storeyed buildings, snug and bright, with telephones and electric light," recited Chang Yung-ching. "I used to quote that until the county secretary said it was too early to talk of such things. Now you're all off on that tack!"

"The county secretary didn't mean we wouldn't have such things in future," explained Chin-sheng. "He meant we shouldn't make it sound too easy. Otherwise hasty folk may join the co-op today and demand telephones and electricity tomorrow. It can't be wrong to talk about these things, if we point out that plenty of hard work is needed to get them. If Comrade Liang can paint us another picture like that, we'll put up all three together to show the road Sanliwan ought to take. I think that would be very useful. Can you paint a third picture like that, Comrade Liang?"

"Yes!" agreed the artist. "I've brought a few drawings of state farms and collective farms with me. I'll just transfer their conditions to Sanliwan."

"Will the new buildings in Sanliwan be the same as in other places?" one fellow asked.

Before Liang could answer, someone else retorted:

"It's to give the general idea! There may be three cars in the painting, but that won't stop us from having five later, will it? If he paints a field of millet, that doesn't mean we can't plant sesame there afterwards."

"Right!" confirmed the artist. "All I can do is imagine what Sanliwan will be like then, on the basis of what I know of mechanized agriculture. What I leave out or get wrong can be filled in and corrected according to future developments. Well, I must apologize for holding up your meeting by asking for comments! We can come back to that later. I promise to finish those two paintings by the tenth!"

"Three pictures will be a great help!" repeated Chin-sheng. "That's what this meeting is about. Will you join us?"

Liang accepted the invitation.

Then Chin-sheng urged everyone to sit down, and Chang Lo-yi and Section Chief Ho, who had been discussing questions of management in the inner room, joined them.

After opening the meeting, Chin-sheng announced the decision taken by the co-op functionaries the evening before to enlarge the co-op and make a canal.

"Now this is a race against time," he pointed out. "Our plan is for the co-op and the rest of the village to make this canal together, dividing the cost and the labour according to the land to be watered, reckoning the co-op as one unit, and the rest of the village as so many different households. That means we must finish expanding the co-op before starting on the canal, to know how many new members we have in the co-op, which will decide how much they should pay and how much work they should do. Non-members will be organized differently. In other words, without a clear division between members and non-members, we can hardly start on the canal. But the ground begins freezing in less than a month after the harvest, and if we wait till after the harvest to build up the co-op, we won't have time to dig the canal. Now we've studied this question in our branch committee and among the co-op officers, and we believe we can enlarge the co-op *during* the harvest this month. This is our time-table. Before the tenth, our Party members, Youth League members and propagandists must approach different villagers and collect their opinions. On the morning of the tenth we shall hold a big rally to start the ball rolling, followed by discussions in all the mutual-aid teams and residents' groups to mull this thing over. After that, those who want to join the co-op can sign on. By the twentieth we should know pretty well where we are, and can start organizing the work on the canal. This way, not a day will be wasted—we can guarantee that work starts straight after National Day, and is finished before the ground freezes. There's another small problem which must also be settled this month—we haven't yet got the Ma family's consent to use their Hilt Field."

"We've found an answer now for Hilt Field!" put in Chang Yung-ching.

"Very good!" declared Chin-sheng. "So that's the work this month for the village and the co-op. We Party members, Youth League members, and propagandists have got to explain the situation to all the villagers. We must help our own folk straighten out their ideas, and set an example ourselves for all the others, doing everything we can to see that the job is successfully carried out. That's all I have to report. Now I'll call on our propaganda officer to give you more details."

Chang Yung-ching then spoke of the propaganda campaign. He had divided the village up into different localities, and appointed groups composed of Party members, Youth League members and propagandists, who were neighbours or friends of the people there, to deal with each section.

"Between now and the tenth," he said, "our job is to tackle the section allotted to us. We must explain why joining the co-op means taking

the road to socialism. We must point out how the co-op's output has gone up during the last two years, the advantages of turning dry land into irrigated land, how irrigated land is farmed, and how much easier farming and construction work are for a collective than for individuals. We must make it clear that mechanization will mean a further big increase in output. Give folk something to think about! And any objections or scruples they have should be promptly reported to the Party and Youth League, so that we can find solutions for each problem. After the big rally on the tenth, everyone will have to make up his mind. That's the time to help them weigh the pros and cons and answer any questions they bring up. If we keep on with this till it's time to register, we'll have a pretty good idea of the number of new members. And even when registration's over, we shan't shut the door in their face—we'll welcome separate households to join during the work on the canal and after, right up to the spring ploughing next year. We must point out, though, that the later they join, the fewer work-points they will get, and the smaller their share of the profits. We must urge them to join as early as possible."

Someone asked how the Hilt Field problem was to be settled.

"The Party branch hasn't discussed that yet," was Chang's reply. "We'll talk about it later."

Chin-sheng now called on them to divide up into their temporary groups and elect group leaders, after which the meeting broke up.

Chang Lo-yi went back to the inner room to continue discussing methods of management with Section Chief Ho, while Chang Yung-ching took Chin-sheng to the east wing to talk over Hilt Field, and Wei Chan-kuei told the committee of the Youth League branch to stay behind for a meeting.

After the row at home, Yu-yi had been so eager to pour out all his troubles to Ling-chih as soon as the meeting ended that he had not heard half the Party secretary and propaganda officer said. But now Ling-chih was summoned by Wei to the Youth League meeting, leaving him high and dry. Hanging his head, he shuffled out with the rest. Once out of the north wing, it struck him that his mother would hardly be asleep yet, and to go home would only mean another dressing down. He was still loitering when Wei Chan-kuei stuck his head out.

"Has Yu-yi gone or not?" he called.

Yu-yi went in again.

"Wait in the west wing for a bit," said Wei. "We've something to discuss with you presently."

Yu-yi went to the west room, where militiamen were sleeping on all the tables.

While some slept, the others were on guard outside. Only the platoon leader on duty was sitting by a table in one corner with a light. Yu-yi found a bench and sat down by him. For fear of disturbing the sleep-

ers, the platoon leader said nothing after greeting him, so naturally Yu-yi kept silent too. The paraffin lamp burnt dimly, the clock ticked away, and he sat there engrossed by two matters: What did Wei Chan-kuei want with him? Would he have a chance to talk to Ling-chih?

To anyone sitting and waiting, time seems to drag. The hands of the clock appeared to have rusted, so slowly did they move. In half an hour he must have looked at that clock a hundred times before the Youth League committee meeting broke up. He heard footfalls, some heavy, some light, proceeding from the north wing to the gate. Now someone was walking this way. He recognized Ling-chih's step, and opened his sleepy eyes. The half hour's wait had been worth it! The door opened a crack, and Ling-chih's face appeared, but her raised eyebrows looked as if she were out of temper. Instead of coming in, she beckoned to him, and Yu-yi went back with her to the north wing.

He could see that she was very angry. Even her tread was heavier than usual.

"Who are you so cross with?" he asked.

Ling-chih wanted to retort: "With you!" But feeling she was not on sufficiently close a footing with Yu-yi to take that tone, she did not answer immediately.

As we have seen, Ling-chih was in two minds about Yu-yi—both keen and not keen on him. That made her friendly one day, cold the next. It depressed her to think of the future, and this depression arose from a misconception: she felt a man who had studied should be better in every respect than one who had not. So when during the Youth League meeting she learned that Yu-yi had only told the truth in Chu-ying's case under pressure from Man-hsi, she was furious with him for his weakness. Yu-yi had, indeed, behaved contemptibly, but what angered Ling-chih was the thought: "A middle school student—not even up to Man-hsi!" As a matter of fact, in everything but book learning, Man-hsi was not only much better than Yu-yi but possibly, better in some ways than Ling-chih herself. That is not to say she should have transferred her affection for Yu-yi to Man-hsi; but her belief that Yu-yi was better than Man-hsi in every way just because he was a middle school student would have struck Man-hsi, had he known it, as the greatest insult—for the villagers ranked him much the higher of the two. Ling-chih was looking for a husband on the basis of this incorrect hypothesis that book learning came before everything else. The only unmarried middle school lad in Sanliwan was Yu-yi. And since the village was rather cut off from the rest of the world, and she had lost touch with the other boys she had known at school, all her hopes were pinned on him. As soon as he made a little progress she meant to take a decision once for all. Unfortunately several months had gone by without the least sign of progress on Yu-yi's part, and this was what depressed her. In her heart, she often com-

pared him to a crop flattened out by hail-stones—it would never amount to much, yet was better than nothing.

Puzzled as he was by Ling-chih's silence, Yu-yi followed her to the side of the platform in the meeting hall, and sat down facing her. There were only the two of them in the east corner of this hall, the size of five ordinary rooms. Thick snuff furred the wick of the lamp after two meetings, and all Yu-yi could make out in the gloom was the table top and Ling-chih's stern face, her eyebrows still arched in displeasure. Not a trace of her usual good humour! After one look at her, he glanced nervously around.

"Our Youth League branch committee asked me to give you this message," said Ling-chih icily. "Chin Hsiao-feng of the Party committee told us the low, dirty way you behaved this afternoon at the grievance committee. The Youth League wants you to write a self-criticism before it decides what action to take. That's all!"

She stood up, and started off.

"But you've got to understand . . ." mumbled Yu-yi desperately.

"I don't want to understand anything!"

"Let me just say one thing!" he pleaded. "I did tell the truth in the end this afternoon!"

"I should hope so! If you hadn't, the League wouldn't be troubling about your self-criticism now."

Saying this, she turned and left him.

This was a terrible blow. Yu-yi was sure other members of the Youth League committee would not have spoken to him like that, and that Ling-chih would not have spoken to anyone else like that in the name of the League. She must be angry with him, and trying to make it clear that she was through with him. He leant his head on the table and started sobbing. He sobbed for some time, but no one took any notice. So he mopped his tears and decided to go home. But then the



knowledge that his mother would start abusing him again set him crying once more.

Just then the door of the village office opened, and Section Chief Ho walked out with Chang Lo-yi. It struck Yu-yi that with Section Chief Ho staying in their house, he had a powerful protector. He hastily blew out the lamp, surreptitiously wiped his tears, and stepped up to Ho.

"What, still out so late?" asked Ho.

"I was waiting for you," said Yu-yi.

He walked home with the section chief.

## 20. A Big Member for a Small Group

Yu-yi could not sleep that night after his clash with Ling-chih, for fear she was through with him. He sat up in bed, lit the lamp, and started to write a self-criticism. Writing expressly for Ling-chih, he took great pains, doing his best, however, not to analyse his faults but to satisfy her without losing too much face. His first draft contained some genuine admissions, such as: ". . . to cover up for my mother, I let a comrade down badly. . . ."

But the moment he had written this, he thought: "Hold on! That sounds too contemptible."

He was determined to twist what was, in fact, contemptible into something no one need be ashamed of, which was of course difficult. Setting aside the first draft, he concentrated on justifying himself by using a whole string of equivocal phrases: "I did not speak up decisively enough . . . but had certain scruples. . . . At first I was a little lacking in courage . . . and slow to realize what was meant. . . . I was rather foolish . . . being mentally unprepared." But try as he might, the result was disappointing, and he went on scribbling till dawn without producing one version that satisfied him.

As soon as it was light, he heard a girlish voice call his name outside. It sounded something like Ling-chih, but the end was drowned by the barking of their large brown dog. Yu-yi grabbed what he considered the least objectionable of all his self-criticisms and put it on the table, stuffing those he had rejected under the matting on his bed. Then he opened the door of his small room and went out. At the gate he silenced the dog with a shout, and asked who was there. It was Yu-mei after all. He removed the wooden wedge, and was preparing to take down the bar when his mother called him.

"Wait till I've opened the gate!" he shouted back.

"Come here! Come here this moment!" she cried.

"Don't open the gate," said Yu-mei from outside. "I'm scared to death of your dog. You can open it when I've got some way away. The Party wants our short-term group to hold an emergency meeting at once

to discuss important business in Backyard Granny's house. I'm going on ahead. Mind you come straight away!"

"Wait a second, and we'll go together."

"I still have to tell the village head."

This said, she left.

Always Right was still shouting for Yu-yi, and he ran to the door of the north room. Finding it locked when he tried it, he walked to the window to ask what she wanted.

"Just couldn't tear yourself away from that small mother of yours!" she grumbled. "You're to go to Linhochan to fetch your uncle."

"But I have to be at a meeting straight away!"

"But for the two of you always attending meetings, our family wouldn't have split up! Go to one more meeting, and you're no son of mine!"

At this point, Muddlehead took over.

"I'm not against your attending meetings, Yu-yi," he said. "But if you've important business at home, you can ask to be excused, can't you? The grievance committee has told us to give Third Son's Wife her share of the property within three days. Go and ask to be excused now, then take one of the donkeys and go straight to Linhochan to fetch your uncle. He often goes out early to make a deal. You must get there before he has breakfast, to make sure of finding him in. Look sharp!"

Yu-yi made his way to the back yard of Flagstaff Compound.

By this time, Yu-mei had run to Fan Teng-kao's house, where she found Ling-chih feeding the mules in the lean-to. She asked if the village head were up or not. Ling-chih gave the mules some more hay as she greeted Yu-mei, then took her inside. Mrs. Fan, who was combing her hair by the table, asked her to take a seat. The girl repeated her question.

"I don't know what he had on his mind when he came home last night," said Mrs. Fan. "He wouldn't give me a proper answer. He blew out the light, but didn't go to sleep, just sat on the bed and smoked one whole packet of cigarettes. Didn't lie down till cockcrow!" She pointed towards the curtain over the door to the inner room. "Now he's asleep! Ling-chih and I have been careful not to disturb him."

Fan was not sleeping soundly, though, for the voices on the other side of the curtain woke him. At first he thought Ling-chih and his wife were discussing his return the night before, but when he realized there was a visitor he felt rather put out. He shouted for his daughter. Finding he was awake, Mrs. Fan said no more.

"Dad's awake now," whispered Ling-chih to Yu-mei. "Tell me what you want to see him about."

"The Party wants our short-term group to hold an emergency meeting at once to discuss some important business. He's in our group, so I came to call him."

Ling-chih went in and told her father, who opened his eyes a fraction.

"The Par-ty?" he muttered sullenly. He reflected a moment, then said: "Call Yu-mei in!"

It always irritated him when Chin-sheng represented the Party branch. At the start, he had been Party secretary, while Chin-sheng was merely a militiaman. But the last few years his two mules had kept him so busy that he had cooled towards his comrades, and they in turn had started cooling towards him. At branch elections he was no longer elected. He thought Chin-sheng "an able fellow," but not a patch on himself. To his mind, it was sheer exhibitionism that made Chin-sheng propose to start a co-op and cut a canal—life would be a great deal more peaceful without these things. And what annoyed him most was the way the Party was now leading this work. They were trying to checkmate him, shutting their eyes to the fact that a man was free to join or not as he pleased. Though the Party had not yet sent anyone to ask him outright to join, he was sure his inclusion in this propaganda team was a clever move on Chin-sheng's part to force his hand—the co-op was scheming to get those two mules of his! It was ridiculous, too, to stick him in the same group as these three kids—Yu-mei, Chu-ying and Yu-yi. The youngsters had elected him team leader, but he had declined on the grounds that he had no time. In actual fact, he was thinking: "I'm not going to lead these infants!" Yet when they elected Yu-mei, he was annoyed again.

"Heavens!" he thought. "Now Yu-mei is leading me!"

He was convinced that Chin-sheng and the others had planned the joint meeting of the Party and Youth League expressly to trap him, and, since they had laid this trap, he must find some way of escape. That was why he could not sleep all night. His first idea was to oppose this mass mobilization in a Party meeting on the grounds that joining a co-op was "voluntary." But he knew that would cut no ice, because Assistant Secretary Liu of the district committee had already refuted him by retorting that this did not mean "making no effort at all"—the people still had to be educated. His next idea was to go on a trip with his mules and stay away for ten days or more, but he was afraid Wang Hsiao-chu of Hillback Village would take advantage of this to find another job, leaving him without a mule-driver. He cudgelled his brains and finished a whole packet of cigarettes, but could not hit on a plan. Not till cockcrow did he fall asleep, only to wake again at the slightest sound.

Then Ling-chih told him Yu-mei had come with a message from the Party.

"What Party?" thought Fan. "This is Chin-sheng's work again. Here's Yu-mei really acting like *my* team leader! They're creeping up on me!"

Though longing to tell Yu-mei he had no time, he knew that if word of this came to Liu's ears, he would be charged with "no sense of discipline." He made Ling-chih fetch Yu-mei in.

When she came in, he pretended to be exhausted.

"Yu-mei!" he croaked. "Uncle caught cold coming home last night. I've a splitting headache—just can't lift my head. You must have your meeting without me. Uncle simply can't get up!"

There was nothing Yu-mei could do but urge him to send for a doctor, and go back alone to Flagstaff Compound.

The Party had sent Chang Yung-ching to assist at this emergency meeting. Yu-mei told him that Fan could not come.

"If he's not coming, we can start," said Chang. "But he needn't think he can keep out—this business concerns him too. I'll go and have a talk with him presently."

"We'll start the meeting then," announced Yu-mei.

"But my dad wants me to ask leave so that I can fetch my uncle," put in Yu-yi. "What shall I do?"

"Pay no attention to that old muddlehead!" retorted Chang before Yu-mei had a chance to reply. The old foggy's full of tricks! We can't have him fetching that broker here to bamboozle Chu-ying."

"But he insists on my going!" objected Yu-yi.

"Man alive!" exclaimed Yu-mei. "Haven't you any guts? He can't eat you if you don't go, can he?"

"I shall have to go home some time."

"Since he knows you have to ask leave, tell him it wasn't granted. Leave can't always be granted, see?"

Though this sounded fair enough, Yu-yi still did not know how to square things with his father, so for the moment he was silent.

"That's settled then," observed Chang. "Let's get down to business."

"Is it really all right?" wondered Yu-yi. "I must think before I decide."

But as Chang gave him no time to think, he simply stayed there.

"You all know that the course of the canal has been plotted," Chang went on. "And agreement has been reached, for the most part, on the land to be used for it. Only Yu-yi's old man hasn't given us permission yet to use that end of their Hilt Field. Looks as if he'll go on crabbing till the bitter end. Now Chu-ying wants her share of the property. Last night a few of us Party members talked it over, and we decided the best thing would be for Chu-ying to get hold of that land, to save further trouble with old man Ma when digging starts. Think it over, Chu-ying. Are you willing? If you get hold of that plot and join the co-op next year, they'll give you your share of the harvest according to the rating of that land. If you don't join, the co-op will give you another field, equally good, in exchange."

"Once I'm on my own, of course I'm joining the co-op!" Chu-ying cut in.

"That's what we figured," said Chang.

"How will you put it to her family?" asked Yu-mei.

"Like this," was Chang's reply. "Chu-ying can raise it herself, and others will back her up. The whole family will be there when the property is divided, so will the grievance committee, to keep an eye on things. Yu-yi is one of the family, Fan Teng-kao is chairman of the grievance committee, and Chu-ying is the party concerned. This touches three out of four of you in this group. If you pull together, you can bring it off."

"What if he decides my share without consulting me?" inquired Chu-ying. "How can I ask for that plot then?"

"That's all right. No need to beat about the bush. Just say you're joining the co-op, and want to help the co-op and village to settle this problem. Say they didn't want to give up this plot for fear of losing out over it, but now you're willing to take any loss there is. With others to back you up, Ma will have no reason to refuse—if he still holds on to that land, it will show that he's trying to make trouble for us. Well, that's all I have to say. Discuss it as quickly as you can while I go to have a talk with Fan."

As he started out, Chu-ying ran after him.

"But suppose he sends for that broker, and doesn't go through the grievance committee?"

"If they don't give you that plot, you can say you aren't satisfied and complain to the committee."

"Right! Right!" Chu-ying smiled. "I'd forgotten that now I'm one of those with a say!"

"That's the style!" Chang called back. "It's high time you realized that!"

When he had gone, Chu-ying thought out a way to word her request, and tried it out on Yu-mei and Yu-yi. Yu-mei suggested some additions, but Yu-yi said nothing—he was wondering how to account to his dad for not going to fetch the broker.

The whole meeting was over in a matter of minutes, after which Chu-ying stayed with Backyard Granny, while Yu-mei and Yu-yi started out together. Since the discussion had taken very little more time than it would have to ask for leave, Yu-yi could still tell his father that was what he had been doing; but in view of what had just been said, it would not be right to fetch the broker now. He was still writing that criticism of his mistake yesterday, and if, after making it clear at the meeting that he wasn't going to Linhochan, he now went after all, that would be another mistake! It wasn't doing wrong that he minded, but what the Youth League would say, and how angry Ling-chih and Yu-mei would be. He decided to sound Yu-mei out, and try to get her on his side.

"I'm going home," he told her. "What shall I say if my dad still insists on my fetching my uncle?"

He hoped her answer would be: "If he really insists, you'll have to go, that's all."

He was disappointed, however.

"Man alive!" retorted Yu-mei. "Chu-ying's already set up on her own—when are you going to follow suit? You'll have to decide for yourself how to cope with your dad! I can't do it for you!"

She walked off, leaving him alone at the gate of Flagstaff Compound.

His scheme turned down by Yu-mei, he was in a worse hole than ever. If he went home, he saw no way out of fetching his uncle. And if even Yu-mei accused him of having no guts, he dared not look for Ling-chih—he hadn't finished that self-criticism either. . . . He shuffled up and down by the gate for quite a time, but could not think what to do. Suddenly he caught sight of a red-brown speck in the distance: it was Section Chief Ho riding off on his roan horse. With Ho in the house, Yu-yi's mother had not dared really fly out at him; but the section chief's departure meant his last defence had gone, and he was worse off than ever. Soon he saw someone else approaching—it was his brother driving their larger donkey, with a coloured quilt across the saddle. Yu-yi shot back into the compound, and shut the door. Through a crack, he watched Skinflint drive the donkey towards the Lower Flats, and knew his father had given up waiting for him and sent Yu-yu instead. He heaved a great sigh of relief, and braced himself to go home and face the music once Skinflint was out of sight.

Meantime Chang Yung-ching had found Fan Teng-kao, and was explaining their plan to let Chu-ying get that plot in Hilt Field. Before he was through, Fan was fuming inwardly.

"Everything's tied up with 'enlarging the co-op' or 'cutting the canal,'" he thought. "Have you people nothing else to do?"

After impatiently hearing Chang out, he protested: "As a Party member, I want to raise two objections. First, the Party shouldn't interfere with the division of property in a private family. Secondly, once this demand is made, Ma To-shou is bound to say the Party put Chu-ying up to breaking away because it wants this piece of land. That will be very bad for Party prestige!"

He thought these two arguments, ostensibly aimed at safeguarding Party interests, would effectively silence Chang. But the latter retorted at once:

"It's Chu-ying who wants his land, not the Party. Yesterday afternoon at the grievance committee everyone was egging her on to break with them. How can you say the Party put her up to it? Do the villagers think this canal is to water the Party's land? As a Party member, I've a criticism to make of you, too. Why do you resist every single decision



of our branch committee and Party branch? Not once have you given us your full support. You're just flouting Party discipline!"

"What single decision have I resisted?" bellowed Fan. "The Party allows us to raise objections at the same time that we carry out its decisions. I raise more objections than the rest of you because I see more problems! You ought to criticize yourselves for not taking my objections more seriously, instead of lecturing me for raising them!"

This drew fire from Chang's big guns.

"That's enough from you! We'll criticize ourselves all in good time for not taking your objections seriously! Will you carry out this decision—yes or no!"

"Will you consider my objections first?"

"I've already told you—no! Your arguments don't hold water! They aren't worth considering. You're a 'big' Party member, yet you don't attend meetings, and expect one of the committee to come to your house to report. In future, kindly report to your team leader, Yu-mei, how you're carrying out directives."

With this parting shot, Chang left. Fan's wife and daughter saw him out.

\* \* \*

## 22. Before and After the Meeting

The next day, September the fourth, as Fan spent the whole time with the Ma family discussing the division of property, he could not collect the money owed him by the villagers, and went home that evening thoroughly disgruntled. Ling-chih, who took a keen interest in Chu-ying's case, asked immediately what had happened. Fan proceeded to air his grievances.

"Seems I can't work with youngsters," he grumbled. "But folk have to listen to reason! If she won't, how can I back her up?" He pulled a roll of papers from his pocket, and tossed it on the table. "How can you say settlements drawn up ten years ago are forgeries?"

"The question of dividing the property only came up yesterday!" exclaimed Ling-chih. "How can there be settlements dating from ten years back?"

"Have a look at those!" He pointed to the deeds on the table.

Ling-chih unrolled them. The first started with a crabbed preamble, which concluded with the words: "Ma Yu-yu's share is as follows." Underneath, in smaller characters, were listed certain rooms and fields, with a description of their position and size. The second and third had the same preamble, but one was for Yu-fu, another for Yu-yi. There was none for Chu-ying's husband.

"What about Yu-hsi?" she asked.

"Chu-ying took his away to study. A fat lot of good that'll do her!"

Ling-chih had another look, and discovered that Hilt Field was under Yu-fu's name.

"What's this?" she cried. "Couldn't Chu-ying get that plot in Hilt Field for Yu-hsi?"

"I don't care what they do to me," he fumed. "I can't carry out this idiotic decision!"

Before Ling-chih could ask what he meant, the mule-driver came back.

"Collect any money?" he asked.

"Not a cent!"

"Shall I go out tomorrow or not?"

"We'll see by and by. I haven't had time to think." A moment later he said, "I tell you what. Tomorrow I'll go out with the mules myself, taking what's left on our hands, and try to return it or exchange it for some other goods. If I can't do either, I'll think of some other way out."

"What about me?"

"You can help here with the harvest for a couple of days."

"Didn't we agree I wasn't to work in the fields?"

"If you don't want to, you can go home. Anyway, you're paid by the day."

Wang was in a quandary. There was nothing to do at home, yet he was no hand at farming.

"But you haven't finished Chu-ying's business yet, have you, dad?" put in Ling-chih.

"I'm not the only one on the grievance committee!"

"But you haven't finished the job the Party gave you!"

"I tell you, if not for that job, I wouldn't be going. Let them get someone else to finish it! If they find someone able to do it, they're welcome to trounce me. If he can't do it either, it'll show they're using the Party's name to make things hot for me—they'll be the ones due for a trouncing!"

Just then someone outside called Ling-chih to a meeting, and she started off.

Her father shouted after her: "Don't talk about this to anyone!"

The meeting, in Chin-sheng's house that evening, was to enable the Party and Youth League committees to hear reports from the short-term propaganda teams.

Ling-chih found Yu-sheng and the Handy Man trying something out in the courtyard. This contraption looked at first sight like a large wooden kitchen steamer fixed upside down inside a U-shaped stand, which was suspended by pulleys from a framework slightly lower than a basketball goal. This was the new measure Yu-sheng and his father had improvised during the last two days to fill a sack at one go. First they fitted

the mouth of the sack over the lower end of this funnel-shaped measure, and set it down so that the legs of the stand and the funnel were touching the ground. Then grain was poured into the steamer-like container above, which was hoisted up by the pulleys while someone supported the sack so that the grain ran into it. The whole Wang family was watching—Chin-sheng, his wife, the Handy Man, Mrs. Wang, Yu-mei, Ching-miao, Li-ming and Ta-sheng—as well as some members of the Party and Youth League committees and some leaders of the short-term propaganda teams. When Yu-sheng worked the pulley, the sack swiftly filled with grain, and the Handy Man removed it from below.

"You've done it!" everyone shouted.

"They are smart!" thought Ling-chih.

She saw the bottom half of this container was in one piece, while the top half consisted of different sections.

"Why isn't it all one piece?" she asked.

"Each of these six rings equals one peck," Yu-sheng told her. "The bottom half holds five pecks. That makes one bushel, one peck altogether. To give one peck less, you remove one of the circles."

"Why not make it to hold one bushel?"

"Because the biggest sacks in the co-op hold one bushel and one peck."

"What do you do when less than five pecks is wanted?"

"The difference can be paid back with peck measures!"

The onlookers agreed that they had thought of everything.

By now everyone had arrived, and the late-comers asked for another demonstration.

"It's time to start our meeting!" Chin-sheng reminded them.

They went about their different business. While Yu-sheng and the Handy Man put away their tools, Chin-sheng's wife and mother swept up the grain spilt in the yard. And their way of life formed a striking contrast in Ling-chih's mind with her father's retail business, his quarrels with the mule-driver, his eagerness to make money, and his show of authority. How she wished she could live here! Watching the Wangs and thinking of her own home, she did not notice that all the others had disappeared until Wei Chan-kuei called her from South Cave. Then waking up to the fact that she was the only one left, she hurried after them.

Since Yu-sheng's divorce, South Cave had been unoccupied and come in handy for meetings. By the time Ling-chih went in, practically all the seats were taken. She sat down on the end of a bench which was still vacant, but jumped up on finding something sticking into her, and promptly knocked into something else with her shoulder. She now saw she had sat on the peg on the bench Yu-sheng used for planing—several others had done the same thing before her arrival, which was why that place was empty—and knocked down a small saw which had been hanging from the ceiling. The roof of the cave was rounded, so things hanging rather high were some distance from the wall.

"Be careful!" warned one youngster. "This room of Yu-sheng's is full of traps!"

Ling-chih perceived that the cave was filled with tools, models and material of every description, which covered the walls and tables, and filled every corner and window-ledge. It was quite a sight. She hung the saw up again, while the others squeezed up on the *kang* to make room for her.

When Chin-sheng declared the meeting open, there was silence for several minutes. There is often a short silence at the beginning of a discussion, but not when group leaders meet to report on their work. This was a curious exception.

"Well, I may as well start," said one group leader finally. "Yuan Tien-cheng has made a very bad impression by keeping back so much land. One fellow said: 'He keeps that land in his brother's name, but keeps the grain himself. What sort of mentality is that?' Then someone answered: 'A socialist mentality! How can Party members be other than socialist?' Another fellow said: 'Now that Party members have set the example, I shall do the same myself next year—keep back some land for my wife, some for my son, some for my grandson. . . .' Others said: 'It can't be a paying proposition to join, otherwise why should a Party member keep his land out?' We didn't know how to answer all these objections. That's one thing. Another . . . well, let the others speak first. I'm not quite ready."

But apparently neither were the others, for silence fell again.

Ling-chih was here as one of the Youth League committee, but as no one else was talking she spoke up.

"I'm not a group leader," she said, "but I can pass on certain information I have. It looks as if Chu-ying's attempt to get that land in Hilt Field has been a flop, and I think it's all my dad's fault. The Ma family produced some settlement deeds written ten years ago, giving that plot in Hilt Field to Yu-fu. When Chu-ying protested, my dad was annoyed. As far as I can see, my dad doesn't want to join the co-op himself, nor does he want the village to have a canal—he flares up if you speak of either. He says. . . ."

"That's right!" burst in Yu-mei. "Chu-ying told me he didn't say a word to help her. She suspects these deeds may be forgeries. She gave me hers, and asked me to get Uncle Yung-ching to have a look at it."

As she took the deed from her pocket, the other group leaders launched into accounts of the villagers' opinions of Fan.

"Wait a bit!" cried Chin-sheng. "Let Ling-chih finish first."

The fact was that as soon as each group started work, it came up against this feeling against Fan.

"Don't come trying to win us over!" most of the villagers said. "You'd better win over the Party members first!"

Some who said this intended to join the co-op, but disapproved of Fan's conduct and were taking this chance to have a dig at him. Some did not intend to join, and were using Fan's attitude to excuse themselves. But one and all implied that Party members ought to set an example. Since this took the wind out of the propagandists' sails and set them at a disadvantage, it was the first thing they reported to their leaders. The latter intended to bring this up first at the meeting, but Ling-chih's presence embarrassed them, and they wanted to wait till she was out of the way. Ling-chih had no inkling of this. She spoke up because she felt her father's every thought and action was in opposition to the Party, and that if this went any further he would hold up the work in the village. Though she had determined to cure him, his case was growing increasingly serious and, since she was not much use as a doctor, she was now reporting his illness for the Party to deal with it. Her speech took a great load off the minds of the others, and the silence was broken as all tried to gain a hearing.

"Dad says he's going off on a trip with the mules tomorrow," continued Ling-chih, at Chin-sheng's request. "He wants someone else to see to Chu-ying's business. I think he's got some very unhealthy ideas, and the Party branch ought to cure him of them!"

"We have tried!" announced Chang Yung-ching. "The branch committee has talked to him several times, but we haven't been able to cure him!"

"That doesn't mean we've given up," said Chin-sheng. "We'll go on treating him. Now let's have the other reports."

"In our mutual-aid team," said one group leader, "I told the others why we ought to take the road to socialism instead of the road to capitalism. One of them asked: 'Which road does the Communist Party take?' 'The socialist road, of course,' I answered. 'Is it taking the socialist road,' he asked, 'when you buy two mules and hire a mule-driver?' How could I answer that?"

"How did you answer?" asked Chin-sheng.

"I said that was an exception."

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'Is it the rule in the Communist Party for small Party members to take the road to socialism, while big Party members take the road to capitalism?'"

"The bastard!" roared Chang Yung-ching. "That's an insult to the Party! Who was that man?"

"Don't fly out like that!" Chin-sheng sighed. "This comes of the way our Party members have behaved."

Nearly all the other group leaders, in describing how the work was going, brought up the names of Fan and Yuan Tien-cheng.

"We can't let this go any longer," declared Chin-sheng. "We must deal with these two fellows' problems."

Yu-mei relayed what Chu-ying had told her about the division of property, and passed the deed of settlement to Chang Yung-ching. But though Chang knew more characters than most of them, he could not make head or tail of that preamble, and stuffed the deed into Ling-chih's hand.

"I'm not a scholar," he said. "Please tell me what that means."

"I've seen it," replied Ling-chih. "I don't understand all this queer, fusty language either, though I know all the characters. Suppose I read it to the meeting?"

She thereupon read as follows:

"Whereas it has come to our ears that dissension between brothers arises perpetually over lucre, and in as much as strife within a household springs frequently from disputes over the estate, to remove all cause for discord and forestall disaster, therefore, it seems expedient to make a settlement of the property. I have accordingly asked my cousin Yu Hung-wen and my wife's younger brother Li Lin-hu to divide my estate into four equal parts for our four sons, that henceforward, if they enjoy brotherly happiness they may live together in harmony, but if bickering starts each can withdraw to his own property. From each share four *mou* are deducted to support us old folk in our declining years; but once our span of life is done, these portions will revert to their rightful owners. As testimony thereto, four deeds of settlement have been drawn up. The share of our third son Ma Yu-hsi is as follows."

Then she read out a list of rooms and fields, with their size and location. The document ended:

Drawn up on March 5, 1942

Estate owner—Ma To-shou

Witnesses—Yu Hung-wen, Li Lin-hu

Notary—Yu Hung-wen

"No wonder the thing's so full of hard words!" cried Chang when the reading was over. "I didn't know it was written by that old fox!"

The youngsters asked who Yu Hung-wen was.

"He was an old provincial graduate at Linhochon," Chang told them. "A great hand at blackmail and provoking lawsuits. He's been dead now for seven or eight years."

They said no further explanation was needed.

"This deed doesn't appear to be a forgery," observed Chin-sheng. "As I see it, old Ma To-shou made this sham division of property in case they started on him in the land reform. But since no one attacked him, he never produced it."

He asked to whom the plot in Hilt Field went.

"To Yu-fu," answered Ling-chih.

Chin-sheng thought this over.

"Never mind whether this deed is true or false," he said. "The land it gives Chu-ying isn't bad at that. I say, let it go at this!"

"I think this is a very good share of land," agreed Chin Hsiao-feng. "All we want is a fair deal for her. We army dependents don't demand special treatment."

"But she doesn't get that piece of Hilt Field!" objected Chang.

"We'll think of another way to deal with that," Chin-sheng assured him.

"Is our group's job finished then?" asked Yu-mei.

"Not yet," replied Chin-sheng. "I'll have a good talk with you first thing tomorrow."

After these reports, the Party committee stayed behind at Chin-sheng's request, while the others left.

The first out of the door cried: "My! It's raining!"

"Good!" exclaimed Ling-chih. "If it rains tomorrow, dad won't be able to go."

"Wake up Chang Lo-yi on your way," Chin-sheng told Wei Chan-kuei, "and ask him if there's anything left on the threshing-floor."

"We can go and have a look ourselves," responded Wei. "If there's anything left, we'll see to it. You don't have to worry."

While Chin-sheng and the rest of the Party committee went to the back yard of Flagstaff Compound to find old Liu who was on the county committee, the other co-op members went to the threshing-floor, and everyone else went home. Though Ling-chih did not belong to the co-op, she was now connected with it, so she went with the others to the threshing-floor. They found all that needed to be kept dry covered, and knew that Chang Lo-yi, the chairman, had done all that was necessary. So they, too, went home.

When Ling-chih reached home, her mother was fast asleep and her father was sitting by himself before a paraffin lamp. He asked what sort of meeting it had been. Afraid that he would cross-examine her if he knew the truth, she told him it had been a Youth League meeting. Still Fan, eager to know if they had considered Chu-ying's business, asked what had been discussed. Realizing what was in his mind, Ling-chih knew she must keep the facts from him. To ward off further questions, therefore, she chose a subject certain to put him off.

"We discussed the road to capitalism and the road to socialism."

After that, as she had foreseen, he asked no more questions.

Ling-chih went to bed, but not Fan. He sat by the lamp listening to the rain outside. Even the elements were conspiring against him, by preventing his trip the next day! Whenever the downpour grew lighter he thought it had stopped, but on listening carefully was disappointed. He walked to the door and looked up at the sky—it was equally dark with your eyes open as closed. It seemed likely to rain for months. A knock sounded at the gate, and he asked who was there. It was Chang Yung-ching, the man he least wanted to see. He opened the gate, and Chang

came in to ask him for the three deeds which the Party committee wished to study.

"This is the job of the grievance committee," protested Fan. "What's it got to do with the Party?"

"They're making trouble for one of our Youth League members. Shouldn't the Party get to the bottom of the business?"

"Good! And if you will see it through, so much the better! I have no idea what to say to Ma."

He produced the three deeds, and Chang left.

After seeing him off, Fan closed the gate again, came back and blew out the lamp, then lay back in his chair to try to work out what the Party committee's conclusion would be, what to do if he could not go out the next day, what action to take if the Party said the deeds were false, what if they were genuine, what to do in case Ma lost that plot in Hilt Field. . . . He had a great deal to think about, but his reflections were interrupted by another knock at the gate. He groped his way out, and asked who was there. It was the leader of his Party group.

"Don't open the gate," said the latter. "Chin-sheng told me to let you know that if it rains tomorrow there'll be a Party meeting in the morning. If it doesn't rain, the meeting will be in the evening."

He was starting off, when Fan called after him:

"Wait! If it's fine, I shall have to ask for leave!"

"No one can stay away!" came the reply from some distance. "There's an important report from the county committee."

He went away.

"They've nabbed me again!" thought Fan.

With the light out, he could see nothing. He fumbled to the chair and sat down again, then growled:

"This is the devil of a mess!"

### 23. Fan Still Has to Attend the Party Meeting

Fan spent a disturbed night on the fourth, so busy was he trying to foresee what the next day might bring. At dawn it was still raining and, as soon as he was up, Skinflint came to fetch him. This, indeed, was one of Fan's plans—to get out of the Party meeting by assisting at the division of property in Ma's house. He thought since the Party wanted to study those deeds, the question of their authenticity could be argued for several days, while the Party meeting would only take one morning. The previous evening he had grumbled at the weather, but this morning he felt the rain was to his advantage, for if it rained the Party meeting would be held during the day and would clash with his business in the Ma family. Glad to see Skinflint, he hastily washed his face and fol-

lowed him out. Wang Hsiao-chu, who dreaded being stranded, hurried after him.

"Shall I take out the mules if it clears after breakfast?" he asked.

"We'll see later," answered Fan.

Another of his plans was to let the mules rest that day and take them out the next day himself, when the Party meeting was over. That was why he would not let Wang go.

Soon after Fan reached Muddlehead's house, Yu-yi brought Chu-ying over. By then, Muddlehead, Skinflint, Li Lin-hu the broker, and Fan were already seated in state. Fan addressed Chu-ying as if she were a child.

"Have you studied that deed yet?" he asked mockingly.

"Yes, I have."

"Is it genuine or false?"

"It's genuine."

"Ah?"

This was not what he had expected. He could not understand her, and Chu-ying saw his hesitation.

"It's genuine!" she repeated.

"Have you any other objections?"

"No, I think it's quite fair."

"That's a good girl!" cried the broker. "I knew you'd listen to reason. Your uncle and dad here are elderly folk—why should they try to cheat you? You're all one family, all fingers on the same hand—of course the old people treat you all alike! If you've no objection as regards the land and rooms, we can divide up the furniture, tools and small stuff today. What do you say to that?"

"What about livestock?"

"We've two donkeys," said Muddlehead. "That makes half each. You can take fewer other things if you choose the big one, and more if you choose the small. Just take your pick!"

"I'm going to join the co-op," was Chu-ying's reply. "Can I turn half a donkey over?"

"If you're joining the co-op, we'll give you money instead. You can pay that in, and the co-op will buy a donkey. All right?"

Chu-ying agreed to this.

They were ready to divide the household goods and farm implements, for Muddlehead and Skinflint had sat up half the night preparing lists, which Skinflint now produced. First he read the general inventory, then each one's share. He read so fast, it was impossible to remember each item. And of course they had taken certain unfair advantages—some pieces of furniture which had always been in the Ma family, for instance, were described as part of the dowry of Always Right or Spitfire, while smaller objects, unlikely to attract attention, were left out altogether. After these lists had been read, they asked Chu-ying's opinion. She was

so keen to start living decently on her own that she would not haggle over trifles—she was ready to be generous.

"As long as I have enough furniture to make do, I don't mind a few sticks more or a few sticks less. Farming folk live by honest work. No one can depend all his life on what little those before him left. I'll take what you've given me. I don't want to make difficulties."

"Good girl!" approved Li Lin-hu. "See how reasonable she is!"

Skinflint gave Chu-ying the list of her property.

"Curious!" thought Fan. "I thought this was going to take several days, but the whole thing's been settled in under an hour."

Things had not gone smoothly at all for him yesterday, but far too smoothly to suit his taste today.

The reason for Chu-ying's compliance was that first thing in the morning Chin-sheng had told Yu-mei to inform her group of the conclusion reached the previous night by the Party committee, which was not to worry about the deed's validity—accept it if it was reasonable, and oppose it if it was not. Moreover, in their view, since these deeds were drawn up before the trouble with Chu-ying, the shares were relatively fair. A fresh distribution might not be any improvement. As for that land in Hilt Field, other means had been found for securing it, and she need not fight for it. Yu-mei ran to Backyard Granny's house to find Chu-ying just as Yu-yi arrived to fetch her, and having told them both the Party's view, went on to inform Fan Teng-kao. By then, however, Fan had already left with Skinflint. Hence Chu-ying was in the know, Fan in the dark.

The division of property at an end, the Ma family kept Fan to breakfast, after which Li Lin-hu helped Skinflint sort out the furniture for Chu-ying. Since there was nothing for him to do, Fan took his leave of Muddlehead. Just outside the gate, however, he ran into some Party members on their way to Flagstaff Compound, who asked him to go with them. Having no pretext now for refusing, he trudged silently by their side.

This meeting of the whole Party branch was also held in the front north wing of Flagstaff Compound. Chin-sheng first explained the purpose of the meeting.

"This is a small-scale putting-right meeting," he announced. "We may not be able to finish within two days. You will just have to be patient."

These words struck dread into Fan, who had a horror of "putting-right meetings," especially when they went on for several days.

"At first the county decided not to start this campaign till winter, in our slack season," continued Chin-sheng. "But some wrong ideas are holding up our work at present, so yesterday evening we decided with Assistant Secretary Liu from the county to correct the most harmful ideas now, and overhaul our whole Party branch later this winter. Now I'll call on Assistant Secretary Liu to speak."



Liu, too, took as his point of departure "the road to capitalism and the road to socialism." This was surely a magic formula, thought Fan, whose head ached each time he heard it. Owing to this prejudice, he simply did not listen to Liu, for to his mind that would only give him a worse headache. But Liu seemed a more potent sorcerer than most, for Fan could not help but catch certain phrases, as, for instance: "Fan Teng-kao and Yuan Tien-cheng represent this type of thinking and behaviour."

Though Fan had missed what went before, he could guess that it was nothing good. And now that his name had been mentioned, he had to listen.

"It is the Communist Party," continued Liu, "that is leading the whole country to socialism. What sort of Party members are those who will not take this road? Don't we want to lead the way along this road? Have we taken it ourselves? How have we travelled along it? How do we mean to travel in future? Every Party member must say just where he stands. And the first to do this should be those who have made bad blunders in thought as well as in deed! This is the dividing line between those who are fit to be Communists and those who are not. There can be no sitting on the fence. I hope all comrades will examine themselves carefully."

"There will be a short break now," announced Chin-sheng after Liu's speech. "Then the meeting will be thrown open. Even if it clears up now, it's too wet to work outside, so we mean to go on all day. If it rains again tomorrow, we'll go on for another whole day. If it's fine, we'll work in the day and meet in the evening."

"Heavens!" thought Fan, scratching his head. "They're putting the screws on now!"

By the end of the interval, however, he was ready. Since Liu had named him, he would have to speak first. But his way was to snap back at whoever crossed him.

"There's no need for this beating about the bush!" he said. "It's clear today's meeting was arranged for my benefit!"

This was obviously a thrust at the Party committee, Chin-sheng and Liu.

"Let me put in a word!" interjected Liu. "The main purpose of this meeting is to provide Comrades Fan Teng-kao and Yuan Tien-cheng with a chance to examine their harmful capitalist outlook! At the same time, other comrades can state their own position. I made that quite clear in my talk. There was no beating about the bush. Let's not waste time now. Go on, Comrade Teng-kao."

Fan had been so set on reprisals that, instead of preparing to criticize his faults, he had thought only of how to retaliate. Now that Liu called so pointedly for an analysis of his outlook, he was flustered and did not know what to say. But soon he thought of a way to present his case.

"When the work in this district first started. . . ."

An old Party member stood up.

"Cut it out!" he protested. "We know you did a good job when the work first started; but this is no time to boast of your past record—we want you to analyse your capitalist ideas!"

"But you won't let a fellow talk!" Much less cocksure, Fan spoke rather plaintively.

"All right!" agreed Chin-sheng, as chairman. "No one's to interrupt. Let's hear him out."

With this assurance, Fan began again.

"When the Party first told me to take office, I took office. When it told me to settle scores with the landlords, I did. At that time no one dared take the land won back from the landlords, and the Party told me to give the lead—which I did. Later on, when folk said I had more than my share, and the Party told me to return some, I returned it. After the land reform, when the Party told me to produce more on my land, I produced more. Yet now that I've produced a little more than most, everyone says I have capitalist ideas. I haven't had enough schooling, so I don't know what to do, and I only hope the Party will tell me again! What does the Party want me to do now?"

When he loosed this torrent of words at them, many of his hearers lost patience. So the moment he paused a dozen jumped to their feet, not caring whether he was through or not. Among them Chin-sheng saw Chang Lo-yi, the co-op chairman, whose words should carry weight with Fan. He therefore pointed at Chang.

"You speak first," he said.

"Listen, Teng-kao!" cried Chang. "What grudge have you got against the Party? Stop blaming everything on the Party! The Party hasn't let you down at all! If you want to bring up old history, two can play at that game. There are quite a few of us here who helped to get the work going—you're not the only one! Liu Lao-wu was attacked by all the Party members in the village, and all the villagers joined in too! There were only a few who didn't dare take the land we won from him. When Liu was shot and the land divided up, most of your share was in the Upper Flats. In fact you insisted that because you'd had a worse time than most, you should have more land. All those households living at the mouth of Sandy Creek farmed those hillsides for the Liu family for two generations, yet you would only give them a little hilly land. I had several rows with you over that, but in the end you had your way. In the putting-right movement in the Party after land reform, when you were asked to give back some of that land, you stopped working and shammed illness, and finally only gave back a few *mou* of sandy land. After land reform you say you worked hard—but we others weren't sleeping either! With your better land and better conditions, in a few years you got yourself a mule. Then you let Huang Ta-nien and Man-hsi do your farming, while you drove that mule out to trade. Soon you turned one mule into two, and hired Wang Hsiao-chu as your mule-driver, so that you could stay at home as

boss! Think for yourself—what sort of outlook is that? In the old society, you drove mules for Liu Lao-wu while I tilled his land for him. We were both his hired hands, and each knew just how many pecks of grain the other had. But compare yourself with the rest of our party since—didn't you do best of the lot? Yet you've the biggest grudge against the Party. Why? To my mind, it's just because you did too well. And you did so well, mind you, at the expense of others, just like a capitalist. You drove mules for Liu Lao-wu, and now Wang is driving mules for you—you're trying to copy Liu. Since the Party won't stand for this, of course you bear the Party a grudge! Comrade! Brother! We've been friends for twenty years, and speaking both as your old comrade and old friend, I don't want to see you turn into a second Liu Lao-wu! That would be as bad as having Liu himself lording it over Sanliwan again. Think carefully now which road you ought to take!"

After Chang, several others had things to say about Fan. But when he asked for the floor again, Chin-sheng advised him to examine himself thoroughly and speak in the afternoon. Then Yuan Tien-cheng was called on.

Realizing how much in earnest the meeting was, Yuan did not deny his mistake, but blamed it on his wife. He declared that when he joined the co-op in the spring, he was willing just to keep back one-fifth of his land like everyone else; but Mistress Sly put him up to keeping half in his brother's name. He did as she said because he dared not offend her. The others demanded whether in future he intended to be guided by the Party or by his wife.

"By the Party, of course," replied Yuan. "But sometimes I have to ask my wife's opinion."

They said this meant nothing at all.

It was now noon, and Chin-sheng declared a break for lunch, after which the meeting would be resumed.

## 24. *Strange Encounter*

It was a glum Fan who went home for his midday meal. Instead of asking Ling-chih to fetch him rice, he filled his bowl in silence and took it to the porch.

"Who's your dad angry with now?" whispered Mrs. Fan.

While working with the accountant in Flagstaff Compound that morning, Ling-chih had heard her father being criticized at the Party meeting, but she could not explain this to her mother.

"I don't really know," she answered.

After one bowl of rice, Fan put down his bowl and stood on the steps to smoke. To sound him out, Ling-chih asked:

"What did you do today, dad, in the Party meeting?"

"Chanted litanies!" he drawled.

"What litanies?"

"The sacred litanies!"

"Oh, dear!" she thought. "He still hasn't come round!"

Wang Hsiao-chu's one concern was with the mules. He came up, holding his bowl.

"It's cleared up!" he pointed out. "Will you go tomorrow, or shall I?"

"Neither of us. I'm going to sell the mules."

"What!"

"I'm not keeping them. Keeping them turns a man into a capitalist."

Before Wang could ask more questions, Fan strode out, smoking furiously.

Mrs. Fan was bewildered and started making wild guesses, to which Ling-chih replied at random, as if she were equally in the dark. When they had talked for some time, the accountant called for her.

By the time Ling-chih went back with Li to Flagstaff Compound, the Party meeting had started again. She was drawing up a chart of the general distribution in the co-op, and had no wish to eavesdrop, but she could not help catching some of what was said.

"Don't pin labels on a fellow like that!" she heard her father bellow. "I've never opposed socialism! So long as private ownership exists, you can't criticize me for running my own business. The day we reach socialism, I'll give it up!"

Ling-chih felt there was something wrong with this argument, but could not lay her finger on it. She had long been looking for a chance to discuss this question of socialism and capitalism with her father; but now it seemed he knew more than she had suspected. While she was wishing she could find some theoretical basis to refute him, she heard Chang Yung-ching retort:

"So a Party member will go on building up his private business until the people have finished building socialism—then he'll give it up! Don't talk nonsense! Does the Party lead the people, or the people the Party?"

"Even the masses accept the Party's leadership to work for socialism," threw in Chin-sheng. "They don't wait for others to build up socialism for them before they'll give up their private property. If everyone turns capitalist, who will build socialism?"

"Fan Teng-kao!" cried another. "Stop talking rot! Answer a simple question. Will you take the socialist road straight away or not?"

"I never said I wouldn't."

"All right. Will you join the co-op straight away?"

"The Central Party Committee says that's up to each individual. You can't force a man to join!"

"It's up to each individual, because so far not all the peasants have seen the way forward. Are you a Party member or a backward peasant?"

If you choose to be a backward peasant, the Party will wait for you, but you can't go on wearing a Communist badge!"

No reply came from Fan, and Ling-chih admired the way the others had torn his arguments to pieces. She gave her mind to her chart again.

Now making a chart is not like hoeing or reaping—you have to concentrate. As she wrote her headings: total workdays, total output, nature, value and so forth, she was distracted by hearing such phrases as "criticize . . . make good . . . capitalism and socialism. . . ." But though she made several slips that afternoon, before the Party meeting ended she and Li had completed their task.

She left Flagstaff Compound before sunset and called on Yu-yi, suddenly remembering that Yu-yi had not yet handed in his self-criticism to the Youth League. Though she had left their mutual-aid team so recently, and it was only three or four days since she last came to Muddlehead's house, their big brown dog eyed her suspiciously, and headed for her with a growl. Then he recognized her and stopped. Ling-chih found Chu-ying in the yard, moving her furniture into the east wing of the house.

"Is Yu-yi in?" she asked softly.

"Yes!" Chu-ying pointed to the small south-east room.

Ling-chih went over and tapped twice on the window.

"Come in!" called Yu-yi.

It was too dark inside to see him at first, but by degrees she made out that he was lying on a bed by the south wall. This room had only one door and one small window on the north side, both facing the wall of the east wing. There had been two windows behind Yu-yi's bed giving on the open country, but Muddlehead had nailed boards over them and piled up bricks inside as a precaution against thieves. It was hard in the gloom to see what was in here. At the head of Yu-yi's bed loomed a large grain bin, in front of the bin were vats, on top of the vats were cases, on top of the cases were crates, and on top of the crates were some small, shadowy objects.

"Why lie in bed during the day?" asked Ling-chih.

"I'm sunk!"

"Because you have to write a self-criticism?"

"No! It's much worse than that. My uncle. . . ."

The door-curtain was lifted, and Always Right bustled in.

"Hurry up!" she ordered Yu-yi, wagging one finger at him. "Your dad wants you!"

Yu-yi got up.

"Wait a little," he said to Ling-chih. "I'll come straight back."

"He wants you for something," snapped Always Right. "You can't come straight back. Hurry up!"

With Always Right so unreasonable and Yu-yi so weak-kneed, Ling-chih could only say: "I must be going. When you've finished writing it, hand it straight in to the committee."

She followed Yu-yi out, and walked alone to the gate. Her face set in a sneer, Always Right barely refrained from swearing at the girl.

Walking home past a mill, Ling-chih came upon Shilly-shally hulling rice. Yu-yi's uncle Li Lin-hu was asking Shilly-shally how much the donkey he had harnessed to the mill was worth, while Wang Hsiao-chu stood by and listened. Going home by a roundabout way, she found Wang and Li in the yard when she got back, looking at her father's mules. Just then Fan returned from his meeting.

"How much would you say my mules are worth?" he asked Li.

"Never mind how much—you're not selling."

"I am. I've made up my mind to it."

"I have no money myself," rejoined Li. "If you really mean to sell, I'll find you a customer."

"Good. Keep a look-out for me."

After some polite remarks, Li took his leave.

As we know, Wang Hsiao-chu had once been a horse dealer. When Fan said that morning that he was selling the mules, Wang did not quite believe him; but in the unlikely event that this was true, he meant to keep the deal in his own hands. Since Fan and he were master and man, and he could not take a commission openly, he used Li Lin-hu as a cover. They had agreed to show up when Fan came home from his meeting, and sound him out half jokingly before going any further. This was what brought Li here at noon to look at the mules.

When the broker had gone, Ling-chih called her father in.

"Dad!" she cried. "Why are you selling the mules?"

"They say keeping mules turns you into a capitalist, so of course I must sell them at once to take the socialist road."

"Can't you take the socialist road without selling the mules?"

"How?"

"By joining the co-op!"

"Once I'm in the co-op, who'll look after the mules for me?"

"Take them in with you!"

"That's mighty generous of you! Some men turned in one small donkey, some not even that—why should I be the only one to turn in two mules? If that's the rule, let everyone turn in mules. I won't be the only one!"

"But the rest of them didn't have mules, dad."

"Whose fault was that?"

"They weren't like you. . . ."

"They didn't fly so high, eh? They didn't turn into capitalists like me? That's what all the others are accusing me of. Now you've joined in the hue and cry. Right?"

"What do you expect me to say?" replied Ling-chih after a pause. "What are you turning into?"

Fan longed to give her a piece of his mind, but could not think of any argument that would hold water.

"Dad!" she urged. "If you're willing to join, why begrudge the co-op the mules? It's not as if you get no return for them. The co-op sets a fair price and pays you one-tenth every year, so it's not much different from selling them and putting the proceeds in the bank."

"You've only been in the co-op three days," growled Fan, torn between amusement and exasperation, "yet you've become their spokesman. You're talking exactly like one of the co-op!"

Mrs. Fan was relieved to see his scowl disappear.

"Who told you to swap her with the co-op?" she teased. "Of course, now she's in the co-op she's on their side."

"Dad has agreed to join the co-op too," said Ling-chih. "So we're all on the same side now. I'm speaking up for the co-op, but saying what's best for dad as well. The last few days our propaganda teams have been busy explaining to the villagers that you don't lose out on livestock turned over to the co-op. We're trying to clear up any wrong ideas they may have. Now if dad, as a Party member, sells his mules before joining the co-op, the villagers are bound to get wrong ideas. And if others who join follow his example, why! the whole Party and Youth League—not to say all the co-op members—will be against him!"

"I'm not selling the mules because the co-op wouldn't make it worth my while to hand them over," protested Fan.

"But how can we explain that to the villagers? And if you're not afraid of losing out on them, why are you selling? I don't understand."

"You've all confused me so, I don't understand myself! My idea was to sell the mules to make a bit of ready money, but if I really joined the co-op I shouldn't have any use for ready money."

"If you two don't understand," put in Mrs. Fan, "I'm even more at sea!"

"You won't sell the mules then, dad?" pleaded Ling-chih.

"My head's in a whirl," replied Fan. "You must let me think it over before I decide. Don't pester me!"

Ling-chih realized that he had not yet made up his mind to join the co-op, but was just beginning to consider it.

"Just one more question, dad! Has the Party meeting ended or not?"

"Why ask that? D'you want your old man plagued to death?"

Since this meant it was not yet over, Ling-chih smiled and said nothing.

"As long as the meeting goes on," she thought, "there'll be others to plague you for me!"

It was late that night when Ling-chih went to her room, but she could not sleep. There were three things on her mind: the chart she had made

that afternoon was still not quite right, her father was not completely cured, and Yu-yi had only got as far as saying "My uncle . . ." when his mother put her foot down. Her mind was a hotchpotch of total income and expenditure of the co-op, estimated output, income and expenditure of side lines, and public funds . . . as well as her father's retail trade, hired mule-drivers, waiting for others to build socialism, selling mules, "a Party member or a backward peasant?" . . . to say nothing of bins, vats, cases, crates, "My uncle . . ." and Always Right's sneer. . . . Sometimes these things remained distinct in her mind, sometimes she felt the bins, vats, cases and crates should be entered under expenditure of the co-op, or doubted whether selling mules should go under income from side lines or not. She grew more and more confused.

"Hurry up and go to sleep," she ordered herself at last. "You're not going to solve any problems this way. Tomorrow you can get up earlier to work on them properly."

She slept, but not too soundly, waking up before it was light. Still, her head was clear, and when she remembered her chart she could almost see it before her. By simply changing the order of certain headings, she could make it do perfectly well. She dressed and left her room. At first she wanted to look at the watch on the table in her father's outer room, but drew back after actually raising her hand to the curtain. Her father had bought this watch after going into business, and if he were to wake he would surely say: "If I hadn't turned into a capitalist, where would this watch have come from?"

"Never mind!" she thought. "I don't have to look at yours! By the time we reach socialism, everybody will have one. I'll go and look at the militiamen's watch."

Near the gate to Flagstaff Compound, someone made her jump by flashing a torch into her face. There was a guard post between the threshing-floor and Flagstaff Compound, to watch the road from the village to the threshing-floor as well as Flagstaff Compound. This militiaman challenged Ling-chih, then let her pass. Inside the compound, she saw lights in the east and west wings.

"Can Li Shih-chieh be here already?" she wondered.

"Who's there?" called a voice from the east room, and she heard the click of a safety catch.

"It's Ling-chih!" was her hasty reply.

She walked in and saw Yu-sheng standing behind the desk, holding a gun which he put down when he saw her. The militiamen's watch was on the desk, and going over to it she saw the time was only twenty past four. Beside the watch was an open notebook, with a carpenter's square over it.

"Why have you come so early?" Yu-sheng asked.

At four he had come on duty for the last watch and, not expecting anyone to be about at this hour, had jumped for his gun when he heard her in the yard.

"There's a chart I drew up wrong, and I came to correct it. I haven't a watch, so I didn't know it was only four. Why are you here?"

"I wanted to work something out during my watch, and was afraid the rustle of papers might wake the others up."

Ling-chih now noticed a sketch of some cog-wheels and circles on the page at which the notebook lay open. There was a row of holes in the carpenter's square, and needles through some of the holes. She knew that Yu-sheng and Hsiao-chun's divorce had arisen from a quarrel over a square with holes in it—probably this very one. She picked it up to look at the sketch beneath.

"Don't laugh now!" said Yu-sheng. "We can't do such fine work as you folk with schooling!"

It did look a little crude, but well thought out.

"What are you inventing now—a machine?" asked Ling-chih.

"A machine? Why, I wouldn't know a machine when I see one," replied Yu-sheng. "How could I invent one? I'm just trying to remodel our water-wheels. We're going to start on that canal any day now, aren't we? Once we've a canal, the Lower Flats won't need any water-wheels, and we can move them all to the canal in the Upper Flats. The wells in the Lower Flats are twenty feet deep, but the canal in the Upper Flats where we mean to rig up the wheels is only six feet. The shallower the water, the lighter the work of the wheel. If it's light enough, there's no need for draught animals. I was thinking either of using that method I read about in the newspaper, gearing up the wheel by changing the axle, or of fixing two pipes to each wheel, so that one can do the work of two or three."

When Ling-chih asked how far he had got, he explained his diagrams to her one by one. Some of the teeth on the cog-wheels were too long.

"Long teeth like that won't do," she remarked.

"They're not really so long," he told her. "That's because the holes on my square are too far apart."

Ling-chih could not help thinking how clever he was. But for his unfortunate "lack of schooling," she would have considered him as a possible husband. She picked up the square again to look at it, and realized that it took skill to make such an instrument, though for accurate work it was pitifully crude. To help the co-op, she felt she ought to lend him the geometry set she had used at school—compasses, protractor, set square, and metric ruler.

"This square isn't enough for this sort of work," she told Yu-sheng. "I can lend you some instruments."

She went straight home to fetch them.

On her return, she showed Yu-sheng how to use them.

"Thank you!" he said. "You don't know what these mean to me!"

It was light now, and time for the militiamen to leave their posts. Yu-sheng went home to sleep, while Ling-chih sat down at the desk to revise her chart.

## 25. The Three Pictures

The tenth of September was a rest-day, and that morning the co-op youngsters rigged up the platform in Flagstaff Compound. This was a simple business: you moved the desks from the night school to form an extension to the verandah in the front yard, spread some mats, hung up a cloth to cover door to the north room—and there you were. They fixed up this platform about once every ten days—sometimes for a meeting, sometimes for an opera too—and since practice makes perfect, it took them only ten minutes. In addition to the usual arrangements today, the three large pictures Liang had painted in such record time were displayed on the platform too. Ching-miao, Shih-cheng, Li-ming and Ling-ling, who were live wires on holidays, came running over as soon as the platform was up. The elder children recognized Sanliwan the moment they saw the new pictures, and explained them to the little ones. Then they dashed back to the village to spread the news.

"There are three pictures on the platform!" they shouted to everyone they met. "They're all of Sanliwan! One has water in it! One has motor cars!"

Apart from this collective propaganda, each child went home to tell his own parents and grandparents.

After breakfast, folk started pouring in to Flagstaff Compound—some to attend the meeting, some dragged here by their children. Behind the curtain, in the north room, the village officers held a preparatory meeting, while the others gathered in the yard to look at the paintings.





None of the villagers had seen a picture of Sanliwan before, and nearly all exclaimed that Liang had made it much prettier than it was. The picture on the left—the first to be painted—was the same one shown on the evening of the second at the meeting of the Party and Youth League.

The painting in the middle showed an early autumn scene of luxuriant, dark green crops. A big canal flowed from the middle of the Upper Flats to the edge of the village, under a bridge at the mouth of Sandy Creek, and southwards along the foot of the Lower Flats hills. In the north part of the Upper Flats, between Hilt Field and Thirty Mou Field, seven wheels were pumping water from the canal. In the Lower Flats, the bed of the watercourse was higher than most of the surrounding land, flanked on one side by the hills, on the other by a dike. The canal, brimming with water, branched out to irrigate all the Lower Flats; you could also see the start of quite a number of ditches, which plunged into the teeming fields and were lost to sight; and both Upper and Lower Flats were dotted with people watering the crops.

The third picture, on the right, showed a summer scene. The hills and Sandy Creek were thickly wooded now, and a little way up the hillside, not far from the flats, was a highway running north from the village. There were trucks on this road, and telegraph poles beside it. Trees grew inside and all around the village, but nestling among them you could glimpse new roof tops. The farming now was on a much larger scale—on half the Lower Flats waved golden wheat, while the other half was divided into two parts, one for autumn crops, one for vegetables. The Upper Flats were given over to autumn crops. In the wheat fields on the Lower Flats combines were reaping the wheat, a cultivator was weeding the Upper Flats . . . it looked very much like one of our present state farms.

Each picture had a title. The first was "Sanliwan Today," the second "Sanliwan Tomorrow," and the third "A Socialist Sanliwan."

People were particularly interested in the second.

"With a watercourse like that," said one, "we need never fear drought again."

"Build the canal this year, and next year it'll be like that."

"We shall harvest twice as much—no doubt about it."

The women pointed to the stretch of canal by the village.

"We can wash our vegetables here!"

"Lower down we can wash our clothes."

"I shan't need to carry any more water. Flows right past the door of our house!"

The children made plans too for swimming, catching frogs, and fishing. . . .

Soon Wang Hsing who looked after the market garden arrived. Since the vegetables needed constant care, the old man had a day off only once in every two weeks.

"It's not easy for old Wang to come," said the villagers. "Let him have a good look."

They beckoned him to the front row.

"I've seen that first one." He pointed to the one on the left. "I saw it before any of you. It was painted in my garden."

"Is the market garden yours?" asked someone slyly.

"That's the funniest thing!" Wang chuckled. "I always think of it as mine. It's like a child to me!"

Then he looked at the second picture, and pointed an accusing finger.

"Comrade Liang! Why have you painted out my water-wheel?"

"With the canal, you won't want a water-wheel."

Wang burst out laughing.

"So this is after the canal is made! And I didn't even see that big canal!"

"You've eyes for nothing but your vegetables!" someone twitted him again.

In the third picture, the old man discovered that wheat was growing in what was now the market garden, while the vegetables had been moved to slightly east of the mouth of Sandy Creek.

"That won't do!" He turned to the artist. "If you move us to the village, folk will have too far to go for their vegetables."

"Haven't you seen that motor road to the river?" Liang indicated the lower edge of the picture. "If I'd drawn any more, you'd see the river here, with a bridge for motor traffic."

"But how can trucks get to East Hill?"

"If Sanliwan has trucks, so will they. By that time, you'll be growing most of your vegetables for yourselves, and people living not too far from the village can cycle over to get them."

"It will be awkward for each family to come to buy. Much better go round with a push-cart to every house."

"Never mind that now. By then we shall be able to work out those details much better."

"By that time everyone will be using machines," observed old Wang. "Will our knowledge be any use then?"

"How long do you expect to live, uncle?" asked another wit.

"When I'm gone, there'll still be the rest of you. Aren't some of you learning from us?"

"The heavy work will be done by machine," explained Liang, "but the finer work will still have to be done by hand. Of course, by then we shall have learned new skills, but the new ones nearly always grow out of the old. If we go forward, we won't fall behind the times."

The preparatory meeting in the north wing was over now. The village and co-op officers, Assistant Secretary Liu from the county, and the other visiting functionaries came out from behind the curtain and jumped down from the platform, leaving Chin-sheng alone up there as chairman.

He declared the meeting open, and asked Chang Yung-ching to speak on enlarging the co-op and making the canal. A talk by Chang was as good as a play: no one ever dozed off when he spoke. He started with the two roads—socialism and capitalism—and explained why the socialist road was the only one with a future. He used Liang's three pictures to illustrate how they would advance to socialism, and stated in conclusion that their present task was to organize themselves better and increase production—in other words, enlarge the co-op and make a canal. The pictures had already aroused general interest, and Chang's talk made the villagers even keener. He threw out a number of questions to warm them up.

"Are we down-hearted?"

"No!"

"Are we going ahead with this?"

"Yes!"

During all the shouting to and fro, some turned to watch the reactions of the men who usually opposed the co-op and the canal. They saw Skinflint sitting silently in a corner at the back, staring not at Chang but at Huang Ta-nien and Man-hsi as they raised their fists to shout.

When Chang had finished, Chin-sheng stood up again.

"The capitalist outlook—each for himself, and the devil take the hindmost—is holding up our advance to socialism. We've explained this time and again, but not everyone has examined himself carefully to see whether he has capitalist ideas or not. In fact, not all our Party members have done this well. One or two have been seriously influenced by capitalist ideas. Our two old comrades Fan Teng-kao and Yuan Tien-cheng, for example, are in a bad way. We've been helping them look into their mistakes in our Party meetings the last few days, and decided to let them make a self-criticism at this meeting today. I'll ask them to speak now." He turned to Fan and Yuan. "Which of you will speak first?"

"I will," said Fan, and clambered on to the platform.

Now during the reduction of rents and rates of interest, Fan had been an even more popular speaker than Chang Yung-ching; but in recent years he had failed to hold his audience, for each time he got up to speak he merely lectured the villagers, and did not practise what he preached. They could hardly believe today that Fan would admit to being anything but an infallible leader of the masses. Ling-chih, too, dreaded lest he disappoint them all by not speaking sincerely.

"These last few years I have made a great mistake!" Fan started off. "I'm going to tell you about it."

"Hear that?" whispered some of the villagers. "He's still setting up as our teacher!"

"I've taken the capitalist road," continued Fan. "I've given all my attention to my own private business, instead of leading you all towards socialism. Now I know my mistake. A Party member mustn't set an example by working for capitalism! I'm going to make a fresh start straight

away! From now on, I'm going to lead you all towards socialism! The village co-op needs strengthening, doesn't it? I'll give a lead by putting down my name to join! I've sent Wang Hsiao-chu the mule-driver away, and I'm willing to bring my two mules into the co-op with me! You know I'm a man of my word. I want to make my stand clear. That's all."

Someone clapped a couple of times, no more. Fan waited a second, but when that clapping stopped and no more followed he quietly left the platform.

Chin-sheng was very embarrassed. In the recent Party meetings, because some old comrades had exposed Fan's mistakes, he had made a much more honest self-criticism than today. Now, in front of all the villagers, he had posed once more as a leader and old revolutionary, putting everybody's back up. This being so, Chin-sheng felt that before the villagers were asked to criticize Fan and help him to know his faults, the Party should state its opinion of what he had said. But if he spoke for the Party, Fan would pay even less attention to the people's opinions; for Fan, in addition to behaving like a capitalist, was puffed up with a sense of his own importance and suspected Chin-sheng of trying to wrest authority from him. If, therefore, Chin-sheng were to criticize him, Fan would think he was inciting the villagers to attack him, and would turn a deaf ear to all they might say to help him. So after Fan left the platform and Chin-sheng took his place as chairman again, he remained silent for several minutes.

Assistant Secretary Liu knew the relationship between Chin-sheng and Fan, and understood the difficulty. He stood up.

"Chairman!" he said. "I should like to say a few words."

Chin-sheng invited him up.

"Comrade Fan Teng-kao has seen his mistake and resolved to correct it—this is something we all welcome," said Liu. "But the tone he took was quite wrong. He was setting himself up above the masses again. That attitude is no good! He has fallen far behind, yet he keeps talking of taking the lead and leading the village towards socialism. When peasants join an agricultural producers' co-operative, they have taken the road to socialism. Many people in Sanliwan *have* taken this road now for two years—but not you, Teng-kao! What sort of lead have you given? You shouldn't talk of taking the lead but of learning. It is up to you to learn well, and the villagers must keep an eye on you. Your first step is to catch up with all the rest. After that, if they believe you can give them a lead, all right! But you can't do it now! Now you must stop posing. Why didn't you tell everyone the disciplinary action the Party has taken against you? Since you couldn't humble yourself, I'll tell them. Because Comrade Fan Teng-kao has stopped thinking or behaving like a Party member, the Party placed him on probation after he admitted his fault. I hope all of you, inside and outside the Party, will watch him, to see whether he's fit to become a Party member again. That goes for other Party members too

—if any of you, whether in the Party or not, finds a Party member who doesn't behave like a Communist, please help us by telling the Party branch!"

After Liu had spoken, Chin-sheng invited the villagers to express their views. One after another they raised various criticisms, mostly repeating what had already been said in the Party, as Fan had omitted to mention all these failings. Only Niu, leader of the hill team, brought up something new.

"I've no patience with the way Fan showed off about turning his two mules over to the co-op!" he declared. "As if our co-op needed his charity! The last two years, we old co-op members have planted all those trees and cleared all that land to encourage you others to take the socialist road. We don't drive a hard bargain with new members. Yet he talks of turning in two mules as if it were an act of charity! We all know his nickname—Fly High. Well, if those of us in the hill team had flown as high as he did in the land reform, we could each have had a mule! When the co-op takes livestock, it pays a fair dividend, so what favour does he think he's doing us? He's simply doing the right thing now by joining—the alternative is to go on towards capitalism. Can't we borrow money at one per cent from the bank to buy ourselves two mules? After listening to him, I feel he hasn't faced up to his faults at all. I doubt very much whether he will work honestly in the co-op."

"Hear! Hear!" called Liu from his place in the crowd. "What do you think, Comrade Teng-kao? Aren't the eyes of the masses sharp? If you don't strive hard and honestly to reform, how can you stay in the Party?"

When everyone had spoken, Fan, no longer able to equivocate, promised to probe more deeply into his faults.

It was nearly noon when Yuan Tien-cheng's turn came to speak. His problem was simple—it was just that, on Mistress Sly's advice, he had kept so much land out of the co-op in his brother's name. He made a clean breast of things and promised to correct his mistakes, and that was all. The others said they knew he had no control over his wife, but he must not allow her to lead him astray like that.

After this, Chin-sheng asked the villagers to discuss Chang Yung-ching's talk in their different groups, then declared the meeting over.

Everyone left Flagstaff Compound, except those responsible for entertainment, who had a programme to prepare for the afternoon.

## 26. No Outsiders Admitted

That afternoon Skinflint gave Muddlehead a report of the meeting, and consulted him on the advisability of attending the group discussion that evening. They decided Skinflint should go to spy out the land, but keep his mouth shut.

The meeting did not end till after ten, and Skinflint had to knock at the gate for some time before anyone would answer. Opening the gate had been Chu-ying's job, but not since she set up on her own. Now Always Right was in bed, and had no intention of getting up and dressing. Muddlehead had too much on his mind to sleep, but he was getting on in years and disliked going out late at night. Besides, used as he was to ordering the young folk about, he had grown rather lazy. He sat on the edge of the kang, and called for Yu-yi. Spitfire was never one to put herself out, so when she heard Muddlehead shout she decided it was none of her business. As for Yu-yi, he was not asleep, but he had been sulking for the last few days and pretended not to hear.

The reason for Yu-yi's sullenness was this: On the afternoon of the fifth, as you may remember, when Ling-chih went to see him, he had barely time to say "My uncle . . ." before his mother called him away. The fact was that Mistress Sly had sent her brother that morning to arrange a marriage between Yu-yi and Hsiao-chun, and his uncle and mother had given their consent. When Yu-yi objected, they worked on him for a whole morning, one scolding, the other coaxing, till he was too upset to eat his midday meal and lay down with a splitting headache. When Always Right saw Ling-chih go in to him, she was afraid that would spoil everything, and hastened to get him out of harm's way. From then on, she tagged after Yu-yi wherever he went, so that he could not go near Ling-chih or Yu-mei.

If Yu-yi had objected openly, and told the villagers he disapproved of arranged marriages, the problem could easily have been settled. But he did not, for fear that would be too much for his mother, and would mortally offend his uncle and aunt. Instead he decided to sulk at home, till his mother changed her mind. She had no intention of doing this, however. Since his uncle left she had filled both roles—scolding and coaxing. She scolded and coaxed in turn, not giving him a moment's peace.

Muddlehead was not entirely in favour of this marriage, for he knew Mistress Sly had brought Hsiao-chun up to be more of a terror even than Spitfire. He held his tongue, however, out of consideration for his wife and sister-in-law.

This sulking had been going on for five days now, and seemed likely to continue.

When Muddlehead had called Yu-yi several times, but the boy had neither answered nor come out, he opened his own door. Then Yu-yi, hearing him and afraid he might stumble in the dark, went to open the gate after all.

Muddlehead called Skinflint to his room to ask what had happened.

"Looks bad!" Skinflint told him. "Man-hsi and Huang Ta-nien are both joining the co-op, and Yuan Ting-wei hasn't said he won't—he's just waiting to see how things shape. Seems we're the only ones in our team who are definitely against joining."

Muddlehead was disturbed to know they had lost two such good workers as Man-hsi and Huang Ta-nien, but could think of no remedy. After a pause he inquired about the canal.

"That's even worse!" said Skinflint. "When Hilt Field was mentioned, everyone crowded round to jolly me along, and insisted that I talk ma round! In fact, Man-hsi said: 'If you can talk aunty round, I'm willing to give you my three *mou* by the well in exchange. Your three *mou* in Hilt Field produce six bushels nine pecks a year to nine bushels on mine, and my land is just next to yours. How about it? That's the only piece of good land I have, but I don't mind being generous—once I'm in the co-op all the co-op's good land will be mine!'"

"Which of the village officers attended your meeting?"

"Only Wei Chan-kuei, secretary of the Youth League."

"What did he say to Man-hsi's proposal?"

"We can discuss that later."

"You can't always depend on Moody Man-hsi! If he really lets us have those three *mou*, that would suit us very well. When the water-wheel was bought, he and Huang Ta-nien only paid one bushel of rice towards it; so when they join the co-op they can't take the wheel with them. We'll give them a bushel of rice and buy it from them. Then both the land and the wheel will be ours. But how do we know that Man-hsi will stick to his word?"

"He seemed to mean what he said," declared Skinflint. "Someone said in fun: 'Don't expect to get your land back if you leave the co-op.' He said: 'I wouldn't join if I meant to back out. I've just made up my mind to take the socialist road—why should I think of backing out?' You've got to remember this about Man-hsi: he has cheek, but he's also stubborn, and doesn't mind taking a chance."

Muddlehead felt there was much in this.

"This exchange of land won't hurt us," he remarked, "but farming it is the problem!" He reflected for a moment before he went on. "What about this! We won't let Yu-yi go on teaching, but make him farm for a year, at the end of which time he should be a useful hand!" He glanced at Always Right, to make sure she was asleep, then whispered: "I don't think we should force Yu-yi to marry Hsiao-chun. Since he's interested in Yu-mei, let him have her. She's another good hand on a farm!"

"No," said Skinflint, after thinking this over. "She's used to the co-op, and would never agree to till our land. Not only that, if the worst came to the worst, she might drag Yu-yi off with her."

"That's right. I did think of that, but this shortage of farm hands put it quite out of my head. So it looks as if we should marry Yu-yi to Hsiao-chun after all. I find Hsiao-chun a bit crotchety, but that's all to the good—she'll be able to keep him in order."

"But Hsiao-chun split away from Chin-sheng's family, and Chu-ying has set her an example of that here. How can we be sure she won't do the same again?"

"Don't worry! Your ma is her aunt. She can handle her. I haven't seen my way clearly the last few days, so I haven't been helping your ma to talk Yu-yi round; but we mustn't let things slide any longer. Tomorrow you go to the supply and marketing co-op, and buy that material that your ma and aunt have agreed on. When the word gets around, Ling-chih and Yu-mei will put him out of their heads, and Yu-yi will know that I've made up my mind, and give up hankering after them."

"Just suppose Yu-yi refuses, how can we return those things to the co-op?"

"He won't refuse!" replied Muddlehead after some thought. "When Yu-yi finds something not quite to his liking, he may sulk for a bit. But if we old folk ignore him, in a couple of days he comes round!"

The next day, accordingly, Skinflint went to the supply and marketing co-op to buy a few lengths of dress material, some hair-pins, shoe-uppers, handkerchiefs, socks and so forth. The moment Yu-yi saw these, he realized his father had sanctioned his mother's scheme, for his old man held the purse-strings. He must take quick action, or it would be too late.

"Dad!" he pleaded. "Tell brother to take those back! I shall never agree to this marriage. Let ma scold me, if she doesn't know the new ways. Why should you back her up?"

"Now then, Yu-yi, you must make the best of things! You know your ma's temper, don't you? If she can't have her way, she'll start rolling on the ground. She's given her sister her word, and she can't go back on it. If you won't obey, and she falls ill of rage, the whole household will be upset. And Hsiao-chun isn't stupid either. With those pretty eyebrows and eyes—and your own cousin into the bargain—she's not a bad match, eh, lad? Dad didn't want to force you, but think of your mother's temper—you mustn't cross her. If you won't do as she says, and trouble comes of it, we'll both of us be to blame. Make the best of it now, lad! You have to look at the question from all sides."

Yu-yi said nothing at the time, but went back to his dark, poky room. If he swore to die rather than give in, there would be a tremendous scene. Yet if he let them have their way, he would lose the girl he loved.

"I never believed in fate," he thought. "But surely this is fate!"

He started sobbing, and his mother hurried in.

"There, son! Don't take on! This is a happy business—why are you crying?"

"I'm crying over my fate!"

"This isn't a bad fate at all!"

"Fate! Fate!" He burst into hysterical laughter.

Seeing him laughing and crying at the same time, Always Right thought he was possessed.

When anyone in the Ma family had a slight headache or fever, they thought he was possessed by evil spirits — how much more so, then, when Yu-yi was sobbing and laughing so wildly! The rule on such occasions was first to burn incense to the kitchen god and the ancestors, then to wave three sheets of yellow paper over the patient three times, and burn them outside the gate. They also hung a strip of red cloth on the gate to keep all strangers out till the illness was cured.

This was what Always Right did now for Yu-yi.

So from that day on no outsiders could enter.

## 27. *Ling-chih Makes Up Her Mind*

After the rally to expand the co-op, those who wanted to join began to sign on, and Ling-chih, when she had no work in the fields, often went to Flagstaff Compound to help register the new members' land, livestock, implements, and whatever else they were turning over. In about a week all who wanted to had signed on, except for a few who were still hesitating. The rest made up their minds to stay outside.

On the evening of the eighteenth, Ling-chih had nearly finished helping the co-op officers to list all the new members' property, when Yu-sheng came in.

"Who are you looking for, Yu-sheng?" Chang Lo-yi asked.

"No one! I just came to see if you had finished."

Ling-chih knew he liked working in this room when he was on duty.

"So it's your watch again!" she said. "Come on in. We'll be through in no time."

Saying this, she cleared away her work, and Yu-sheng brought his things over from the west room.

As Ling-chih left with the rest, he called to her.

"Ling-chih! Ling-chih! Have you time to help me with another problem?"

Since borrowing Ling-chih's geometry set, Yu-sheng had often consulted her on his calculations, and she had discovered what a good student he was — very quick in the uptake. So she was glad to help, and during the last few days had taught him a good deal of simple arithmetic. He now produced another diagram which looked like a balance, except that the two ends of the lever were of different lengths and attached to it were a wheel, some strings and pulleys. He showed her the measurements for each end of the lever.

"Judging by these figures," he asked, "how heavy a weight could you lift?"

She realized he was trying to improvise a simple crane.

"What do you want to lift?" she asked.

"Earth — when we start digging the canal."

Ling-chih explained to him the relationship between the load, point of application of force and fulcrum, then started working out the figure for him.

"I get it!" said Yu-sheng. "Let me work it out. Sorry! I've been putting you to too much trouble."

"That's nothing!" said Ling-chih, and left.

At home Ling-chih found her parents sitting in their outer room, peeling the sheaths of corn cobs. She joined them at this job — they left one spathe on each cob, then tied seven or eight together to hang up to dry. She was very pleased with her father these last few days. After sending the mule-driver away, to save fodder he had handed the mules over to the co-op in advance, to feed and use. He had also joined the co-op on the evening of the tenth, and made over all that was left of his retail business at cost price to the supply and marketing co-op. Since then there had been no more quarrelling with Wang Hsiao-chu, no more trading, no more rushing right and left to collect payment, no more working out of accounts in the middle of the night. . . . In brief, all that Ling-chih had frowned on had disappeared. She had not the courage to say: "Now you're something like a father!" But when she saw Fan she smiled contentedly, to express her warm approval.

The co-op had decided how to distribute the harvest, the new members had registered, and her father had turned over a new leaf. So Ling-chih had a breathing-space this evening to think of her personal problems.

After Skinflint went to the supply and marketing co-op to buy gifts for Hsiao-chun and spread the news of Yu-yi's engagement, Ling-chih's reaction was one of great indignation. Yu-yi might not agree at once, of course, but she had not heard him openly contradict the announcement. In fact he had not come out, so far as she knew, since that day when she went to ask him for his self-criticism and Always Right broke in on them. Other members of the Youth League said he had never handed in that criticism, and each time they summoned him to a meeting his mother told them he was ill and could not see them. The last week there had been more mummary, and now a red cloth was hanging on their gate and not a soul could go in! From what Ling-chih knew of Yu-yi, he was unlikely to agree at once, but would knuckle under finally to Always Right. She had been tempted to rush into their house to bolster up his resistance, but in the first place she was busy, in the second she dreaded that sneer on Always Right's face, and in the third she had little hope of successfully propping up such a weakling as Yu-yi. Whether he agreed or not, his engagement to Hsiao-chun was now the talk of the village.

"Have you no guts at all?" she silently asked him. "Why don't you come forward and speak up?"



But past experience proved that this was exactly the sort of boy Yu-yi was. All she could do was resign herself to this fact.

"A Youth League member!" she thought. "Guided by the League! But rather than upset his mother, he won't bear fair witness for another Youth League member. The League orders him to make a self-criticism, but instead — again for fear of upsetting his mother — he's staying away from the League. As a member of the Youth League committee, what should I say to him? Oh, dear! How could I fall for a boy like that?"

Fortunately she had at least had the foresight not to come to any understanding with him, which freed her of any sense of obligation. Still the question was — where could she find a better man? She noticed now that one of the cobs in her hand had grains of two different colours, yellow and black, and was reminded of Yu-yi — so well-grown yet with such a blemish. Forgetting to work, she started playing with the cob.

"Go to bed, Ling-chih!" Her mother thought she was tired. "It's time for us all to sleep."

As Mrs. Fan stopped, Fan stood up and yawned, and Ling-chih went back to her room, still holding that cob of maize.

She lit a lamp and sat down by the table, fingering the cob and picking off some of the grains as she reflected. If she gave up Yu-yi, there was no one else worth considering in Sanliwan. She thought fleetingly of Yu-sheng, but turned him down at once.

"He's straight, dependable, unselfish, intelligent, competent, and handsome! But he's had no education."

She searched her memory for other boys, but kept coming back to Yu-sheng. Though she had lent him a hand several times since the night of the first when she helped him with the roller, they had never been together for more than half an hour. Yet each occasion stood out vividly in her mind. Not one detail had she forgotten.

"Does this mean I'm in love with Yu-sheng?" she wondered.

Her heart did not deny it.

"So quickly? All the time I've been with Yu-yi didn't count for so much as these few hours!"

She started comparing the two of them, and Yu-sheng beat Yu-yi in every respect. Yu-sheng gave all his thought to building socialism, Yu-yi to obeying his feudal-minded mother.

"I must start considering Yu-sheng!" she decided.

But his lack of schooling set her thinking again of Yu-yi, and then of herself, till she realized she had all along held a wrong view of "education."

"Someone with education should do better work than someone without," she told herself. "But Yu-sheng has done a lot of things nobody else could do, and what has Yu-yi, for all his schooling, done? What have I done, for that matter? I've merely been a few years at junior middle school, and the little I learnt there is only good for playing about with.

As soon as I teach Yu-sheng anything, he can use it straight away on worthwhile jobs. That shows which of us is the better. If he asks me to teach him, in less than three years he'll have mastered all I know. I mustn't go on underestimating him. How much learning do I have anyway? And even if I were a university graduate, but couldn't put my knowledge to proper use, I'd be far below Yu-sheng!"

So at last she overcame her intellectual snobbery, and seriously considered dropping Yu-yi for Yu-sheng. But while under no obligation to Yu-yi, she had known him so long that she had a soft place in her heart for him. She picked up some of the maize scattered on the table, and decided the yellow grain stood for Yu-sheng, the black for Yu-yi. She would close her eyes and pick one. The first she picked was black. She must try again. The second was black as well. She must have a third try. But this time, in the act of reaching out, she pulled up abruptly.

"What's the idea?" she scolded herself. "Making such an important choice so lightly. If you really wanted Yu-yi, you'd have counted the first two times. Go ahead and fix on Yu-sheng! Don't be a shilly-shallier!"

This choice made, she went to bed and, to confirm her judgement, curled up under the quilt she compared the two boys' families. Yu-sheng had an able father and kindly mother, an elder brother who was a Party member, and a hard-working, good-tempered sister-in-law; whereas Yu-yi's family consisted of Muddlehead, Always Right, Skinflint and Spitfire. In South Cave where Yu-sheng lived, you saw nothing but tools, models and materials, including the planing bench on which she had sat, and the saw against which she had bumped her head. Yu-yi's poky south-east room, with its boarded-up windows, was full of bins, vats, cases and crates. Through Yu-sheng's yard passed Party members, Youth League members, and officers of the village administration or people's organizations; and they spent their time discussing plans for the village and the co-op, or attending meetings and carrying out experiments. But the most frequent callers at Yu-yi's house were his aunt, Mistress Sly, and his uncle, the broker. His family bolted the door, kept a brown dog, hung up red cloth, stood in the way of progress, was greedy for petty gain, bullied the daughters-in-law and locked its sons up. . . .

"Enough!" she thought. "It all shows how right I am to choose Yu-sheng instead of Yu-yi!"

Happiness often interferes with sleep, and Ling-chih woke again before it was light. She lay there going over in her mind all her resolutions of the previous evening, and decided she had been absolutely right. She dressed and lit the lamp. Yu-sheng would still be at the desk in the east room at Flagstaff Compound, sketching some diagram, and she longed to have a good talk with him, but felt this would seem too sudden.

"How can I settle on a man I've really known barely three weeks?" she asked herself.

"Why not?" she answered. "There's no rule that you can't fall in love till after a certain time. Besides, Yu-sheng's from the same village and a member of the same branch of the Youth League. We've known about each other for years — much longer than three weeks."

She summoned up all her courage and set out to find him.

Once more she went past the guard to Flagstaff Compound, where Yu-sheng challenged her as before, and she answered and walked in as on a previous occasion.

Her guess had been roughly correct. Yu-sheng was sitting in the same place, not drawing but making a clay model. A knife, wooden file, mallet, chisel, wire, hemp, nails and hoop-iron lay on the desk, as well as the nearly finished model. He had put the watch on the window-ledge for safety, and Ling-chih saw that it was exactly twenty past four again.

Yu-sheng assumed she had come to find out the time.

"Don't go yet! I want your advice on this." He pointed at his model. "Everything else is all right, but once you load it with earth, it doesn't turn easily."

He dismantled it, and they tried to reduce the friction on the wheel, then set it up again. But though improved, it was still not good enough. Suddenly he had an idea.

"We don't need a wheel!" he cried. "If I fix a square frame on the upright bar, and fasten the lever to that with a strong rope, it can turn a semi-circle easily! There won't be any friction. There's no need even to try it out. It's all right!"

Ling-chih saw by the watch on the window-ledge that it was already after five.

"If I don't hurry," she thought, "the militiamen will be going off duty and coming here!"

She helped him clear the table, then sat down opposite him, looking at his triumphant face.

"I've something to ask you," she said. "What's your opinion of me?"

"Why ask me that?" wondered Yu-sheng. "Member of the Youth League committee, junior middle school graduate, co-op accountant: you're intelligent, able and pretty — what fault could anyone find with you? But why do you want to know my opinion? What's special about me?"

He was too bewildered to answer.

"Why don't you say something?" pressed Ling-chih.

"I think you're pretty good all round!"

Vague as this answer was, Ling-chih saw the admiration in his eyes.

"Then I've something else to ask you!" she blurted out. "Could you ever love me?"

"Are you joking?"

"No! Of course not!"

"I never dared think of such a thing."

"Why not?"

"Because you've been to middle school."

"Oh that!" she said to herself. "If it hadn't been for that I'd have thought of you long ago!"

She smiled at this notion, and suddenly burst out laughing.

"Well, you didn't think of it before," she rejoined, giggling. "Suppose you think it over now?"

"You're my teacher! If you don't despise me for having no book-learning, there's nothing for me to think over!"

He held out both hands, and Ling-chih took them. Gazing into each other's eyes, they felt things had come to a head rather suddenly.

## 28. Yu-yi's Revolt

When day broke and Yu-sheng's watch was over, he and Ling-chih went to the back courtyard to ask Chang Hsin to act as their witness, and agreed to go the following afternoon — which was a holiday — to the district office to put their names down to be married. At breakfast they told their families. And the households in the village who heard the news early helped to spread word of their engagement.

The co-op was picking maize that day, and Ling-chih divided her time between turning the stalks to sun them, and recording the number of loads brought in. Neither of these jobs took long. In fact together they only amounted to five work-points. So she had time to wonder how to break the news to Yu-yi. His father's mutual-aid team was picking maize for Huang Ta-nien, and since her own father and Yu-mei both knew of her engagement, there was almost sure to be talk of it in the fields, and that meant that by noon Yu-yi would have heard. Unless she got in first, it was just possible he might pass some cutting remarks in the first flush of his resentment, and she would have to put up with that or go and reason with him — both unpleasant prospects.

While wondering what to do, she remembered that in the county town, when any teachers or office workers got engaged, they treated their friends to sweets. She and Yu-yi had eaten other people's. That was it! Before noon she would buy some sweets at the supply and marketing co-op, and go as a friend to tell Yu-yi of her engagement to Yu-sheng. Whatever method she used, of course, Yu-yi would not be too happy; but he would be less upset if she told him the news herself than if she left him to hear it from someone else.

It was nearly time for the midday meal when she asked old Chang Lo-yi, who was forking hay by the threshing-floor, for permission to leave a little early, and he agreed to jot down the number of the last loads brought in as the men knocked off. She bought some sweets, and hurried to Yu-yi's house.



The red strip of cloth was still hanging over the gate, and the big brown dog was lying panting in the gateway. In the bright noonday sun all was clear even at a distance, and after one bark the dog recognized Ling-chih and lay down again. She stepped over it, crossed the porch, and slipped into the south-east room.

Yu-yi could hardly believe his eyes when he saw her.

"How did they come to let you in?" he whispered.

"I came in myself!"

"I've such a lot to say to you! My uncle. . . ."

"Let's not talk about that. I know. Your uncle arranged a marriage between you and Hsiao-chun, and you've already sent betrothal presents. Isn't that it?"

"Who told you?"

"The whole village knows."

"But I haven't agreed to it."

"I haven't heard that you refused."

"I've protested every single day!"

"First I heard of it."

"Of course. Because I haven't been out."

"Why don't you go out?"

"They won't let me!"

"Then of course they won't let you refuse either!"

This exchange was cut short by Always Right's voice in the yard.

"Who's that come in? Outsiders have got to keep out! This is too much!"

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Ling-chih. "Your mother's coming! I must tell you quickly what I came for. I'm engaged to Yu-sheng, and I came to bring you some sweets!" She took a package from her pocket, and put it on the table.

Yu-yi felt as if a bomb had hit him and, while he was still speechless, Always Right lifted the curtain and came in.

"Ling-chih!" she scolded. "How could you creep in without a word? We can't have outsiders coming in! Didn't you see the red cloth over the gate?"

"For once you've come at the right time!" thought Ling-chih. "I've said all I came to say."

"I'm sorry, aunt," she answered. "I didn't know what that red cloth was for."

"Red cloth means no outsiders are to come in! Yu-yi is ill."

"I'll go then. Goodbye, Yu-yi. I'll come again when you're better."

She turned and left.

Yu-yi wanted to rush after her, whatever his mother might say, but then he thought: "I'm just one of the people invited to eat her sweets—what use is it chasing her?"



*Buffalo Boy in the Autumn Forest* (96.3 cm. × 53 cm.)  
Painting by an anonymous artist in the Sung dynasty

He threw himself on the bed and sobbed bitterly. And Always Right, who knew nothing of what had happened, was sure Ling-chih had brought evil spirits in with her.

Always Right comforted Yu-yi as best she could, until presently he took a grip on himself, stopped blubbering, and sat up. Ling-chih had said: "Of course they won't let you refuse!" And judging by the last few days, she was right.

"What can I do?" he wondered. "Ling-chih has given me up, and if Yu-mei has picked herself someone too during this time, I may really find myself landed with that little shrew Hsiao-chun. Then life won't be worth living."

Hating his parents for announcing this marriage without his consent, he scowled at Always Right, and from the wild look in his eye she thought he had lost his senses.

"What do you want, Yu-yi?" She jumped up in fright.

"I want to go out!" Yu-yi sprang up too.

"No, no!"

She reached out to grab him, but he leapt to one side. Then she rushed to the door, and held out both arms to stop him. From the top of the cases he snatched a crate half full of tobacco and rammed it at her, and this, being nearly as wide as the door, kept her from getting at him. By pushing hard, indeed, he could have sent her sprawling into the yard. But of course he was not really mad. He just forced her out step by step. Once in the yard, she knew she could not stop him.

"Here, dad! Quick!" she screamed. "Yu-yi's gone off his head!"

Muddlehead hurried out too. And Yu-yi, afraid they would catch him, whirled round and round with the crate in his arms towards the gate, terrifying the dog, which hastily slunk away.

Still whirling the crate, Yu-yi reached the lane, with his father and mother at his heels. Folk were flocking home to eat now, and all the passers-by stood still to watch, while the women and children left at home ran out when they heard the noise. Very soon the lane was blocked. Some of them wanted to catch hold of Yu-yi and reason with him, but he blinded them by scattering tobacco in their faces. And when Muddlehead suddenly grabbed the crate with both hands, Yu-yi let go of it, leaving his father to hold it, and pushed his way into the crowd.

"Stop him!" screamed Always Right. "He's off his head!"

Some men laid hold of Yu-yi.

"Don't worry about me!" he said. "I'm no madder than you are! They locked me up because I wouldn't agree to this marriage they've arranged. I'd like you all to know I'm not going to be forced into it. I'll trouble you to tell Hsiao-chun, if you see her, she must look for a husband elsewhere!"

Since he was talking sense, they let him go, and he squeezed his way past.



"Don't let him get away!" screamed his mother, in hot pursuit.

"Go on home, granny!" the neighbours advised her. "You can't lock up a strapping young fellow like that!"

Muddlehead, less sure of himself than Always Right, stood there completely at sea, still clutching the crate.

"Yu-yi's revolted!" shouted Yuan Hsiao-tan.

Yu-yi did not know where to find Yu-mei, but having heard they were picking Huang Ta-nien's maize that day, he decided to have a look in Thirty *Mou* Field. He raced out of the village, and strained his eyes in that direction. During the last ten days the fields had changed almost out of recognition—all the grain had been reaped and most of the maize, while the wheat fields had been ploughed and harrowed, some of them sown; and as the leaves were falling there was little to obscure the view. With no eyes for anything else, he stared down the path to Huang Ta-nien's field, along which some men and women were walking towards the village. Looking past them, he discovered his team still busy loading crates, and there seemed to be a girl among them who might be Yu-mei. Pushing past the loaded peasants on their way to the village, he made for the fields.

"Better?" most of them asked him casually.

"Yes, thanks," was the brief reply he gave without stopping.

He was almost at Huang's plot when he bumped into his brother, Fan Teng-kao and Man-hsi, walking this way with loads slung over their shoulders. Skinflint pulled up in dismay at the sight of him.

"Go on home!" he shouted. "What are you doing here?"

"There's nothing wrong with me!" retorted Yu-yi. "You've just been making it up!"

"You're raving! Hurry on back!"

"Mind your own business! And keep your hands off me!"

When Huang Ta-nien, his wife and Yu-mei heard this squabble, they stopped their work and stood up to watch. Other peasants who were carrying crates found their way blocked.

"Get a move on!" they called impatiently.

Skinflint dared not really stop Yu-yi, for fear of losing face if he blurted out the truth before all these people. He simply called to Huang Ta-nien:

"Please see that Yu-yi comes back!"

Then he swung away with his load.

Now Skinflint, Fan and Man-hsi had gone, while Shilly-shally had not shown up at all because he had driven his donkey to Linhochan. That left only three people—Huang Ta-nien, his wife and Yu-mei. Taking Skinflint at his word, Huang put down his work and walked up to Yu-yi.

"You mustn't believe what my brother said," Yu-yi told him. "There's nothing the matter with me!" He went over to help load the crates, and explained at some length how his parents, Skinflint, the broker and Mis-

tress Sly had shut him up to try and break his will. They could tell by the way he talked that he was quite sane, and declared that Muddlehead had muddled things once more. The work was done now, and it was time to knock off.

"You two go on ahead," said Yu-yi to Huang. "I've something to say to Yu-mei."

They guessed what it was, and left the young people together.

Yu-yi fixed his eyes intently on Yu-mei.

"What is it?" she asked nervously. "I thought you said you were all right."

"I am! I just want to ask you a simple question. Will you marry me—yes or no?"

"Are you crazy? How can you settle a serious matter offhand like that?"

"Why not? If you won't have me, say so at once. Don't keep me dangling after you for nothing!"

Yu-mei realized then that he had heard of Ling-chih's engagement, and was still smarting from the news. But knowing that Yu-yi cared more for Ling-chih than for her, she had never seriously thought of him as a husband. Now Ling-chih was out of the way, she could consider him—though how could she answer then and there? Of course, Yu-yi was still angry with Ling-chih. That was what made him so unreasonable.

"I tell you what," she said. "You've popped the question. I promise to answer by a definite date, when I've had time to think it over."

"That won't do! You might just as well say no and be done with it! You've known me more than a couple of days, and I don't believe you've never thought of me that way. If you won't have me, say so, and I'll look elsewhere! I want you to tell the truth. Don't *you* fool me too!"

"Really!" thought Yu-mei. "You're taking it out on me for what Ling-chih did. Is it my fault if she turned you down? And it's not as if you thought all that of me before! If Ling-chih hadn't found someone else, you'd not have been in this hurry!"

"Man alive!" she said out loud. "You've put the words in my mouth. I've known you more than a couple of days, but did you ever think of me that way before? Tell the truth now! Don't try to fool me either!"

She had found Yu-yi's weak spot, and he dared not brazen it out. While he was in a more chastened mood, Yu-mei laid down certain conditions.

"You were right," she said. "I did sometimes consider you, but I never dared make up my mind."

"Why not?"

"Because there are some things I like about you, and some things I don't like."

"What do you like, and what don't you like?"



"You're my teacher in night school, yet you're tied to your mother's apron-strings. I like studying with you, but I wouldn't like to be under your mother's thumb—I'd become a Never Right. Then there's your sister-in-law, Spitfire. It was because of her that Chu-ying left you. Do you suppose I want to quarrel with her every day? But most important of all, I belong to the co-op, while your family hasn't joined, and you needn't think I'm going to leave the socialist road and take the capitalist road! For all these reasons, I can't rush blindly into this!"

Yu-yi felt doused with cold water. His face fell.

"Why not refuse and be done with it?" he mumbled.

"Oh, no!" protested Yu-mei. "My answer depends on how things go from now on!"

To herself she said: "A lad who has been away and studied the way you have, must have plenty of treasures in his magic gourd. I want to see you use them to change these things I don't like."

Having given Yu-yi this lecture and something to think over, she looked around elatedly. There were only the two of them left on the Upper Flats, but an elderly woman was heading that way—Always Right.

"Hurry up and go back!" said Yu-mei. "Your ma's looking for you."

Yu-yi glanced at Always Right, then turned to Yu-mei.

"Let's go together."

"But your ma. . . ."

"I'm not afraid of her now."

"You go first, all the same. I don't want to stir up any trouble."

So Yu-yi did as she said.

He walked along, thinking: "She doesn't want to be under ma's thumb, or to quarrel with Spitfire, or to leave the co-op. The only way out is to set up on our own. All right! When I get home, I'll see to it!"

Wondering how to raise this question, he reached his mother, who was querulously blaming Yu-mei for keeping him out. He brushed past her to run home, and naturally Always Right followed.

Instead of going to his own room, Yu-yi marched straight to the north wing to find his father, who was holding a council-of-war with Skinflint. They guessed Yu-yi had flared up like this because Ling-chih had told him of her engagement, and Skinflint described how he had gone to find Yu-mei.

"If he's so set against Hsiao-chun, let him have Yu-mei," said Muddlehead. "We don't want any more trouble."

At this point Yu-yi came back, followed by Always Right.

She wagged a finger at him.

"I've told you a thousand times, but you won't listen! You still chase after those young mothers of yours. . . ."

Muddlehead pushed her aside.

"Don't be so common!" he growled. "Can't you hold your tongue?" He turned to Yu-yi. "Yu-yi, do whatever you like, but stop carrying on like this!"

"Just promise me one thing, dad!"

"Anything you say."

"Give me that deed of settlement, and let me set up on my own!"

"A bad waiter picks the one kettle that hasn't boiled," thought Muddlehead bitterly. "Here I've done all I could just to stop you from breaking away, and you pop up with this! But what can I say? I just promised you your own way, and if I go back on my word now, there'll be another scene."

He decided to hedge until Yu-yi calmed down a little, for fear he might make another scene.

"It isn't all that important—don't get so worked up!" he said.

"Give me the deed then! When I've got that, I shan't be worked up!"

"Don't get so excited! If I had the deed here, I'd give it you straight away; but Fan Teng-kao took it and hasn't returned it yet. Have something to eat first. Then go to your room and lie down. When we've all had a nap we can talk this over again."

"All right!"

Yu-yi walked out.

"Don't keep nagging at him!" Muddlehead whispered to Always Right. "You only make him worse!"

"It's blown over this time," said Skinflint. "But what shall we do if he really demands his share?"

"We're in a tight spot. This is all your uncle's fault. If he hadn't got us to produce those faked deeds of settlement, we could have made out a separate list for Chu-ying and been in a stronger position today. But now we've claimed those deeds are genuine, there's nothing we can do about it. You must have a good talk with Yu-yi before he gets up. Tell him how angry I am. I say he has no sense of gratitude. He's putting a wife before his father and mother. Tell him if he really sets up on his own, I shall never speak to him again."

Yu-yi agreed, then suggested: "Let's go and eat."

They found the pan still covered, and the rice untouched.

"Hasn't Yu-yi taken his yet?" Always Right asked Spitfire.

Hearing that he had not, she hurried to his room, only to find it empty.

"Where are you, Yu-yi?" she started screaming. "Yu-yi! Yu-yi! Why haven't you eaten? Where are you?"

"Curse it!" said Muddlehead to Skinflint. "He must have gone to Fan to get that deed! Go there quickly and have a look."

Not waiting to eat, Skinflint hurried to Fan Teng-kao's house.

When Yu-yi asked Fan for the deed, he was told it was with Chang Yung-ching; and Chang, when he called on him, took him to the front east room of Flagstaff Compound. Chang unlocked the door of the vil-

lage office and then the drawer of his desk. He took out two deeds, looked them over, gave one to Yu-yi and put the other away.

"Where's the other?" asked Yu-yi.

"You take yours," replied Chang. "That one belongs to Yu-yu."

"What about Yu-fu's?"

"They've taken that away to study."

He locked the drawer again, and they were just going out as Skinflint came in, having taken the same route as Yu-yi to Fan's house, Chang's house, and Flagstaff Compound.

"What are you doing here?" he asked Yu-yi.

"Getting my deed!"

"Have you got it?"

"Yes!"

Skinflint walked out with them, baffled. In the courtyard they met a postman who, having given Chang the papers, circulars and letters for the village office and co-op, produced another letter.

"Where does Ma To-shou live?" he asked.

"From Hunan!" observed Chang, looking at the postmark. "This must be from Yu-fu."

Pointing at Skinflint, he told the postman: "Ma To-shou is his father. Just give the letter to him."

Chang went back to the office to look at the mail, while Skinflint and Yu-yi took the letter home.

The deed in his possession, Yu-yi helped himself to rice and went to his room to eat, while Skinflint went to the north room and reported his defeat. Muddlehead sent Always Right to plead with Yu-yi for the return of the deed, then told Skinflint to read him Yu-fu's letter.

Always Right coaxed and threatened Yu-yi, but he remained adamant. When she tried to search him he dashed into the yard, and as she was chasing him round in circles Skinflint lifted the curtain of the north room.

"Ma!" he shouted. "Never mind about catching him! Here's a letter from Yu-fu! More trouble!"

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### 30. Muddlehead Wins Renown

September the twentieth, the day after Ling-chih's engagement to Yu-sheng and Yu-yi's and Yuan Tien-cheng's revolt, was another rest-day. That morning the platform was rigged up again in Flagstaff Compound for a meeting.

After breakfast the villagers made their way one after another to Flagstaff Compound while the officers, as was their habit, held a preparatory meeting in the north room.

Ling-chih, who was responsible for getting the place ready, tackled it in a different spirit today. This system of rest-days was peculiar to the co-op, though others could join in if they felt inclined. Last time she had been here as a temporary substitute for Yu-mei, but now her father had joined the co-op and she was engaged to Yu-sheng—both families were in the co-op—so she really felt she belonged. And the others regarded her not simply as an accountant, but as co-op secretary.

Attached to the middle of the curtain behind the platform were a picture and a chart. The picture was Liang's second painting, which would come in useful when the canal was discussed. The chart, prepared by Ling-chih, showed the progress made during the last ten days in enlarging the co-op. So that people at a distance could see it clearly, she had only written a few lines in large characters, giving figures—past and present—for the number of households, area of land, and livestock.

While waiting for the others, the first arrivals started reading:

<i>Growth of Our Co-op</i>			
	<i>Original Figure</i>	<i>Increase</i>	<i>Total</i>
Households	50	71	121
Land	720 mou	1,215 mou	1,935 mou
Livestock	58	....	....

Soon nearly everyone had come.

"Why don't we start?" Ling-chih was asked.

She explained that Wei Chan-kuei was not yet back from the county town, where he had gone to fetch an important document. She asked whether all the band had arrived or not, and was told that one drummer only was missing. This was Wang Shen, otherwise known as No Good. She asked his son, Chieh-hsi, why he had not come.

"He's not too well today," replied Chieh-hsi.

"Not well!" someone snorted. "Backward is what you mean!"

"How can you say that?" asked Ling-chih. "He's put his name down for the co-op."

"That's just the trouble!" said someone else.

When Ling-chih passed on this information to the officers in the north room, Chin-sheng and Chang Yung-ching hurried out to find what the matter was. Apparently the fault lay with Chang Yung-ching.

Chang had been the village officer to take part in the meetings of the Sandy Creek mutual-aid team after the tenth, to discuss expanding the co-op. One evening old Wang remarked that he did not want to muck in with everyone else.

"It's Chairman Mao who's calling on us to get organized and take the socialist road!" retorted Chang. "If you don't respond to that call, you're taking Chiang Kai-shek's road!"

When the time came to register, old Wang signed on with the rest. But later he told his friends: "I've put down my name of my own free

will — you needn't think Chang Yung-ching set my thinking straight! If everyone in the co-op was like him, I'd sooner die than join. How can he lump me together with that old sod Chiang Kai-shek?"

"What made you let off your big guns again?" Chin-sheng reproached Chang. "Is old Wang the only one you let fly at, or were there others?"

"There weren't any others," volunteered a man from Sandy Creek. "The rest of us had already made our stand clear!"

"I didn't know he'd take it so to heart!" said Chang. "Since I've offended the old fellow, I'll go and fetch him in person."

"Stop!" said Chin-sheng, as he was leaving. "We've still got important business to discuss. I'll send someone else for you, and you can apologize when old Wang comes." He asked someone down in the yard: "Is my dad here yet?"

The Handy Man was sitting smoking in a group of old men.

"Here I am!" he called, standing up.

Chin-sheng asked him to fetch Wang Shen for Chang, and everyone else said he would be able to manage it.

As the Handy Man left, Chin-sheng and Chang were turning to go back inside when Yu-yi stood up.

"Is it too late now to join the co-op?" he asked.

"Of course not!" replied Chin-sheng. "Is your family joining?"

"No. Just me. I'm going to set up on my own."

Since Skinflint was present, Chin-sheng turned to him.

"How about it, Yu-yu?" he asked. "Have you agreed to this?"

"Well!" Skinflint glanced helplessly at Yu-yi. "If he insists! Doesn't look as if we can stop him!"

"I don't know the position in your family," continued Chin-sheng.

"But I can tell you the co-op's rule: anyone who likes to can join right up to the spring ploughing. The co-op keeps its door open."

Shilly-shally stood up.

"I'm signing on too," he announced. "I've got my thinking straight."

Chin-sheng agreed to accept him.

"Don't let him in!" shouted Man-hsi.

"You should welcome him," reproved Chin-sheng. "Why try to keep him out?"

"He sold his donkey yesterday."

"Of course he can't join then!" assented Chang Yung-ching.

"The co-op can get a loan from the bank to buy livestock for no more than it costs to price your donkey and pay you interest on it," said Chin-sheng. "But your selling it shows you don't trust the co-op. And it isn't good for the co-op to take in new members like that. Wait till you've really got your thinking straight before you apply."

"Even then we don't want him!" shouted someone else. "He must buy another donkey before he can join."

"He can pay in what he got for the donkey instead."

"I can do that," agreed Shilly-shally. "A million dollars, less tax — I haven't spent a cent!"

"A million?" exclaimed Fan Teng-kao. "With your eyes shut, you could have sold it for one and a half!"

"No, no, no!" protested Shilly-shally. "It really was a million. I've got the receipt in my pocket."

"Of course, you can always give a donkey away!" chaffed Man-hsi.

"Who did you sell it to?" asked Fan.

"I don't know who bought it. Yu-yu's uncle was middleman."

"That old horse-dealer must be celebrating now!"

"I tell you what," said Chin-sheng. "If you're really clear in your mind, make over that million dollars. We pay interest according to the amount you put in."

Shilly-shally stared at the sky and said nothing.

"What are you thinking about?" demanded Man-hsi. "Half a million dollars gone like firecrackers? If you join the co-op you get interest on half a million less. If you don't join, you can fork out an extra half million to buy another donkey like that."

"At least crackers sputter and bang!"

"I'd have given one million six hundred thousand for it!"

"Shilly-shally ought to try to get it back."

They were shouting together when Wei Chan-kuei arrived.

"Did you get it?" Chang Yung-ching asked him.

Wei answered that he had.

"Think over the question of joining the co-op, and we'll discuss it later," said Chin-sheng to Shilly-shally. "There's no hurry. It's a long time till the spring ploughing."

Then he went behind the curtain with Chang and Wei.

"Let's ask Yu-yu in," he proposed.

"All right," agreed Chang.

Chin-sheng called him in.

By now the villagers were tired of waiting, and some youngsters picked up the band's instruments and started playing. Wang Shen the drummer had not arrived yet, while Chang Yung-ching the trumpeter was busy with the other officers, and without these two chief players the rest did not keep good time. They tried out one substitute after another, but all were nearly equally bad.

While this racket was going on, Skinflint stepped out from behind the curtain, and got down from the platform. Instead of going back to his seat, he walked slowly towards the gate with lowered head.

"Why are you leaving?" they asked him.

"I've got to go home for something," was his reply.

Now Chin Hsiao-feng arrived, carrying a rolled-up red silk banner.

"Are they all in there?" she asked Ling-chih, pointing at the north room.

When Ling-chih nodded, she went straight in. The banner had only just been finished, and she spread it out for their inspection. The gong and drum kept missing the beat outside, and got on everyone's nerves.

"Not so bad!" said Chang Yung-ching. "That's Chieh-hsi drumming now. Of course he's nothing like as good as his father, but he's not bad all the same."

While he was still making this comment, there came a sudden change in the drumming.

"Wang Shen has come!" he cried in elation. "I must go and apologize." With this, he hurried out.

"Well, everything is ready now," said Chin-sheng. "Let's start the meeting."

The first item on the agenda was Chin-sheng's speech. After a brief report on the enlargement of the co-op, he outlined the draft plan of work for the period just before and after National Day. On behalf of the Party branch, he proposed shifting the rest-day on September the thirtieth to October the first — National Day. He also proposed that in the ten days before National Day villagers and co-op members should get in the harvest and finish the autumn ploughing, as well as complete the preparatory work on the canal. Between National Day and the beginning of the frost, they should dig the canal, estimate the yield of the new co-op members' land, set a price for the livestock and tools turned over, and draw up a detailed plan for the following year. He also described in detail some of the working methods thought out by the Party branch.

"This is the draft plan made by our Party branch," explained Chin-sheng. "We hope you'll discuss and improve on it in your small groups this evening."

His speech met with hearty applause. Old fellows who rarely came to meetings stuck up their thumbs and whispered to each other:

"Talk sense!"

"He knows a thing or two!"

The second item of business was the election of officers



for work on the canal. Chin-sheng read out a list of nominees for discussion.

"Our canal committee proposes to divide the canal into five parts," he said, and pointed them out on the picture. "Dragon's Neck and thereabouts, including Hilt Field, count as one section. From Thirty Mou Field to the village is another, and left and right of Sandy Creek a third. The foot of the hills in the Lower Flats will be split up into two parts, south and north. For short we'll call them Hilt Field section, Thirty Mou section, Creek section, First Hill section and Second Hill section. Hilt Field section is rather short, because we have to dig deeper there. And Second Hill section is short too, because we have to raise the canal bed there. There are two other special jobs: cutting through the rock at Dragon's Neck, and making a bridge at Sandy Creek. That's work for masons and carpenters, so we don't count it with the rest."

He proceeded to read out the nominations for the general and deputy heads, the administrative chief, accountant, and the group leaders and deputy leaders for the five sections and two other jobs. Chang Lo-yi was proposed as general head, with Yu-sheng as his deputy. Man-hsi was nominated for administrative chief, Yu-yi for accountant, the Handy Man for the leader of the masons, and Wang Shen for the carpenters. The villagers approved of this choice, though someone suggested that Chin-sheng should also help to direct the work. He explained, however, that he would be too busy in the co-op assessing yields and drawing up plans. After this, the voting took place.

While the ballot slips were being collected, Yu-yi came in with his father. Since Ma To-shou never attended meetings, all eyes turned to him, and the stewards stopped collecting votes to watch him walk towards the platform.

"Have you lost your way, Muddlehead?" one old man twitted him.

"Welcome!" cried Chin-sheng. "Find him a seat in front!"

The others made way, and a seat was offered him in the front row.

Before sitting down, Ma To-shou said to Chin-sheng:

"I'm slow to change, but now I've come round too. I'm joining the co-op as well!"

Before Chin-sheng could answer, everyone started clapping. The old man who had just made fun of Ma stood up and stared at the sky.

"Did the sun rise in the west today?" he demanded.

Another old fellow stood up.

"Don't joke about it!" he protested. "We ought to welcome them with all our hearts."

There was more applause at this.

"Now that Ma's joined the co-op," this speaker went on, "he's taking the same road as we are. I propose we stop calling him Muddlehead."

There were shouts of: "I second that!"

"A very good idea!" agreed Chin-sheng. "Let's all act on it."

"Well, this is worth my while!" thought Ma To-shou. "At last I've got rid of that label!"

The votes were counted and the results announced — all the nominees had been elected. Of course, there was more clapping.

"Last of all," said Chin-sheng, "I want to announce some good news. Yu-yi's second brother, Ma Yu-fu, has given his thirteen *mou* of land to the co-op! Including the three *mou* in Hilt Field!"

This was greeted by loud applause. Many people were quite amazed, and asked each other what this meant.

"It happened like this," continued Chin-sheng from the platform. "When Chu-ying took her share of the property, it was noticed that Hilt Field was down under Yu-fu's name. The co-op officers talked it over, and wrote Yu-fu a letter, which I'll read you."

He produced a sheaf of papers, and picked one out to read.

September the sixth, 1952

Dear Comrade Yu-fu:

Our co-op and the rest of the village mean to make a dike, which should run through your three *mou* in Hilt Field. Ten years ago, your family allotted that land to you, and though some people say that deed of settlement is false, we do not think so. We are enclosing it for you to see. We want to ask you to let us use that land. We shall give you another good plot in exchange, or buy it from you, or rent it — whichever you prefer. Please let us know which of these methods you choose. For the sake of the work in our village, we are sure you will agree!

All best wishes!

Sanliwan Agricultural Producers'  
Co-operative

"Yesterday afternoon," went on Chin-sheng, "we received Yu-fu's reply. I'll read that too."

September the thirteenth

Dear Co-operative Chairman and Deputy Chairmen:

Please tell all your co-op members and all the village that I am very pleased to hear you are working collectively now, and taking the socialist road. I am in charge at present of the mutual-aid and co-operative office under the county committee, so my whole time goes to considering problems like yours. I hope you will pass on your valuable experience to us. The deed is in my uncle's handwriting, and therefore cannot be a forgery. I am working in a government

office for the revolution and, since I mean to devote my whole life to this work, I shall never come back to Sanliwan to farm. I am accordingly giving all my land to our village co-op, and sending you back the deed so that you can take it to the county to get the title-deeds. As for the rooms listed as my property, I make those over to my brothers, who are rather short of space. I have written to this effect to my father, and hope you will get in touch with him. Please let me have an answer.

With best wishes,

Ma Yu-fu

They clapped this letter too. Then Chin-sheng showed them another paper.

"This is the title-deed Wei Chan-kuei brought back from the county!" he said.

At that there was further applause.

The letter given Skinflint the morning before had contained this news, and the emergency meeting had been to discuss this matter.

During the meeting Chin-sheng had proposed getting in touch with the Ma family at once, but all the others were in favour of fetching the title-deed first, to avoid possible complications. And since no question of principle was involved, Chin-sheng did not object.

After receiving the letter, Ma To-shou and Yu-yu conferred for the whole afternoon, and decided to let Always Right refuse when the co-op sent a man over. But Yu-yu was not sent for until just before the meeting, by which time Wei Chan-kuei had brought the title-deed back. Then the officers explained the situation, told him they were presenting his family with a banner, and asked him to go home and persuade his father to come to the meeting.

When Ma To-shou knew of this, he could think of no way out.

"Don't take the banner!" urged Always Right. "When they bring it, tear it up!"

"That wouldn't do," said her husband. "We'd lose both the land and the credit."

He made Skinflint do another sum. If they joined the co-op, the old couple's land and Yu-yu's share would come to twenty-nine *mou*, which, reckoning on an average two bushels a *mou*, should bring them twenty-two bushels four pecks in land shares. He and Yu-yu counted as one and a half workers, and if they put in three hundred work-days, they could earn forty-five bushels—sixty-seven bushels four pecks altogether. If they stayed out of the co-op, they would only get fifty-eight bushels of grain—nine bushels four pecks less. And if, by joining the co-op, they could prevent Yu-yi from setting up on his own, they would get even more grain.

"If it's credit we want, let's go the whole hog!" said Ma. "We'll join the co-op!"



Having made his choice, he went to the meeting.

After displaying the title-deed, Chin-sheng went on: "When a government worker makes a gift of his land like this, it does great credit to his family. And now his father is joining the co-op—that does him even greater credit. We had people working all last night to make a flag of honour. Shall we take it with drums and gongs to the Ma house now?"

All clapped to express approval. Wang Shen picked up his drumsticks again, and Chang Yung-ching jumped down from the platform to fetch his trumpet, while the other musicians took their own instruments, and the music started up. With Chin Hsiao-feng carrying the red silk banner in front, they walked from Flagstaff Compound to Ma's house, where the big brown dog, overwhelmed by the band, slunk under the bed in the north room.

The Ma family hastened to buy wine from the supply and marketing co-op, and prepared dishes to entertain these guests.

Both sides were on their best behaviour.

"Aunty!" said Chang Yung-ching to Mrs. Ma. "I offended you before. Today I've come, blowing this trumpet, to show I'm sorry. You laid a charge against me at the county people's court, and they've asked our grievance committee to deal with the case. If the village can't handle it, they'll look into it themselves. I'd like to talk it over with you, aunty, in a day or two."

"That's past and done with!" cried Mrs. Ma. "What is there left to talk over?"

\* \* \*

### 34. *The Eve of National Day*

That evening there were three groups of officers in Flagstaff Compound—some at a meeting, some in their offices. September the thirtieth was the day for the co-op to wind up its annual accounts, and a good many figures were needed for the meeting on October the first. This year there was also the canal project, work on which was to start on October the second, and another report would have to be given on the preparations for that. This made everyone extra busy that evening.

In the conference room in the north wing, the Party committee, co-op chairman and deputy chairmen were considering the new co-op constitution drafted by Chin-sheng, and the list of nominees for officers. In the east room, Ling-chih and Li Shih-chieh were adding up the work-points for the year and calculating the final payment still due to each household, beside drawing up a budget for the coming year. The village office in the north wing had been left for Yu-sheng and Yu-yi to check up on the preparatory work on the canal, but so far only Yu-yi had come. This was Chang Lo-yi's job as head of the project, but since he had to

attend the meeting in the outer room in his capacity as co-op chairman, he had entrusted the work to Yu-sheng, his deputy. Yu-yi was here as treasurer and secretary of the canal project. Yu-sheng was late because he was in the storeroom with the administrative chief, Man-hsi, going through the tools and materials needed for the work.

While waiting for Yu-sheng, Yu-yi was copying out lists of workers on each section of the canal to be posted up at the meeting, when he heard someone in the east room registering a new household. Since some co-op members had split off from their families, left home, or married, the original households had changed; and from October onwards, work-points, shares and land shares, as well as all other financial transactions in the co-op, would be reckoned according to the new households. This reminded him of his own position. As a new member, though he knew something about the co-op rules for the coming year, he had paid less attention to them than the older members. He had signed on before setting up on his own and, though during the last few days the sharing out of his family property had been completed, he had been too busy as treasurer and secretary for the canal to think of registering. But here was a reminder. And he took advantage of Yu-sheng's absence to hurry to the east room.

Ling-chih, busily winding up the accounts, looked up when he went in and called out a friendly greeting, but went straight on writing; and Yu-yi after two days in his new job could appreciate what it was to work against time. Li Shih-chieh was in charge of registration. When the fellow before him had finished, Yu-yi explained his business, and Li asked what his family's new grouping was.

"My elder brother and his wife are one household. My father, mother, Yu-mei and I are another."

This was news to Li and Ling-chih, for Ma To-shou and Mrs. Ma had always been much closer to Yu-yu. Why were they going to live with Yu-yi? And why register now before he had married Yu-mei? Ling-chih glanced up, then bent over her books again.

"You haven't married Yu-mei yet, have you?" asked Li.

"We're getting married straight away—on the third, the Mid-Autumn Festival!"

He eyed Ling-chih, as if to say: You've no call to look down on me. I'm getting married before you!

Ling-chih smiled, but not in astonishment.

Ma To-shou's ideas had recently undergone a certain change too. Before Chu-ying left, Yu-fu gave his land to the co-op, and Yu-yi asked to set up on his own, the old man's one thought had been to put by enough grain to buy two mules as Fan Teng-kao had done, so that Yu-yu could start a small business. Then when his two other sons came home, the family would be better off than any other household in the village, both for property and labour. But events since Chu-ying's bid for free-

dom had taught him an important lesson, making it quite clear that three of his four sons would never take orders from him again. Thus his earlier hopes were dashed. When the villagers left on the twentieth after bringing him the banner, he had a talk with his wife.

"I tell you what. All we did was for our boys, but instead of being grateful they're doing all they can to defy us — why go to any more trouble? As I see it, we may as well stop worrying and lead a quiet life."

"But which of our boys shall we live with?"

When they signed on for the co-op, Ma had put himself down with Yu-yu, but now—with an eye to the future—he had changed his mind. He made a show, though, of consulting his wife.

"Which would you like to live with?"

"Yu-yu's a good lad, but I find his wife a bit difficult."

"The wife doesn't matter, but Yu-yu is rather tight-fisted. He'll be glad to have us now, while we can still work; but when we're older and can't fend for ourselves, it's cold comfort we'll have from him! How about throwing in our lot with Yu-yi?"

As a matter of fact, Yu-yi was Mrs. Ma's favourite, but she was angry with him because of his marriage.

"Now Yu-mei has hooked him!" she objected. "And she won't stand any crossing!"

"Why should you cross her? Yu-mei's a good, open-hearted girl, and a better hand at farming than our Yu-yi—she'll make a good manager. To my mind, we had better live with them. Of course, if you keep that label 'Always Right,' I dare say no one will want you!"

"Stop finding fault with me, can't you! Is your name Muddlehead so much better?"

"All right! All right! Don't fly off the handle! That was only my bit of fun. Seriously though, you know none of the young folk want us. A lot of persuasion will be needed to get them to take us. First make up your mind, and then I'll find a way."

Mrs. Ma thought it over. Two of her sons were away, and there were snags to both of those left at home.

"We've sixteen *mou* of land," she said. "Let's not tag on to either of them but shift for ourselves."

"No! I've seen too many cases like that. Most old folk who live on their own have a bad time when they can't work any more. If they're well off, their children are itching so badly to get their hands on the property that they can hardly wait for them to die. If they've nothing, and don't attach themselves to any of their sons while they can work, once they're past it nobody wants to be troubled with them. No, it's better to choose one family earlier on."

Having always admired her husband's shrewdness where his own welfare was concerned, Mrs. Ma fell in with his proposal.

"If you agree," said Ma, "we must make a plan. We can't ask Yu-yi outright. In the first place, he'd never agree for fear Yu-mei was against it. In the second, if I asked him myself that would put Yu-yu's back up. We'd better tackle this in a roundabout fashion by asking the authorities to handle it for us. You go and find Chin Hsiao-feng of the grievance committee tomorrow, and tell her that now we've joined the co-op we don't want Yu-yi to leave us, so we're asking her to make it up for us. Yu-yi's bound to refuse when she puts it up to him, but we'll ask her to our distribution of property. When the question of whom we're to live with comes up, I'll plump for Yu-yu while you choose Yu-yi—Yu-yu knows Yu-yi's your favourite, so that won't make any trouble. But in the end I'll pretend to give in to you. Then if Yu-yi and Yu-mei refuse, we'll have Chin Hsiao-feng to talk them round, and we won't have offended Yu-yu either."

His wife approved, and passed on this request to Chin Hsiao-feng at the meeting of the women's association on the evening of the twenty-first. And when Hsiao-feng talked it over with Yu-mei and Chin-sheng, they came to the same conclusion as Ma To-shou—for different reasons. This was why it did not take long to settle the question, and why Ma and his wife were in the same household as Yu-yi.

When Li Shih-chieh had registered Yu-yi's name, land and livestock, he asked:

"Why hasn't your brother come to register? Isn't he joining the co-op after all, now that your dad's with you?"

"He says he's still joining, but he's in a bit of a huff because my mother didn't want to live with them. Besides, he doesn't know the regulation that all co-op members must register by today. You'd better send him word."

"I'll make a note of his name for the time being, and keep a record of his work-points."

Yu-sheng and Man-hsi had now come back from looking through the tools for the canal.

"Here, Yu-yi!" shouted Yu-sheng, when he heard Yu-yi's voice. "Come on and get down to work!"

As Yu-yi left the east room, Man-hsi walked in.

"I've come to register too," he told Li Shih-chieh.

"I put you down long ago."

"I know. I want you to put Hsiao-chun's name down with mine."

"Which Hsiao-chun?"

"How many Hsiao-chuns are there in our village?"

"What is all this?"

"Hsiao-chun and I are getting married!"

"When?"

"On the Mid-Autumn Festival."

"Why hadn't I heard?"

"I told a few people, but it seems no one told you!"

Man-hsi's engagement to Hsiao-chun had been kept so quiet, and Ling-chih had been so busy these few days, that this was news to her too.

In the conference room, Chin-sheng was explaining the new constitution he had drafted for the co-op. When he announced that over sixty officers would be needed next year, the others were staggered.

"That's more than a platoon," remarked one.

"That means an officer from every other household."

"Isn't that overdoing it a bit?"

"That's how it struck me at first," replied Chin-sheng. "But we need that many people to handle all the work. Judging by the set-up in other big co-ops in our administrative area, and by conditions here, now that we've grown to this size we need a co-op committee of nine people to decide important questions, and a supervisory committee of five to prevent any jobbery. We need one chairman and three deputy chairmen, and a leader and deputy leader for our big work brigade, the three teams under it, divided according to locality, and the three groups in each team. Then we have our side lines—water conservancy, afforestation, market gardening, cattle and sheep farming—each of which needs a head and deputy head. Since each section has its own budget, it needs its own accountant. For general co-op business, we need both a chairman and a secretary. And now that the co-op has so many payments to make, we need someone in charge of finances, as well as a chief accountant, cashier and treasurer. To improve our working methods, we need a chief technician, with several technicians under him. For culture and education, we need a cultural officer, as well as several group leaders. When I say over sixty, I'm allowing for the fact that some people will hold more than one post. Otherwise we'd need even more. I think there's something to be said for this, though, because if most of our members have some special responsibility, large or small, it will help them to take an interest in co-op affairs, and be good training for them too."

"Just how many do we need?" asked Chang Lo-yi.

"I can't say on the spur of the moment, because some officers will be elected by the whole co-op, some by their small groups, and some appointed by the co-op committee. We won't know till the end how many of them hold more than one post."

He went on to explain certain points in the draft constitution, then asked the others to discuss and amend it.

After that, they discussed the list of candidates. Among those put down for their old posts were the co-op chairman Chang Lo-yi and the deputy chairmen Chin Hsiao-feng and Chin-sheng, the agronomist Ma Tung-fang, the forester Niu Wang-tzu, and the accountant Li Shih-chieh. Chang Lo-yi and Li Shih-chieh were also acting as brigade leader and chief accountant. Officers put up for new posts included Wei Chan-kuei to take charge of finances, the Handy Man for chief technician, Yu-sheng

to look after the water conservancy, Wang Hsing to be in charge of the market garden, and Chang Yung-ching for cultural officer. New nominees included Ling-chih for the chairman's secretary and assistant to the accountant, Wang Shen to look after the side lines, Man-hsi for the supervisory committee, and Yu-yi for deputy cultural officer. Nominees for the other posts included old as well as new members, but the group leaders and officers to be appointed by the committee were not on this list. After some discussion and a few minor revisions, the meeting passed these names.

Having discussed these two drafts and talked over other preparations for the National Day meeting, they broke up.

Chin-sheng and Chang Lo-yi stepped into the inner room.

"Well?" asked Chang. "Is there any question about starting work the day after tomorrow?"

"None," replied Yu-sheng. "The carpenters won't be here for a day or two, but the masons have already come. All the tools needed by the different sections are ready. We've gone over the names in each section with the section chiefs, and budgeted for each of them as well as for the project as a whole. You've drawn up the rules for the work-site and the rules for reckoning work-points; so if they're passed tomorrow, after the meeting the sections and groups can meet to elect leaders and give out the tools—then everything's set for the second."

Yu-yi was copying out the rules for reckoning work-points, while Yu-sheng was adding a few names to the different groups from a list of new members who had joined since the groups were formed. Chin-sheng and Chang Lo-yi looked through their account sheets and notices, then went to the east room.

The accounting had been finished there and Li Shih-chieh had gone home, leaving Ling-chih to add the chief figures from the ledgers to the report she had written. When Chin-sheng and Chang Lo-yi found all was well here too, they left with easy minds.

After filling in the figures in her report, Ling-chih came to the end of her work for the time being. Rather tired after these ten hectic days, she leant back in her chair and breathed deeply, closing her eyes to rest them for a little before going home. Then, somehow or other, she remembered how Yu-yi and Man-hsi had come to register, and that set her thinking of her own marriage. She had always liked the Mid-Autumn Festival. As a child, she used to eat her favourite sweets and play with her best-loved toys in the moonlight, while at middle school she would seek out her best friends on this festival to chat with them till midnight under the moon.

"How shall I spend the festival this year?" she wondered. "I'm not a child any more, and my schoolmates have scattered. My friends are getting married on the festival. I've found myself a husband too, but far from making ready for our wedding, we've both been so busy in

Flagstaff Compound since our engagement that we've hardly had time to talk to each other."

As her thoughts ran on like this, the door of the north room banged and Yu-sheng and Yu-yi came out. Hastily opening her eyes, she stood up and went to the door to call Yu-sheng to wait, leaving Yu-yi to go home alone.

Yu-sheng was in a relaxed mood too after finishing his work, so finding Ling-chih alone in the east room he was eager for a chat. They pulled out two chairs, and sat down side by side.

"Are you through with your work?" she asked first.

"Yes. What about you?"

"So am I."

"This gives us a breathing-space."

"How do you mean to spend the festival?"

"Once we start on the canal the day after tomorrow, we'll be up to our ears in work. I shan't have time to think of the festival."

"Neither shall I. On the second we shall begin to estimate the yield of the land brought in, and draw up a plan of production. But we can still celebrate in the evening, after work."

"Will you come to our house that evening?"

"I'd like to. But let me tell you something: Yu-yi and Man-hsi are both getting married that day!"

"I know. Yu-mei told us."

"Suppose we cash in on the festival too?"

"We've been too busy to get anything ready. Tomorrow there's a meeting, and work starts again the day after. How can we make it?"

"What is there to get ready? I don't see that we need anything—we're all right as we are."

"There isn't even time to clean out my room!"

Ling-chih remembered the bench, small saw and other things in his South Cave.

"Don't clean it out!" she said. "It's nice as it is."

"We've not even made new clothes."

"We'll just wear what we have. We're old friends—it's not as if we were meeting for the first time!"

Both started laughing. And after a little further discussion, Yu-sheng agreed.

"Should we register too as a new household?" asked Ling-chih.

"I hadn't thought of that."

"Neither had I, until the others came to register."

"I don't want to set up as a separate household—it's too troublesome. Who'd cook for us?"

"I hadn't thought of that either!"

Ling-chih reflected for a moment.

"What about this?" she said. "Let's go home to talk it over with our people, and not register as a separate household if we can help it. Your work-points can still be marked up to your family, and my work-points to mine; but we'll be together at night. If that won't do, the mess hall is opening the day after tomorrow, and after registering as a new household we can eat there."

"What about clothes?"

"Go to the tailor in Linhochon!"

"That's a very odd sort of household!"

"What if it is a little odd? It's not as if we were taking the capitalist road!"

Here their discussion ended. As the moon, nearly full, climbed over the western roof, steps sounded outside the gate and the platoon leader on duty came back from his rounds. Then Yu-sheng and Ling-chih left Flagstaff Compound, and walked home in the light of the moon which was gliding down the western sky.

*Translated by Gladys Yang  
Illustrations by Wu Ching-po*

## Two Short Stories by Yu Ta-fu

Yu Ta-fu was born in 1896 in Fuyang County, Chekiang Province. He went to Japan during his early years where he studied literature at the Imperial University in Tokyo. In 1921, he set up the Creation Society, together with the poet Kuo Mo-jo and literary critic Cheng Fang-wu, who were then also studying in Japan. Yu Ta-fu edited the books and journals published by the Society.

The Creation Society played an important role in the development of China's new literature. It advocated enthusiastic and dauntless romanticism based upon real life. In 1925, Kuo Mo-jo formally raised the slogan of revolutionary literature. He wrote in *Flood*, a fortnightly published by the Society, that what was demanded of revolutionary writers was "to point out the ideals of the proletariat and to present their sufferings." This slogan had a deep influence upon the new literary movement at that time. In 1926, in the first issue of the monthly *Creation*, Yu Ta-fu stated on behalf of the Society that the purpose of this journal was to lend their yet weak voice for the reformation of the irrational social conditions around them. During the period of the first revolutionary war (1925-1927), most of the writers belonging to the Creation Society took part in the revolutionary movement.

During the Sino-Japanese War, when the coastal areas of China were occupied by the Japanese, Yu Ta-fu took refuge in Singapore where he engaged in journalistic work among overseas Chinese. After the outbreak of the Pacific War, he went to Sumatra where the Japanese imperialists killed him in 1945, after the surrender.

Among his novels are *The Lost Sheep* and *Mirage*. His short stories were published under the titles of *Chicken Ribs*, *Cold Ashes*, *The Past and Wild Herbs*. He has also written feature stories, including *Nine Diaries*.

Yu Ta-fu's ideology as reflected in his works is mainly a sort of revolutionary romanticism, but heavily tinged with disillusionment so that, in the nineteen thirties, he became divorced from reality.

The two stories printed here were written in 1923-1924 and show the influence which socialist ideas had upon him during that period.

## INTOXICATING SPRING NIGHTS

### I

For six months I lived without a job in Shanghai and, because I was unemployed, changed my lodgings three times. At first I lived in a pigeon-hole on Bubbling Well Road, a prison without guards where the sun never shone. With the exception of a few ferocious gangster-like tailors, the inmates of this unguarded prison were mostly pitiable unknown scholars. That was why I named the place Yellow Grub-street. After a month or so in this Grub-street, the rent suddenly went up and I, with my few dog-eared books, was forced to move into a small hotel I knew somewhere near the race-course. Here too I met with certain kinds of pressure until I had to move again. This time I found and moved into a tiny room in the slums opposite Jihsinli on Dent Road at the north end of the Garden Bridge.

The houses on this side of Dent Road stood no higher than 20 feet. The loft I lived in was extremely small and low. If, standing upright, I had wished to stretch my arms and yawn, my hands would have gone through the dusty grey roof.

Coming in from the lane through the front door, one entered first the landlord's room. Here, edging one's way through heaps of rags, old tins and bottles and other junk, one came to a rickety ladder leaning against the wall. This was the only way one could get up to the dark opening—two square feet—which led to the second story. This story was really only a small, dark loft, but it was partitioned into two tiny rooms. I had the one where the trap door was; the other one was let to a woman who worked in the N Cigarette Co. As she had to go through my "room," to get to hers, my monthly rent was a few dimes cheaper.

Our landlord was an oldish man, round about the fifties, with a bent back. There was a dark oily gleam in his sallow face. His eyes were unequal in size, and his cheek bones were sharp and protruding. The lines on his forehead and face were filled with coal dust which seemed indelible despite his daily morning wash. He got up between eight and nine every day and after a fit of coughing left the house with a carrying pole and two bamboo baskets. Usually, he returned at three or four in the afternoon with the same baskets empty. Occasionally he came back with a load, the same kind of stuff as he had all over his room: rags, broken bottles and miscellaneous pieces of junk. On these days he would



usually buy himself a few ounces of wine, and, sitting on the edge of the bed, would drink by himself and curse roundly in an incomprehensible language.

I met my neighbour on the other side of the partition on the afternoon I moved in. At about five o'clock, when the fast-falling spring dusk had already descended, I had lit a candle and began to arrange the books I had brought with me from the hotel, setting them up into two stacks, one big and one small. On the bigger stack I placed two 24-inch picture frames. I had sold all the furniture I ever possessed, so my arrangement of books and picture frames had to serve as a desk during the day and a bed at night. I then sat myself down on the smaller stack of books, facing the "desk," and lit a cigarette. As I sat staring at the candle and smoking I heard a slight noise under the trap door, behind my back. I looked round but could only see the shadow of my own head. But my ears told me plainly that someone was coming up. I stared intently into the darkness and then saw a pale white oval face and the upper part of a slim woman's figure emerge before my eyes. I knew immediately that she was my housemate on the other side of the partition. When I first came to get a room, the old landlord told me that besides himself there was a woman worker who lived in this house and had one of the rooms. I had taken the room without a moment's hesitation because first of all I liked the low rent and secondly, I was glad there was no real housewife and children in the house. As my neighbour came up into my room, I stood up and bowed politely. "Good evening," I said. "I moved in today. I hope we'll get along all right."

She made no answer but her big dark eyes looked at me searchingly. Then she went to her door, unlocked it and went in. That was all I saw at my first encounter with her, but for some reason I felt that she was a defenceless young thing. Something about her pale features, and her small slim figure all seemed to indicate that she was a desolate and pitiful soul. However, at that time, I myself had enough worries of my own to spare much pity for someone who at least was not yet out of work and I turned back to sit motionless on the smaller stack of books, staring at the candle light.

A week went by since my move into the slums. Every day when my neighbour went to work — she went before seven in the morning and returned after six — she would find me sitting dully on my stack of books watching the candle flame or the oil lamp. Perhaps her curiosity was stirred by my constantly keeping to myself in a sullen manner. Finally, one day when she came up the ladder after work and I stood up as usual to let her pass, she stopped and looked directly at me.

"What is it you are always reading so hard every day?" she asked in a faltering, timid voice. She spoke a soft pure Soochow dialect but the feeling this charming tongue produced in me is impossible to describe so I'll just translate her words into ordinary speech.

What she said made me quite red in the face. The fact was that though I placed a number of foreign books before me, as I sat woodenly thus day in and day out, my mind was actually in complete confusion and I wasn't reading a single word. Sometimes I let my imagination fill the space between the lines with strange shapes and forms; at other times I merely glanced at the illustrations and my fancy promptly conjured up fantastic images from them. Actually, at that time, I was suffering from insomnia and malnutrition and was not in a normal state at all. Furthermore, since my only possession in the world, the padded gown on my back, was too shabby for words, I hadn't been able to go out in the daytime, and in my dark little room which let in no daylight whatever, had to use a candle or the oil lamp all the time, so that my eyes, and legs too, were weak from disuse.

"I wasn't really reading," I said confusedly. "But you see, if I just sat there woodenly without doing anything, it would have looked so silly. That is why I have these books open in front of me."

She gave me a quizzical look and went back to her room, still wearing a puzzled expression.

It would be untrue to say that I had completely neglected the idea of a job or that I had done nothing whatsoever. There were moments when I felt somewhat clearer in my mind and altogether I had translated a few short English and French poems and several German short stories around 4,000 words each since I had been there. The results of my efforts I had posted off to some new publishing firms. I always did the posting in the dark of night, when no one else was stirring. I felt that I had no hope of getting a real job, and that the only thing I could do was to try and make use of my dried-up brains. If I were lucky and my translation met with the approval of the publishers and were used, it would bring in a few dollars.

## II

Living anywhere in the dreary foreign concessions in Shanghai one hardly noticed the passing of the days or the changing of the seasons, and in the Dent Road slums I only noticed that my shabby padded gown felt heavier and heavier day by day and realized one day that spring must have grown quite old, as the saying is.

But I, with my lean purse, was in no position to go anywhere. All I could do was to sit fixedly by the lamp in my dark room day and night. One day — it must have been late afternoon, I suppose — I was sitting there as usual when my neighbour returned, carrying two small parcels. When I stood up to let her pass, she put one of them down on my desk, and said, "Here's a bit of raisin bread for you; eat it tomorrow. I've bought some bananas, too. Will you come into my room and eat them with me?"

I held the little parcel for her while she unlocked the door and led me into her room. We had been neighbours for a fortnight or so and it seemed she had come to trust me as an honest respectable man. The fear and suspicion on her face the first time I spoke to her were no longer there. Entering her room, I realized that it was not yet dark outside. Slanting rays of sunlight came in through a window which faced the south and I saw she had a bed made of two planks, a small black lacquer table against the wall, a wooden trunk and a round stool. She had no mosquito-net but there were two clean cotton quilts on bed. A small tin case on the table probably held her toilet things; it was bespattered with greasy spots. She picked up some odd pieces of clothing which were on the stool, put them on the bed and invited me to sit down. I felt a little embarrassed by the warm, hospitable fuss she made over me. "We are such close neighbours! Please don't stand on ceremony with me," I told her.

"I'm not standing on ceremony. But you always stand up when I come through to let me pass. I really feel very much obliged."

She undid the parcel as she spoke, offered me a banana and peeled one for herself. As we ate, she sat down on the bed and began to talk. "Why do you sit at home all the time instead of going out to get some work?"

"I want to get work, but though I've looked round I haven't been able to find a job."

"Haven't you got any friends?"

"I did have friends, but at a time like this they're not inclined to see me any more."

"Have you had any schooling?"

"Yes. I've had some years in a foreign school."

"Where is your family? Why don't you go home?"

By then, her questioning suddenly made me aware of what was really happening to me. In the last six months or so I had simply been fading away day by day and had practically forgotten such things even as "Who am I? What am I doing?" or "Am I sad or happy?" My mind was full of the difficulties I had been in during these months and I could only stare at her dully, unable to say a word. My expression must have made her think that I was a waif with no home. A look of sadness and loneliness was reflected on her face too.

"You're like me, then!" she said with a sigh, and like me lapsed into silence. I saw that her eyes were getting a little moist so I tried to change the subject. "What do you do in the factory?"

"Cigarette wrapping."

"How many hours do you work?"

"We start at seven and finish at six, with an hour's break for food — ten hours a day. We're paid by the hour, and we've got to do the lot, or we're fined."

"What's the pay, then?"

"Nine dollars a month. Three dollars for ten days, that is — three cents an hour."

"How much do you pay for food?"

"Four dollars a month."

"If you don't lose any time in the month, then you're left with five dollars to take home, eh? Is that enough for rent and clothes?"

"Of course it's not enough! And the foreman there is so. . . ." She shuddered. "I hate that factory. Do you smoke?"

"Yes."

"I wish you wouldn't! If you must, please don't smoke my factory's cigarettes. I do hate it so, everything about it."

I saw how fed up she was and did not know what to say. I finished my banana and looked round. It was getting dark in here too. I got up, made my thanks and went back to my own room.

Usually, because she was always exhausted from the day's work, she went to bed not long after her return; that night I could hear her pottering around in her room for a long time: She did not go to bed until after midnight. Ever since that evening, she always said a few words to me on her return, and I learnt all about her.

Her name was Chen Erh-mei, and her family came from Soochow, though she herself grew up in one of the villages outside Shanghai. Her father had also worked in the cigarette factory, but he had died last autumn. When he was alive they had shared this same tiny room, and went to work together every day. Now, she was all by herself. For the first month after her father's death she used to weep all the way to the factory and in the evenings come back with tears trickling down her cheeks. She was only seventeen, and had no sisters or brothers or any near kin. Our old landlord downstairs had taken full charge of the father's funeral and burial, for which task he had been entrusted with fifteen dollars by the father before his death.

"He is a good old man," she told me. "He has never had any bad intentions towards me, so I have been able to continue to work the way I did when father was living. But one of the foremen in the factory by the name of Li is wicked. He knows that my father is dead and he's been trying to get at me."

### III

The weather seemed to have changed. During the past few days, the stuffy dim little room which was my lone world had become as close and hot as a damp steam oven. It was so oppressive that it made me dizzy and nauseated. At certain times of the year, particularly the season of late spring, my nerves usually drove me half crazy. I now began to go out for long walks by myself at night, when the streets were quiet.

Strolling, solitary, under the narrow strip of dark blue sky I gazed at the stars and let my thoughts soar in fantasy. This was beneficial to my health. On such intoxicating spring nights, when I felt carried away, I often roamed round until it was nearly dawn before I returned to bed. After these exhausting strolls, I found I could sleep till noon the next day, sometimes even later, in fact, till it was nearly time for Erh-mei to return from work. After these hours of good sleep every day, I began to feel like a new person. Ordinarily, I could not make myself eat more than half a pound of bread but since I began my midnight exercises, my appetite improved until I found myself eating nearly double. Though this was a severe blow to my budget, my brain, nourished by the increased rations, was able to concentrate much better. After those night wanderings and before I went to bed, I managed to write a couple of short stories in the style of Edgar Allan Poe. Reading them over, I thought they weren't so bad. After numerous corrections and re-copying, I sent them out. I could not resist a slight hope about them, though I told myself that there had been no news whatever of the translations I sent out some time back. A few days after I had sent them I forgot about them too.

As for my neighbour, Erh-mei, I now saw her only occasionally when she returned in the afternoon since I was usually sound asleep when she left her room in the morning. For some reason her attitude towards me had reverted to the old one of fear and suspicion. Sometimes she used to give me a searching look, her dark limpid eyes seeming to be half-reproaching and half-advising.

About three weeks had passed since I moved into the slums. One evening, when I had just lit the candle and was reading a novel I had got from a second-hand bookstore, Erh-mei rushed up the stairs and confronted me. "There's a postman downstairs, who wants you! He's got a letter for you to sign for."

The look of suspicion and fear on her face was more evident than ever. She seemed to be saying, "Ah, you've been found out." I was very much annoyed at this attitude of hers, and said sharply, "A letter? Who would write to me? It can't be mine."

My indignant reply seemed to make her feel triumphant, and she said coldly, "Go and have a look yourself. You alone know what you have done."

As she spoke I heard the voice of the postman downstairs calling impatiently, "Registered letter!"

When I got the letter my heart began to thump. One of my translations of German short stories had been accepted by a magazine, and I had got a money order for five dollars. My purse was actually getting very empty and this five dollars meant that I would be able to pay the rent that was due at the end of the month and have some money left to keep me alive for several days. The need I had for this five dollars was greater than anyone could imagine.

The next afternoon I went to the post-office and cashed the money order. A short time on the streets under bright sunlight and I was dripping with perspiration. I looked at the people round me, then looked down at myself and felt self-conscious. Trickle of sweat rained down my head and neck. When I had been roaming about at night, there had been no sun and the cool air of the spring nights as I strolled through deserted lanes in the small hours was not so incompatible with the shabby padded gown that was my only wear. But now it was mid-afternoon on a warm sunny spring day and I, like a fool, did not have the sense to realize it but had walked down the street still in the same old attire. Naturally I felt abashed when I compared myself with my fellow creatures on the street, who had adapted themselves to the changes of the season. At that moment I forgot all about the rent that was due in a few days and the fast-emptying contents of my purse and turned slowly towards the clothiers on Cha Road.

I, who had not been out in broad daylight for a fairly long time, now felt for a moment that I had entered paradise when I saw the busy traffic and rickshaws rushing down the street with beautifully clothed young men and women in them, the luxurious and dazzling windows of the silk shops and jewellers', and heard the buzz of human voices, foot-steps and bells and horns. I forgot my own mean existence and felt like singing and skipping as merrily as my fellow men. Inadvertently, I began to hum a long-forgotten tune from some Peking opera. But this momentary nirvana was quickly shattered by the sharp notes of a bell when I tried to cross the street and turn into Cha Road. I looked up and saw that a trolley-bus was rushing towards me and the fat driver, leaning out, was glaring at me angrily. "Swine, have you no eyes? Serve you right if you get killed. Your life's worth no more than a yellow dog, anyway."

I pulled myself up as the trolley-bus rumbled past in a cloud of dust. I did not know why, but I found myself bursting into peals of ironical laughter. All too soon I realized that passers-by were staring at me in astonishment and I went off with a very red face.

I went into a number of clothiers, asked the prices of a couple of lined gowns and offered a price I could afford. No matter which shop I was in, all the attendants behaved as if they were trained by one master. Frowning down on me, one after the other they said mockingly, "You're not kidding, are you? If you can't afford to buy anything, don't bother us."

I went on from shop to shop until I got to a tiny place a long way down the road. I had come to realize that it was impossible to get a lined gown for what I could afford to pay, so I bought a plain blue cotton gown and changed into it then and there. Carrying my old padded gown, wrapped up in a parcel, I walked silently homewards.

"The money won't be enough for anything now, whatever happens, so I might as well have a spree," I told myself. I remembered the bread and bananas Erh-mei had asked me to share with her, and I turned into a confectioner's and bought a dollar's worth of chocolates, cakes and various eatables. As I stood waiting for the counter-hand to wrap it up I remembered that I hadn't had a bath for more than a month and decided I must have one.

By the time I had had my bath and returned to Dent Road with my two parcels, the food and my old gown, the lights were on in the shop windows and there were few people on the street. A cold evening breeze swept in from the bund and I shivered in my thin gown. I went back to my room, lit the candle and looked towards Erh-mei's door, only to find that she hadn't yet returned. I felt very hungry by now myself but I didn't want to open the parcel on the table; I wanted to share the delicacies with her. Picking up a book at random, I tried to read, but found myself having to swallow hard to curb my hunger all the time. I felt as though I had waited for ages, but there was still no Erh-mei. In the end my fatigue overcame me and I dozed off against the books.

#### IV

The sound of Erh-mei's footsteps on the ladder roused me. I noticed that the candle had burnt down two inches. When I asked her what time it was she answered, "The ten o'clock siren's just gone."

"Why are you back so late today?"

"They made us do night work because the sales have gone up. Though we get extra pay I get too tired."

"Can't you refuse to do overtime then?"

"No. There aren't enough workers, so I can't refuse."

Suddenly a tear trickled down her cheek. I thought she was crying from exhaustion and felt not only a deep sympathy but a certain thrill to discover she was still such a child. I opened the parcel and offered her my delicacies. While she ate, I said consolingly, "You're not used to night work; that's why you feel so tired. When you get used to it, it's really nothing."

She sat mutely on my makeshift desk and nibbled at a chocolate but her eyes turned on me several times as if she wanted to speak. "There's something on your mind, isn't there?" I said. "Come on, say what it is."

There was an awkward pause and then she started, falteringly, "I've been . . . er . . . wanting to ask you something for a long time. Recently you've been going out every night. Have you been mixing with bad men?"

I was very surprised at this idea of hers. She had been suspecting me of mixing with thieves and gangsters since I had been going out at

night, it seemed. When she saw that her words had startled me she thought her suspicion was right and that she had found me out. She went on talking to me, her voice friendly but pleading. "Do you have to eat such rich food and wear new clothes? Don't you know what you are doing is very risky? What if you are caught? How would you be able to face people? Let's not bother about what has already happened, though. I just want you to reform from now on. . . ."

I couldn't say a word, but stared at her with my mouth agape. Her thoughts were so strange and unexpected that I didn't know how to explain. She was silent for only a few seconds and then went on, "Now take your smoking, for instance. If you cut that you'd be able to save a few coppers. I've already told you you shouldn't smoke, and particularly not the cigarettes made in my factory. But you won't listen."

Again a few tears rolled down her cheeks. I knew really that her tears were at the thought of her hated factory, but my heart would not let me think that way: I preferred to think that they were for me. I kept quiet for a minute, thinking, while she gradually calmed down. Then I explained where I had got the money, and the source of the registered letter yesterday, and told her about my going out to cash the money order and the things I bought, and about my insomnia and why I had to go out for walks at night. She accepted what I had said with no more doubts, and her cheeks were pink when I finished. With her eyes on the desk she said in a little voice:

"Ah, I was wrong to blame you. Please don't mind what I said. I didn't mean any harm. But your behaviour was so strange that my thoughts went to the worst. If you really get down to work it would be fine. That thing you mentioned — whatever it was that you sold for five dollars — couldn't you do one of that every day?"

Her simplicity touched me but at the same time an unthinkable notion swept over me. I longed to stretch out my arms and embrace her but reason checked me severely, saying, "That would be a sin. Don't you know your own situation? Do you want to poison this pure simple girl? Devil, devil, you have no right at present to love."

I closed my eyes for a few seconds while my emotions struggled with my reason, and reason won. When I opened my eyes again, the place suddenly looked brighter. I smiled gently at her and said, "It's getting late. Hadn't you better go to bed? You've got to go to work tomorrow. I promise you, starting from today, I'll cut out my smoking."

She stood up obediently and went back to her room with a happy smile.

When she was gone I lit another candle and sat down quietly to think things over.

"The fruits of my labour brought me this five dollars for the first time today but already I've spent three dollars. Added to the dollar I

still had it'll only leave 20 or 30 cents after the rent's paid. What shall I do?"

"I could pawn my old padded gown, perhaps, but I don't think any pawnshop will take it."

"She's a poor little girl, but what about me? I'm in an even worse situation. She doesn't want to work, but she has to do overtime. I want to find work but I couldn't get any."

"Perhaps I could get a manual job. Oh, oh, but my useless muscles couldn't even cope with a rickshaw."

"I could kill myself, I suppose—I would have done long ago if I had had the courage. However, the fact that this word entered my head at this juncture shows that I haven't lost all my courage to do so."

"Ho, ho, what was it the trolley-bus driver called me today?"

"Yellow dog! Now that's a pretty term."

"....."

My mind went over a great number of scattered unconnected thoughts, but I could think of no really good way to get out of my present poverty. A siren from a nearby factory sounded; it must have been midnight. I stood up and changed into my shabby old gown, blew the candle out and went out for my walk.

It was quiet. All the other inhabitants of the slums were slumbering. Opposite me, in the modern blocks of Jihsinli a few windows were still bright with coloured lights. The strains of the balalaika and snatches of a soft melancholy song drifted across the chilly night, probably from a young White Russian emigree girl, singing for her living. Overhead, greyish-white clouds covered the sky, piling up heavily like decaying corpses. Here and there where there was a gap in clouds, an occasional star blinked, but even the scraps of dark sky round them seemed sad and gloomy.

July 15, 1923

*Translated by Tang Sheng*

## A HUMBLE SACRIFICE

### I

It was a bright spring afternoon. The weather was so fine I felt bored sitting at home. After a late lunch I put some loose change into my pocket and went out for a stroll.

In fair weather, the sky in Peking is different from that in the south. No matter how clear the day, in the south there are always thin streaks of cloud, and the blue of the sky is rather pallid.

Not so in Peking. The sky is a glittering azure, and to look at it for a while makes you feel you want to sprout wings and fly into space. Of course, all this talk about sky only applies to still days. When the Peking winds blow, you can barely open your eyes, let alone talk about the colour of the sky.

On this spring afternoon the air was unusually refreshing. The sky was immaculate and I felt the warmth of the sunshine on me as I walked along the streets amidst the cheerful Peking folk. Before I knew where I was I found myself in a busy street outside Chienmen Gate.

I had a look in a paper lantern shop, and bought a few quaint paintings intended for candle-shades.

Back in the street again the clash of theatre gongs and drums assailed my ears. I followed the sound into the theatre, sat down and began to watch the play. In the middle of the third item I could hear that the wind had risen: it began to shake the roof.

I came out at the end of the show into flying dust. I closed my eyes for a moment to keep the dust out, and then began to shout for a rickshaw, but all the local rickshaw men wanted 60 or 70 coppers for my journey, and refused to consider anything less.

It was not dark yet, but with the air so filled with dust the normal evening bustle had already set in. The shop-keepers had put their lights on. The street was jammed with traffic, cars, horse-drawn carriages and rickshaws. What with the tooting of horns, bells, shouting people and a medley of sounds coming from I knew not where, there was a regular symphony of discordant noise. Evidently the time for supper parties was approaching: that must be where the men in those vehicles were going, with their fashionably-dressed women companions.



At such an hour, with a dust storm to boot, I stood no chance of getting a rickshaw, so I made my own way back to Chienmen Street. It was the normal practice for the rickshaw men to charge exorbitant prices when they were fortunate enough to get a rush hour and a dust storm together. But I had spent nearly all my money and had only 40 to 50 coppers left. I could not meet their prices and decided I would have to walk to Hsitan and take a rickshaw from there — where my money would be enough for the shorter journey.

As I was walking along the foot-way on one side of the Chengyang Bridge a southbound motor showered me with dust. My fine idea about walking was shaken, and I stopped and rather hesitantly approached a rickshaw standing at the kerb, saying, "Hsunputing Lane! Will you go there for forty coppers?"

The rickshaw-puller nodded politely, "Right! Hop in, sir!"

We started on our northward road. The dust storm was still raging, but it was no longer getting into my eyes — it must have been a south wind blowing.

I like talking to the rickshaw men, and always chat as I ride, hoping that this will lessen their load. Going by my own experience it shortens the distance if one has a companion to talk to. This much humanitarianism I thought I could easily practise while sitting comfortably, high above a fellow-man who had to run before me like a draft animal.

I did not feel particularly like talking that day, but when I saw my puller's bowed back and heard his heavy panting I felt sorry for him.

"Take your time," I said, as gently as I could. "I'm not in a hurry. Where's your rickshaw station?"

"The western end of Hsunputing Lane."

"And where do you live, yourself?"

"At the northern end of Nanshuncheng Street, just around the corner by Hsunputing Lane."

There was a moment's silence, and then I said, "Heavens! Why does it have to blow so hard every day!"

"You may well ask! It's tough on us rickshaw-pullers and uncomfortable for gentlemen like you. Rotten!"

So we talked as we went along. It was nearly dark when we arrived at the place where I was staying. I got down and began counting out his pay, while he wiped the sweat off himself with a grey towel. Then he suddenly said, with a grin, "It's all right about the money — keep it! We're neighbours, aren't we?"

I was very embarrassed at this and insisted on him taking all my coppers — which turned out to be 48. He thanked me, and went off westward along the dusty road to his home.

As I watched him go my imagination followed him. I pictured his arrival home and his wife coming out to greet him, and how she would take his day's takings out from under the rickshaw seat, and he would

pull the rickshaw round to its owners, and then go into his home to wash himself, and sit down to a few puffs before he ate his simple evening meal with her — perhaps choosing to take a copper or two's worth of white wine. Loosened up with the wine, my fancy ran, he would start talking and embracing his wife and child, then fling himself down on the bed to fall fast asleep. This exhausted sleep is probably the only enjoyment life holds for toilers such as he. Ah. . . .

My train of thought led me into my usual melancholy mood.

"And what a poor state I am in myself," I mused. "I have not had a good night's sleep for over two years. That is because I am ill, and I've nobody to blame. But why should my wife and child have to stay three thousand *li* away from me, not able to share my joys and sorrows! Must we be for ever apart? Or is this, too, my fault, because of my illness?"

It is. It is all my doing. We are apart because I cannot support my wife.

And yet the rickshaw man thanked me. I felt pity for him, but I am not so well off as he is; no, not so well off as he.

As I stood still there in the dark, brooding, I felt sadder and sadder, and tears pricked my eyes. It would not do for my host to see me like this — I am completely dependent on him. I walked down the steps in front of the house and along the street, following my rickshaw man. First he, then I, reached a bend in the road. As I rounded it I saw him stop and go into a ramshackle one-story house at the end of the lane.

I went on walking alone for some time, as far as outside the city gate, before I went back home for supper.

Since then this rickshaw man and I have developed an affinity for one another, and I have ridden behind him many times. We gradually became better acquainted.

## II

Outside Pingtzemen Gate is the city moat. It is not so wide as the Canal outside Chaoyangmen Gate to the east of the city, but in spring and autumn days after the rains the deep, moving water is green, and you can sail southward with the wind.

The weeping willows along the banks cast their images in the river, and there are big green patches on both sides. Towards dusk horses may be found grazing here and there, and people bring their hunting hawks for training flights.

If you stand by the ferry in the moat just before sunset and look northward you can see the misty watchtower over Hsichihmen Gate soaring above the willows, gilded by the setting sun. To come alone and walk along the moat on a fine evening in spring or autumn is like seeing a series of paintings of the later impressionist period. It is hard to realize that this is really only just outside bustling Peking.

The countless smiling peaks of the Western Hills seem to be dreaming, as they lie clothed in purple haze beyond the rolling green fields. My fancy tells me that if I were to call them, they would come to me. Outside the walls beyond Hsichihmen Gate are some duck and goose farms. Every afternoon the geese swim, paired off, in the moat, and towards evening the last rays of the setting sun shine through the willow branches and glisten on their white backs.

I, who live alone in this crowded imperial city, feel sad and without hope. When I am in a thoroughly dejected mood I find myself wandering aimlessly about. I go right across the city from the north-west to south, look in at a theatre or two, or at the tea-houses and the singsong girls' or the wineshops as do other seekers after idle entertainment. I forget my miserable existence, and like them try to drown my sorrows.

Sometimes I go alone outside the city, by Pingtzemen Gate to enjoy the view. I do not avoid the placid calmness of Jade Spring Hill deliberately, nor does the remote Temple of Great Awakening lack attraction for me. No. The reason is I am penniless all the year round and cannot afford to see these noble sights far away from the city.

One afternoon in the middle of May I felt sad and agitated for no reason at all. I first thought of going to one of the gay places in the south city to try to find some consolation. But I did not even have the rickshaw fare in my pocket. All that was within my reach was my old walk, out of Pingtzemen Gate. There I went, and sat down under the shade of the willows, to breathe my fill of the fresh air from the Western Hills.

I watched the sunset sky turn from a deep blue to purple. All of a sudden the whole heavens turned crimson. The spire of the distant French church and the tips of the trees were lit by these last red rays of the sun. Then, just as suddenly, the air became clear and calm. Everything seemed to disappear before me, and the shadows closed round me in a mass of confusion.

I was overcome by a sadness brought on by the sunset. The tears came to my eyes, and I began to go back slowly, as though in a dream.

I went through Pingtzemen Gate and turned south, along Nanshun-cheng Street. The first lane on the east side is Hsunputing Lane. No sooner had I turned down the lane than I heard loud voices coming from a rather tumbledown house, right at the turning. I knew one of the voices, somehow. I thought for a moment and realized that it was my rickshaw man speaking. I stood there and listened quietly for a while. It sounded as though he was quarrelling with someone. After all the times I had ridden on his rickshaw and always found him even-tempered it seemed strange to hear him quarrelling now. He doesn't speak very readily — he's a taciturn type, but he's always ready enough with an answer when spoken to.

He must be quite a tall fellow really, but his back is so bent that he does not seem his height. I do not know whether his posture is due to the heavy toil society has laid on him, or whether it is a natural handicap. He looks over fifty, but he says he is only forty-two. The expression on his face is the expression of all care-worn toilers. How shall I describe it? He seems always to be reflecting on the lot of those whom society persecutes, as though it is inevitable. Yet his silent tolerance gives the impression of unlimited strength, a strength which enables him to resist and struggle. To me, this worker's face makes me ache with sadness.

As a matter of fact, my own position in society is not much better than his — I feel sometimes that I suffer more persecution even. Riding behind him talking to him, I cannot escape a feeling of unjust suppression, suffered by both of us, from which neither he nor I can escape, or even voice. I, who am literate, educated, must accept it dumbly. When I feel I cannot stand it any more, all I can do is cry out to the sky.

A fortnight ago, I had got drunk in one of the red-light districts in the south city, and went to a friend's house to sleep it off, in my clothes, until nearly midnight. I woke up to see the crescent moon rising, and took a rickshaw to Hsitan, intending to take another one on from there. There I got my old friend's rickshaw.

I felt very bad. My drunken stupor left me melancholy and the dismal surroundings, the long grey roads, with nothing moving but an occasional car stirring up dust, only increased my gloom. And then to meet him, and hear his complaints!

He said times were bad and he could barely make a living. The value of the silver dollar had gone up only a copper or two, while the price of coal, rice, oil and salt had doubled. The owner of his rickshaw knew too well how to squeeze him and was always overcharging him for every crooked spoke or small screw missing. His whole takings for a normal day were not enough to satisfy the rickshaw owner, and if he got a punctured tyre, or broke the spring he was lost. At home, his wife did not know how to manage and was always wasting money — they have two sons, one eight and the other three.

As I sat there, sunk in gloom in the cold moonlight, I listened to him talking, voicing one complaint after another. As we went along my feelings mounted: I felt all the narrow grey lanes we passed intensified our sorrows, his, mine, and many others'. I wanted to jump down and weep with him. But my dress, my long gown of fine cotton, and my upbringing kept me from expressing my real emotion.

Ever since that night, I had avoided meeting him.

And now, on my way home from Pingtzemen Gate, hearing him quarrelling so, I blamed myself for having avoided him for so long. After a minute or two I realized he was quarrelling with his wife.

My inertia left me and, moved by the sorrow in his voice, I stepped into his dilapidated house. He had one room, half filled by the big brick

bed. Although nightfall had not come, the room was dark and gloomy and at first I could not see a thing, save for his dark figure. I greeted him and, as my eyes got used to the dimness, I could see that he was talking and gesticulating to a woman, hunched on the bed. On the far side were two children.

I asked him what had made him so angry. He waved his hand at his wife and said, "She's spent all three of my hard-earned silver dollars at one go and bought this rubbishy cloth! It's only good for wrapping the dead. . . ."

As he spoke he kicked at a bundle of stuff on the floor.

After saying a few words of greetings to me, he knitted his brows and went on:

"She doesn't try to understand my difficulties at all, nor what I want to do. What was I saving this money for? I must try to get enough together to buy my own rickshaw, and save paying this everlasting rent. It's warm enough now. Poor people like us don't need clothes: we can go bare-backed. But she must go and buy this cloth! It's enough to madden anyone!"

I did sympathize with him, but tried to say something non-committal.

"We have to have some clothes, you know. Be patient — you'll be able to save another three or four dollars again."

He didn't speak. The only sound was his wife's sobbing.

If I had had any money in my pocket I would have given him all of it, and tried to persuade him not to be angry. But when I felt in my pockets there was not a single coin there.

I stood there thinking, but could find no solution. I waited, not knowing what to do, and suddenly became aware of my silver watch ticking away in my inner jacket. But I realized I would not be able to make him take it then and there. Then I struck on an idea.

I made myself say a few more consoling words and, without his noticing it, took my watch out, moved forward, and slipped it on to a table. I brought my words to an end, and went out under the stars. Again my heart felt heavier than ever. I hated myself for being so helpless!

Next morning, while I was getting dressed, someone knocked at the door.

I looked out. It was my rickshaw man. He called out a good morning and then fumbled under the seat — looking for my watch, which he got out.

"Is this yours, mister?" he asked. "Did you lose a watch last night?"

I felt my face going red and answered, "No. It's not mine. I haven't lost a watch."

He repeated "That's queer" a few times and explained how he found it. When he saw that I firmly refused to claim it, he could do nothing but keep it, and went off.

After the summer solstice we had a fortnight's continuous rain. I had been careless about covering myself properly at night and caught a very severe cold. I have only been back on my feet for two weeks. Three days after I got up, the weather was fine and I took a cane and went out for a walk.

This was my first time out after my illness. I walked towards the west, intending to go to my favourite spot by the moat outside Pingtze-men Gate.

As I passed the ramshackle house at the turn in the lane I saw there was a crowd of people at the door, and could hear loud sobbing inside. I thought it was my rickshaw man quarrelling with his wife again, and joined the crowd.

"If they're quarrelling about money again I can help them today," I thought. I still had some money left from the money my family had sent me for my medical expenses — several five-dollar bills.

I went to the door and saw only the rickshaw man's wife there, sobbing, at the edge of the brick bed. There was no sign of him. One of the little boys was sitting on the ground by his mother's feet, crying too.

I stood there for a minute, unable to make out what the matter was. Some of the other bystanders were sighing, and others were wiping their eyes, saying, "Oh, how sad! Oh, how sad!"

I asked a middle-aged woman who was standing next to me what it was all about, and had a dreadful shock. The rickshaw man had been drowned at South Swamp during a flood several days ago.

His wife had not known he was dead until the following evening — only after one of his mates had seen the body and told her what had happened. She had taken the two boys and gone out in the heavy rain to the scene of the tragedy, south of Nanheng Street. They were all in tears. She tried to drown herself too, but people nearby, hearing the children crying for help, came and rescued her.

The next day kind people in the neighbourhood had a collection and arranged for his funeral, and gave her 30 catties of flour and 800 coppers. Since then she had been crying day and night.

When I heard what had happened, and saw her pitiful state, my heart seethed with pain.

My feelings were the same as when, more than a month ago, I was coming from Chienmen Gate at midnight with her husband when his mournful story then made me feel that I shared his fate. Now I felt with her.

I thought of my own wife, and my daughter, who is about the same age as the child crying on the ground. The tears came to my own eyes.

Then a barefooted, half-naked child, of about eight or nine, pushed his way through us and went in. Holding out a few coppers in his little hand, he said, timidly:

"Look, mum! Someone gave me these."

Most of the onlookers, seeing the serious expression on his face and the funny way he held out his hand, chuckled and went on their way. Only two old women, who kept wiping their eyes, remained.

When I saw that there were few strangers left I went into the house, and spoke to the wife, "Do you remember me?"

She lifted her swollen red eyes and looked at me, and nodded. Her head went down again and she went on crying bitterly. I longed to tell her to stop crying, but I saw it would be no use. All I could do was to stand there silently and watch her thin shoulders heave. After a few minutes I saw that a crowd had again gathered outside the door. This time they were watching me.

This irritated me, and I stepped forward and said, "What are you looking at? She's mourning her dead. Is that something to stare at?"

The older boy saw I was annoyed and closed the broken door with a slam, darkening the room. His mother, startled, stopped crying and raised her eyes. She saw the boy standing beside me. I took this opportunity to try to persuade her to stop crying.

"You've got the children to look after," I said. "Crying all the time doesn't help. If there's anything I can do to help you, I'll certainly do it."

She managed to answer me amid her sobs. "It's . . . it's his dying so suddenly I can't get over. And . . . I don't know whether he drowned himself or. . ."

Her sobs broke out again in earnest. I did not know what I could do. I took out a five-dollar bill from my wallet and gave it her, saying:

"This is not much. Take it and use it anyway."

She stopped crying for a moment, and said:

"We . . . we don't need money. Oh, his death was a tragedy! He always wanted to buy his own rickshaw, but he never managed to do it. And now . . . the day before yesterday I went to a funeral paper shop to order a paper rickshaw to burn as an offering to him. But it cost six dollars, so I couldn't order one. Dear sir, you are kind. Will you buy him a good paper rickshaw?"

She began to cry again. I felt terrible when I heard what she said. I stood there for a minute, then I put the note back in my pocket and said:

"Please don't cry so! He was my friend. Certainly I'll buy a funeral rickshaw for him and go with you to burn it at his grave."

I said a few words to the children and went out. I had never made this sort of funeral arrangement so I had to look everywhere to find the shop. In the end I found one near Szepailou, put down the money for a paper rickshaw, and asked them to do a rush order for me. They took two days.

It was a fine day. I ate my meal early and hired four rickshaws to take the wife and the two children and myself to the grave.

The beautiful paper rickshaw was put on the first rickshaw with two bundles of paper funeral money. We followed behind. As we went along Shunchihmen Street the people on the pavements stared at me and the raggedly-dressed middle-aged widow, her eyes still red and swollen from crying.

Their staring, curious eyes maddened me. I cursed them inwardly, and felt a feeling of almost irresistible rebellion rise within me.

Oh, those rich people in their cars, and the uncaring passers-by!

"Swine! Dogs!" I wanted to shout. "Do you know what you are looking at? We are going to the grave of a poor rickshaw man, my friend, who was driven to death by such as you! It is his memorial you stare at!"

August 14, 1924

At Peking

*Translated by Huang Shou-chen*

# How Life Unfolds . . .

## Forest Girls

Lu Fei

A rain-soaked tent stood in the clearing of a forest with the words "Central Forest Survey Team" written on top. Some girls were in it, choking with the smoke from a badly burning stove till tears trickled down their cheeks. A rather solidly built girl with bobbed hair and a dark-complexioned, round face was blowing into the stove, one knee touching the ground while her other foot stood in a streamlet that was running under the tent. She was the leader of the girls' team, by the name of Li Lai-ying.

A graduate from a short training course for forestry work, she had been out before for practical work with the boys among her fellow-trainees. But it was not easy for a girl like her from overseas. Although she could walk for hours on asphalt roads in high-heeled shoes and could easily swim a river, to walk across a narrow stream over a freshly felled tree trunk frightened her out of her wits. Whenever she had to do it, she would not hide her fear and tightly grasp the hand stretched out to her in response to her pleading looks. For this, the boys had teased her many a time and suggested that, being born and brought up in the South Seas, she would never be fit for the tough job she was training for. But Li Lai-ying would only shake her head stubbornly at such well-meant comments.

Later on, the graduates of the training class were organized into a survey group, the first of an army of foresters. When they were half way to their destination, the men were sent out to work in different groups, while the girls were told to stay behind and do menial jobs like sewing, store-keeping and the like. Was this what they had come for? They argued and argued that they were trained the same way as the men—to do real forestry work. But Li Lai-ying kept quiet and did what she was told; only sometimes when she chatted with the girls, she revealed her desire of going up into the mountains with the rest. "Don't you ever dream of it!" they said then. "When we went on practice hikes, even, you didn't dare do any climbing. You aren't a good walker, either. You'd only slow us up."

Li Lai-ying was very upset when she heard these things. They didn't understand her, after all! Of course, they couldn't know how she'd come to China, fired with enthusiasm to take part in the construction of

the land of her ancestors. And now. . . . Now they were thinking that, just because she was from the South Seas, she couldn't stand the rigours of the north, the damp forest air and the mountain climbs!

In the end, the girls' arguments prevailed and they were organized into a separate team, to work in the forest like the rest. The only man with them was a night watchman. Li Lai-ying was put in charge. . . . Before they started off on their assignment, the leader of the whole group of forest surveyors asked if they had any problems. But Li Lai-ying was too excited about the prospect of doing real work at last to think of difficulties. The other girls did not raise any questions, either, though they were not quite sure whether Li Lai-ying would make a good leader. . . .

Among the many forestry tasks the survey group as a whole had to fulfil, the girls' team was assigned that of marking out the areas for cutting timber, etc. This kept them on the move every three to five days. One day, the watchman who usually carried the canvas tent didn't feel at all well. The girls began worrying. What were they to do? Their cook, a Korean woman, had enough baggage with pots and pans that she carried on her head after the habit of her people. The cook's helpers had to take care of their food tins, the cooking oil and salt, in addition to their own bedding rolls. The forest girls had axes and other tools or instruments to deal with. Without a further word, Li Lai-ying gave her own bag to the girls while she picked up the tent that weighed close to eighty pounds. Short as she was, the load seemed to make her double up, especially when she walked downhill. But her will-power kept her going so that, when she arrived at the camping place for the night, completely worn out, she was yet triumphantly happy. As soon as she put down her load, the other girls immediately set about putting up the tent, quite different from their usual way of attending strictly to their own business. Some went and got leaves and grass together, to make their nest as cozy as possible. Li Lai-ying was meanwhile helping the Korean woman with setting up the stove and chopping firewood, and very soon the smell of food being cooked rewarded their labour.

To make sure that their task was fulfilled in time, Li Lai-ying took her team up the mountain early every morning and brought them back only at dusk. If they finished their work earlier, they would take their time on the way down, singing, chatting, picking flowers and berries, or they would stop in a clearing to watch a hawk circling in the blue sky above. After their stay deep in the forest, such clearings looked huge to them. The first wild strawberries they found caused great excitement among the girls from the cities who began to chat about ice-cream they were used to have with their strawberries, and about their surprise to see natural ice in the streams in the depth of the forest during summer days. . . . Such discoveries could make them forget all about time together with the fact that mosquitoes and other insects were biting them mercilessly during these rambles.



Once it was getting dark when they left such a clearing, so they could not find the way back to their camp. With the daylight shut off by the tall trees around them, they lost track of sign-posts and markers on the ground. As they stumbled around helplessly, they were getting cold and hungry. Seeing how tired the girls were, Li Lai-ying suggested they should spend the night where they were, warming themselves around a carefully built fire. To this all agreed immediately, glad not to have to wander about any more.

The fire built, they found themselves more strawberries to eat and drank some water from the forest stream which they boiled in their mess tins. Even though it tasted smoky, they felt quite happy again, and began to sing. But gradually sleep overpowered them and, one by one, they dozed off as they were, leaning against tree trunks.

Li Lai-ying was as tired as the rest. But she felt responsible for the girls in the group, even though some of them were older than herself. She decided to watch over their sleep and made the fire burn more brightly by adding dry branches, leaves and tree bark. During her time with the surveying team she had learned enough about life in the forest to know that no wild animal would dare come near a fire. Staring into the flames and listening to the regular breathing of the girls around her, Li Lai-ying couldn't help feeling soothed and dozing off. Behind her closed lids flashed thoughts of home in the far-away South Seas, what huge plantain trees they had there, of her hard-working mother. . . . Slowly she drifted into deep sleep.

All of a sudden, a cold breeze woke her up. When she opened her eyes she found the fire almost gone out. Looking round to find some more wood quickly, she saw two green lights moving towards her. The yellow spots beside them made it clear that they were the eyes of a tiger! Her heart missed a beat or two and she could hardly breathe. But still she felt she must prod the fire. Not daring to look at the green lights, she crouched down and felt for some sticks of firewood with a trembling hand, then blew hard at the dying flames. As the fire blazed forth afresh, its crackling woke the other girls. Quietly Li Lai-ying told the one closest to her to look across the fire. The shining eyes of the animal gave the girl such a fright that, as she was scrambling up, she overturned the tin with the boiled water. This choked half the flames. Li Lai-ying then quickly picked up another stick and knocked with it on the food tin. Also, the girls were by now making such a din that the tiger was scared off.

This happened near the end of the survey, after which every team was summoned back to group headquarters. On the way there, the other teams passed through the area the girls' team had worked in and noted how good a job they had done, putting clear marks all through it, with a sign-post every three miles marked "The Girls' Forest Survey Team." Even on steep cliffs they had made the demarcation line very clear and straight.

The survey as a whole took them a long time, so that the group spent the New Year festival in the mountains. New Year's Eve was made bright with a ring of bonfires around which they sang, danced and laughed, reliving their experiences of the year. Li Lai-ying alone was a little withdrawn on this occasion. With her different background, their present environment had more heroic connotations for her than for the others. This dense forest had been the very place on which the Anti-Japanese United Army of North-east China had based its activities against the Japanese aggressors. One of its generals, Chen Han-chang, was stranded high up on some rocky peak with his troops when the forest was surrounded by the enemy and there was no food left. In a bitterly cold, stormy night one of the soldiers was blown down into the precipice. Grieved and angered by this loss, the general had led his group in an attack by which they broke through the enemy blockade and wiped out a command post. Li Lai-ying had come across the ruins of one of the United Army's camps in the forest and seen the slogans they had carved on the trees. Her team had even found some rusty thimbles and parts of an old sewing machine that had obviously belonged to this army of the people. These paths, now covered with rotten leaves, had been taken by the fighters in their struggles. Looking beyond the bonfires at the dark forest she was filled with pride to think that she was allowed to do her bit in finishing the task these patriots had begun. Here she was helping in the construction of her motherland, and this was the work which helped her to mature. . . .

She was pulled out of her reverie when someone called on her to give an account of how she and another girl had painted the demarcation line up on the rocks. As Li Lai-ying stood up amid the clapping and shouting of her colleagues, she recalled that day very well. Drizzles and light showers were frequent in the forest, so they learnt not to take much notice of them. That morning, too, it was raining as she and Hsiao Liu started off with their instruments. They had to be very careful in climbing up the wet, mossy rock that was so slippery they could hardly hold themselves erect. They grasped at the plants growing out of the rocky crags to pull themselves forward step by step. When they had finished their work, the continuing drizzle made going downhill more difficult. Even looking down made them so ill at ease that their legs would not move. Suddenly stones and earth were rolling down beside Li Lai-ying. As she looked round, she saw Hsiao Liu hurtling down the mountainside. She wanted to shout for help at the top of her voice, but checked herself immediately—what use was there, with not a single comrade in the neighbourhood? Quietly she slid down the slope herself, calling Hsiao Liu's name as she went. When there was no answer, she became panicky. Luckily she found Hsiao Liu, stunned from her fall that had been stopped by a tree. After that, it was easy getting to her, although it meant balancing oneself on the edge of a rock no wider than one's foot. Gently Li Lai-ying helped



Hsiao Liu come to. Her own clothes were torn, her face was bruised and streaked with blood. As they put down their instruments, the two girls cast a shuddering look at the steep rocks, then eyed each other doubtfully, hardly believing they were still alive.

Now Li Lai-ying shook her head to sweep away these memories. What had she done, compared to General Chen Han-chang of the Anti-Japanese United Army? So all she said was: "It's all over now. Let's sing a song together!"

As they sang, Li Lai-ying smiled to herself. With shining eyes and a voice full of courage, she felt that at last she was in the right place where she could contribute her bit as well as anybody else.

It had taken her two years with the foresters' group, but now Li Lai-ying was no longer a scared little girl from the South Seas, she had become a proper forest surveyor and a good team leader, too.

*Translated by Chang Su-chu*

## The Beacon on the Cliff

Liu Sheng-ya

When Chang Yung-kuei finished the buoy he was working on, he took a note-book out of his pocket. Hidden in its pages was the picture of a smiling girl with big eyes and heavy black brows. Long thick plaits hung down to her waist, covering her ears and part of the badge on her coat. It was such a sweet smile. No matter when Yung-kuei looked at her, she was always smiling.

He stretched the fingers of his numb right hand and only then realized that he was bathed in bright, golden sunlight. It was a fine day, extremely rare in the gorge. Usually it was dark and dreary with either heavy fog or incessant drizzle.

The navigation signal station where he worked was moored in a rocky bay along the south bank. It was on a ten H.P. motor-boat, but as the weather varies so much in the gorge, the station used an old junk as a base and its members slept there. Besides Yung-kuei, the station staff consisted of an elderly man who was the station-master and two robust young men in their twenties. One was lean and the other on the stout side. They were in charge of the lights on the buoys.

It was seven months since Young Li, the lean one, first discovered Yung-kuei gazing at the photograph. As the four of them lived on board



*It Looks Like Rain Coming* (24 cm. × 37 cm.) Woodcut by WU FAN



all the year round they saw few outsiders and knew all there was to know about one another—there couldn't be much privacy.

Both the station-master and Tubby found the young lady's face familiar. They had seen her at headquarters where they often attended meetings. "She's called Li Mei-ying, I believe," said Tubby. "Daughter of old Li who's in charge of the signal pole up river. She works on the mooring there herself."

The station-master recalled old Li and consequently took an interest in the young lady in question. "Come on, out with it," said he to Yung-kuei one day. "How did you get to know her?"

"Well, we both work on the river, don't we, and not so very far apart," replied Chang simply.

"On the river. . . . That's right, work on the river. . . ." The station-master repeated the phrase several times. You could tell he felt there was no work like it. "Well," he added, "even women work on the river and sail boats nowadays."

Except on Sundays, Yung-kuei never left his post. Work at the station was not as simple as they'd taught him at the training school. Here he and his mates had to do everything for themselves: stone-masonry, carpentry, ship-building, and even tailoring. And, of course, all the other jobs which were all in the day's work. As often as not they had to mend the leaks and holes in their junk, and there were the spare buoys and markers, piled up under the rocks ashore, which all took time to make. They took turns at night duty: you couldn't relax even on calm windless nights. Day in, day out, their work was strenuous and tense, but every Sunday morning, come wind or rain, Yung-kuei always walked the three and a half miles up river to see his Mei-ying. His mates were extremely interested in the romance, particularly now that the wedding day was approaching.

The eventful day finally dawned. The station-master, official cook of the wedding feast, was in the poop frying crisped chicken. The fat bubbled merrily in the pan and a delicious smell pervaded the air.

"I say, bridegroom, if you've got a moment to spare you'd better take a look at our junk," said the station-master, raising his voice above the splutter of his cooking.

The junk certainly had a very festive look about it. The word "felicitations," cut out of bright red paper, was pasted on the aft cabin door, and the mirror inside was decorated with bright red scissor-cuts. Everything was in its proper place and the "bridal chamber"—the aft cabin—was as spick and span as could be. The furniture was scrubbed so clean that you could clearly see the fine grain of every piece of wood. Brand-new linen and quilts were on the bed, and the old station-master himself was wearing the suit he normally wore for going to headquarters, only at the moment he had an old apron over it.

"I don't think my chicken will be at all bad," said the station-master, chuckling complacently. "Look at the monkeys who've been enticed by the smell." He couldn't help laughing at the idea.

Yung-kuei looked up. Sure enough there were a number of monkeys jumping about among the trees on the rocky shore. Suddenly something clicked in the station-master's mind. From experience he knew that when wild animals came near the shore when there were people about it meant a storm was brewing. He wanted to tell the others of his premonition but hesitated, not wanting the young people to think him superstitious. He also felt that it was bad luck to mention a storm on this propitious day. Besides, it was such a fine day that a storm seemed hardly likely. So he swallowed back what was on the tip of his tongue and concentrated on dropping pieces of cut chicken into the frying pan.

In mid-afternoon the four donned their life-jacket, ready to set out and light the buoys. "You shouldn't be going today," said the station-master to Yung-kuei, and Young Li and Tubby promptly began to take Yung-kuei's life-jacket off.

"No! I'll go as usual," said Yung-kuei.

"You relax," said the station-master. "We'll manage quite well without you."

They had not been gone long when the wedding guest arrived. There was only one—the chief of their signal section.

The bridegroom got more and more agitated. Mei-ying had said definitely that she would be there at five and it was past six already. He went fore several times to look at the winding path down the hills. The sun went down and a grey cold mist rose from the river. His heart too was clouded. The lights from the buoys blinked out of the fast-falling darkness. A ship going downstream slid past swiftly, circled round the buoys and sailed out of the gorge. Then the other three returned and all of them waited with impatience for the arrival of the bride.

"She's young and tough," said Yung-kuei to the others. "She won't mind the mountain paths. She used to carry coal and charcoal up and down them. Anyway, her father's coming with her today." Chang's eyes were on the dark hills searching impatiently for a spark of light. Suddenly his ears picked out an alien sound amid the familiar lapping of the water—the sound of water beating against a wooden boat. His eyes turned quickly in the direction from which the sound came and discerned, above the dark waters, the darker shape of a boat which had just turned into the gorge. Detouring round the buoys in the middle of the river, it slowly drew nearer. In the beam of a buoy light Yung-kuei made out her figure and cried out: "Mei-ying."

There was no answer. Everyone walked fore to welcome the bride. As the little boat drew alongside, a rope was dexterously tossed over and caught the mooring post,

"I thought you said you were coming by land," said Yung-kuei, unable to wait till she came on board.

"I got held up. It's much quicker coming downstream by boat," said Mei-ying, her back bent over something in the little boat.

"Come on up," cried the impatient groom.

"I've got a few things here," she said in a low voice meant for his ears alone. She handed up a big parcel and then a little suitcase. The station-master took them, whispering to the section chief, "How could she come by land with all this trousseau?"

They gave the bride a round of cheers as she came aboard. In the dim light a rosy flush spread over her face as she responded to the men's greetings with charming shyness.

"Where's your dad? Why didn't he come with you?" asked Yung-kuei anxiously.

"The comrade at our station is not well and dad stayed behind to see to the signals," she slowly answered in a subdued voice.

This lass who braved wind and storm and the mighty waves of the river felt very bashful under the intent gaze of her friends. She cast a furtive glance at the work-bag slung over her shoulder. It was evident that she had come straight from work.

There never was such a party on board. They laughed and talked to their hearts' content, though the bridegroom said little and the bride was very quiet too. But their hearts were brimming with joy and their faces glowed as brightly as the lights shining on the river.

A peal of thunder rolled past, but no one took any notice.

The ringing of the telephone abruptly cut short the conversation. Yung-kuei trotted into the cabin to answer it. All present knew that when the telephone rang, it meant urgent business. There was not a sound as everyone sat quietly, hoping to learn what it was about.

They were disappointed because Yung-kuei only said, "Yes . . . h'm . . . aha . . ." and finally "All right!"—all this indistinctly, half-drowned by the lapping of the water. Mei-ying listened with more attention than anyone else and just caught the words Mengliang Cliff as well as the h'ms and ha's. When he had replaced the receiver, Yung-kuei emerged at the cabin door saying, "Step over here a moment, section chief, will you?"

They went back into the cabin and started a hurried conversation in whispers, so low that a third person could hardly hear a word. Mei-ying who sat facing the cabin could see Yung-kuei's face clearly as it was brighter inside. She thought he looked ever so serious. His lips moved swiftly and decisively as if he were reporting something important to the chief. Then the chief turned round to return to them but Yung-kuei stopped him and made him listen to something else. When, a few minutes later, the section chief returned to the party, Yung-kuei walked into the back cabin. As the chief didn't say anything in particular the party resumed its gaiety.

Picking up a wine pot, the station-master said, "Now the bride must tell us why she was late, or else we'll make her drink three cups of wine!"

"I was helping dad repair the signal poles," said she, feeling extremely shy at having to speak out in front of everyone. She stole a glance at the section chief whose brows were tightly knit and she thought he looked troubled since the phone call came.

She longed to know what Yung-kuei was doing by himself aft. Maybe she could help, whatever it was. But then she was the bride that day; she couldn't very well walk out on the others. More jokes about the bride were exchanged and then someone, remembering the bridegroom, asked, "Where is he, anyway?"

"Popped into the bridal chamber and doesn't want to come out, I suppose."

"The bride had better go in and have a look," suggested someone else.

Mei-ying blushed, but she thought it was a good excuse to join Yung-kuei and immediately went into the aft cabin. Under the canvas top everything looked festive and nice, arranged with simple taste. But Chang was nowhere in sight. Kneeling on the low bed she looked out into the darkness, but there wasn't a soul in the stern either. Her eyes went towards the gangway and suddenly she noticed that the little motor-boat was no longer by the junk, though all the other little boats were. Her mind flashed back to the words Yung-kuei had let fall in his phone call and she said to herself, "Something must have happened at Mengliang Cliff! Something very urgent and he's had to go. Must be something wrong with the beacon light."

When she returned to the fore-deck, there was quite a gale. Feeling the nip in the air the old station-master remembered the monkeys he had seen that morning and said, "Let's get into the cabin. There's a storm brewing."

No sooner had they entered than the telephone rang again. This time from what was said at their end everyone realized that another light below Mengliang Cliff had gone out. It was section headquarters calling. They had had a wire from a ship going downstream.

It became quite evident that Yung-kuei had gone to Mengliang Cliff to see to the beacon there. Most likely he hadn't wanted to disturb the others and when he left had let the motor-boat drift downstream by itself until he was out of hearing.

The Mengliang Cliff was a tall sharp crag without a single tree or bush on it. Even the wild grass grew sparsely in its cracks. At its foot, the water swirled and churned. There were dangerous reefs and undercurrents, so it was considered the most treacherous section of the gorge. The beacon, therefore, warned ships with its red light that they must keep to the far bank. It had been quite a job setting up that beacon. The scaffolding alone had taken a fortnight and afterwards a dozen men worked on it for eleven days. Mei-ying knew about it. As a river worker

in the locality herself, she had gone with her mates to look at the remarkable beacon with its great square lantern. She knew that the daily tending of it was no easy job as you couldn't reach the cliff direct by boat—the water was too swift and treacherous. You had to land further up river, make a little detour by a mountain path and then climb a sheer cliff.

She was always telling Yung-kuei, "For heaven's sake be careful when you go up and down Mengliang Cliff."

To which Yung-kuei used to retort, "Take more than a cliff to beat young people like us!"

She must go to Mengliang Cliff; she must join him! Yes, she was sure she ought to go and help her man. One beacon light out on the river and it paralysed the whole navigation signal system and night navigation had to stop. She wasn't so much worried about a bit of delay of shipping as that there might be some dreadful accident. Yung-kuei was quite right to insist on going to see to such an important light, and he'd make a good job of it, too. Perhaps he had already finished it, but if so, why wasn't he back? She could understand his not starting the motor when he left the junk, but she was certain that he would go at full speed as soon as the boat was out of hearing. And he'd know that she would be worrying about him and would try to get back as quickly as possible. But then the storm was really bad: he must be in trouble and needing her help.

The second telephone call convinced Mei-ying more than ever that things had gone wrong with the beacon light. Seizing the opportunity when the others were busy baling water out of the boat, she took off her soaking shoes and walked bare-footed, to the aft cabin. Forcing herself to be calm she checked over in her mind the detailed process of lighting a signal lantern. Then she put on a life-jacket, picked up a lantern, checked the oil, the case and the pedestal carefully and walked swiftly to the gangway. Jumping lightly into her own little boat she placed the precious lantern under a tarpaulin to keep it out of the rain and turned to examine the oars and the punt-pole. When she had assured herself that everything was in order she untied the boat. Standing in the stern, one hand on the rudder and the other working the oar, she carefully steered the boat down the river.

All along the fairway signal lights blinked merrily. Her little boat drove through the driving rain. Roaring waves broke over the prow and rushed at her. But she stood as firm as if she were part of the boat. Only when the towering waves seemed particularly vicious did she dodge their impact.

Ordinarily she could have told which was Mengliang Cliff, but it was different now that she no longer had the beacon to guide her. The night was pitch-black. How on earth was she to recognize Mengliang Cliff? She had only been on this section of the river a couple of times, and she didn't know the fairway or the mountains along the banks as well as she did elsewhere. Though she could trust the buoy lights and steer the boat



without fear, she had no way of finding out whether she was near the cliff she wanted. Suppose she had already drifted past Mengliang! Suppose. . . . The treacherous river, the dreadful gorge, and, worst of all, the race, the hidden reefs and the rocks at the foot of Mengliang . . . heaven knows how many boats had been lost there!

Enough of that! This was no time for speculation.

A flash of lightning rent the sky, cutting across the darkness and lighting up the rocks and rolling waters stretching before her. She rowed onwards for a space and then, when she thought she must be near the spur, ran to the other end of the boat, stretched out the pole and stuck it fast against the rocky shore. The boat stopped. She clung to the pole with all her might, leaning over till she was almost lying flat. She simply mustn't let go or the boat would be washed down the river. Rain mixed with hot sweat poured down her arms, but she held on. Probably Mengliang Cliff was just round the corner, and heaven knows how much effort it would mean to row upstream again on such a stormy night.

Patiently she waited for the next flash of lightning. This time she caught sight of Mengliang very close at hand. Strange! The red beacon light was shining.

She had felt all but completely spent but now it seemed as if she was suddenly filled with great strength. Forgetting the rain and the gale, she turned the rudder with expert skill and the little boat headed for the mooring rock upstream from Mengliang Cliff. The prow bumped lightly against the rock and nosed in quietly alongside Yung-kuei's boat. Going ashore she had to walk up a boulder-strewn path before she reached the foot of the cliff. Cupping her hands round her mouth, she shouted, "Yung-kuei, Yung-kuei!"

The wind made her gasp and rain filled her mouth, but neither wind nor rain could stop her voice. It got stronger and stronger until it reached Yung-kuei's ears. When his answering call came down from the top of the cliff, she called out, "Now that the light's on, hurry up and come down." She said this several times before Yung-kuei shouted, "I can't."

Mei-ying realized that he must be doing something he couldn't leave off: there was no other reason for him to stay on the cliff once the light was on. "Well," she told herself, "I've come to help him. I must go up."

She looked at the beacon light again. Yes, it did look rather faint. "What's the matter with the light?" she called.

After several attempts she got his answer, "It's not working properly."

Mei-ying slung the spare lantern she had brought across her shoulders; and made ready to climb up. But one look at the precipitous cliff told her she must be very careful or the lantern would smash against the hard rock. She moved it further up her back and began scaling the crag. Her hands eagerly groped for cracks in the rocky surface, or better still, for wild grass to hold on to while her feet moved gingerly up the wall-like cliff. Her heaving breast was close against the wall of stone and

she felt her heart pumping as if it would have burst but for the pressure of the rock against it. The heavy lantern seemed like a ton weight on her back, dragging her down. One slip and she would go hurtling down into the river, and that would be the end of it. But Mei-ying wasn't worried about falling into the bottomless pit; her mind was on the lantern on her back.

"Take more than a cliff to beat young people like us!" Yung-kuei's voice seemed to be speaking in her ear.

"I'll make it! I will make it!" she told herself, and it seemed as if Yung-kuei were calling to her to come up. She felt a new strength in her limbs and climbed with redoubled effort. And then Yung-kuei stretched out a strong arm and pulled her up.

As soon as she had removed the lantern from her back she lay on the rock, all out. "The beacon . . . what's the trouble?" she gasped.

"Hit by lightning and all the oil leaked out."

"Then what are you using?"

"My flashlight. The downstream boat team is due any moment."

So that was it. "You'd better switch over to this," she said, as she bent down to drink from a little pool of water on the rock.

"Mei-ying, you certainly can handle a boat! To think in all this wave and storm. . . ."

"You forget I was born and bred in the gorge. I learnt to swim before I could walk," replied Mei-ying with a grin.

He lighted the lantern she had brought and the red signal light flashed out as usual. A sudden thought struck her. "Yung-kuei," she asked, "doesn't your flashlight give a white light?"

"Oh, that was easy," said Yung-kuei, "I'd given myself a bit of a gash, and a smear of blood on the bulb worked a treat!"

"The signals are a godsend," said Mei-ying. "Without the buoys on the river I'd have had a pretty hard job getting here."

"Without the buoys, you wouldn't have got here at all."

"Oh yes I would, with them or without!"

"Why were you so set on coming?" asked Yung-kuei with an affectionate smile.

"To get the lantern to you, of course," said Mei-ying, but her eyes said much more than that. They smiled at each other happily.

*Translated by Tang Sheng*

## A TRIP TO THE TIENSHAN

Pi Yeh



The month of July is so hot in Sinkiang at the edge of the Gobi desert that one can barely draw a breath. The best thing one can do is mount a horse and ride up into the Tienshan range that divides Sinkiang into north and south. The horses from both Ili in the north and Yenching in the south are thoroughbreds, so they carry you up the mountain paths as if you were travelling on the plain, swift and sure-footed.

Up on Tienshan, you have left the heat of the Gobi far behind, while the cool breath of the snow-capped mountains comes to you as fresh as an autumn breeze. The sky is blue above the snowy peaks, while the shadow of some cloud flitting by makes them look like a tapestry of white threaded with silvery strands. The streams of melting snow that rush down over the crags are like so many silver necklaces. At the foot of the mountain these foaming waters form depressions and spray the air seemingly with myriads of white lilies. As the streams slow down in their course, you can see the fish romping in the swirling water. When you let your horse have a drink, you see every pebble crystal clear and the

light spectrum on the rocks, while the fish give liveliness of movement to the whole scene.

You travel up and up and ride through virgin forests covering the mountain slopes beneath the snow-line, the pines standing close and tall, their branches overhanging each other so thickly that the sunlight only trickles through. You hear no other sound but the hoof-beats of your horse syncopated by the flowing water. In the depth of this forest you see hardly any birds, and their cries come to you from afar. In places, you find the charred skeletons of a few trees which show that hunters made their camp here. All sorts of animals are found in the Tienshan range — wild goats, wild oxen, wild camels and deer.

We said that, at the beginning of our journey, the climate is that of autumn; the farther we travel along the Tienshan mountains, the more it becomes like spring. The colours gradually soften as the landscape changes to less vigorous forms. The streams wash around the rocks more calmly, wild flowers stand on both sides higher than your horse, dazzling the eye like a rainbow with their red, yellow, blue, white and purple. Some of these flowers are over eight inches in diameter, while one petal may be as large as the palm of your hand. You need not dismount — you merely stretch out your hands and pick as huge and fresh a bouquet as you like!

### *Bewitching Pasture-lands*

Among the ranges of snowy peaks you suddenly come upon a marvellous, vast pasture-land. The green of the virgin forest and the rich colours of the wild flowers give it a startling hem. Streams flow through it, and both sides are grown with lush grass. The grassland stretches evenly before you, like a becalmed sea. The white felt yurts of the Mongolian people stand out in the sunshine. Wherever you look, you see flocks of fat sheep, herds of cattle and horses grazing over this pasture-land. They are chewing the juicy grass which makes their fur sleek. The brown, speckled and white cattle that dot the jade-green land make it look like a vast piece of embroidery.

From time to time, the wind wafts to you a jingling sound which is made by the metal ornaments on the clothes of the Kazakh girls looking after the cattle. The girls who sit so gracefully on their spirited horses, the snow-capped mountains and the blue sky, give you a sense of beauty that makes your heart contract. The girls laugh as they spur their horses to race each other; when they dismount, they stroll by their animals and move their short whips in rhythm with their love-songs.

This pasture-land on Tienshan among the peaks and forests full of flowers makes you feel as if you were deep down on the plain, while actually you are two or three thousand metres above sea level. The clouds come over so low here, they seem to touch the ground; sometimes they envelop the herds before they dissolve into a sprinkle of rain. Thus

it is difficult to distinguish at a distance between what is cloud and what is herd. After a shower like this, the grassland becomes even greener and has a fresher scent.

The most bewitching time is the dusk, when the sun is sinking behind the snowy peaks and gilding the clouds. The glow of the mountains reaches down to the pasture-land and transforms it into a luminous world of gold and brilliance. The yurts, the herds and the girls all are dipped into this rosy shimmer. When the sun has set and twilight faded away, the grassland is wrapped in a grey mantle. Then a sea of red-glowing spots appear—the herdsmen have lit their fires under their copper cauldrons for the evening meal.

You need not hesitate to make any one of the yurts your home for the night. Just walk towards the closest one and the hospitable Kazakh people in it will make you welcome, as if you were their own brother. If you are thirsty, you first have a drink of mare's milk; your pangs of hunger will be stilled by roasted mutton chops with cheese and fried pancakes, after which nobody will begrudge you the amount you care to eat together with your hosts.

After the meal, when the cow dung under the cooking tripod is turning to ashes, the sound of the *domboro* and the sweetly melodious voices of the Kazakh girls come to you on the breezes of the night wind. This means that a number of families have gathered in one of the larger yurts to round off the day.

Then the grassland falls silent in the quiet of the night. If you pull a sheepskin over your shoulders and come out of the yurt, you see in the dim light of the moon or the stars the cattle moving around slowly before they, too, rest in the tranquil air where the only sound is made by the murmur of the stream.

#### *Wild Horses, Mushrooms, Beavers, Snow Lilies*

When dawn comes to the pasture-land, you find a greater number of horses than there were at nightfall; as soon as you approach, they will divide into two groups, one of which will gallop away, their long manes streaming down their sides in the morning breeze—they are wild horses that, during the night, have mingled with the domesticated breeds. These wild horses, swift and alert, roam where they please, led by a few sleek steeds. When they meet their tamed brothers, they rub noses and mingle with them, grazing and frolicking. But as soon as the herdsmen emerge from their yurts in the morning, they are off into the distance. They are very careful in keeping the mares and colts away from humans. Shy as they are, you can sometimes see them against the morning horizon, their shiny manes reaching down to the wrists.

When the sun lights all the grassland it is the best time to look for mushrooms. The mushrooms on Tienshan are big, tender and sweet. Pull in the reins of your horse and look around—you will see patches of a

deeper green, and in these, mushrooms are plentiful. You can easily fill your pockets, cap and saddle-bag with them, picking them with both hands because they are so fresh and juicy. You wash them in the clear stream and cook them without oil or salt, but still they taste delicious. If you have lamb chops to go with them, you will think you are attending a feast.

Tienshan can boast of many strange creatures, for instance, beavers. On the edge of the pasture-land, at the foot of the mountains, you will see many burrows they have dug. They hibernate for the six months from September or October till April or May the following spring. When the grass they like best is available in midsummer, they fatten up on it till their fur is a rich, dark-brown, and they waddle so slowly on their short paws, their bellies touching the ground, that you can easily catch any number of them.

Another one of the strange things on Tienshan are the white snow lilies. They grow in the crevices between the rocks above the snow-line, nourished by the melting snow, swaying gracefully in the brilliant sunlight. This flower, growing thousands of metres above sea level on the snowy peaks, is sought after as a precious medicinal herb.

#### *A Natural Lake and a Valley of Wild Apple Trees*

Among the crags of Tienshan you often find a large lake whose calm and clear waters mirror the snowy peaks and white clouds. In this remote spot the only movement is made by wild swans with white plumage, their cries only adding to the majestic stillness. People say the colour of the mountain changes, but the colour of the lake changes, too: At first sight, the water is blue-green, but when the wind ripples it, it becomes a silvery white, as if thousands of fish were swimming in it. From where you stand on the shore, you see the water clearly divide into silvery white, light blue, emerald-green and dark jade-green. Local legend has it that this lake was created from the tears an unhappy Kazakh girl wept, and the changing colours reflect the changes of her mood.

But the present-day compatriots of this girl graze their animals beside the lake, its water nourishes the grass on which the sheep fatten, and the ewes' milk feeds the younger generation of Kazakhs. This lake of the Kazakh people's sufferings has, today, become the symbol of their happiness. The herdsmen grazing their sheep around the lake have more and more animals with the passing years, they lead a happy life with their wives and children, a new life they express in happy songs.

The melting snow flows down from the mountains into the lake and thence has carved itself an outlet through the rocks, deep down into the plain. From a height this outflow looks like a white flash, when you stand near, you feel the vibration of it beating against the rocks, while the foam it sends up into the air glistens in all colours under the sunlight. Both sides of this green valley are dotted with white felt yurts, and

there are many fruit trees. In spring, the blossoms scent the air; in autumn, the ripe fruit makes this a paradise for birds and animals, since humans have rarely found their way here. In one of these valleys, there are wild apple trees as far as you can see, the local people say for all of 180 miles. Old trees have decayed and new trees sprung up, the fruit has rotted away in a thick layer on the ground, with nobody to gather it.

But now it's different — people have discovered this big, wild orchard and they are rearing pigs on its fruits, big white, Ukrainian pigs. And a plan for building a distillery here to make apple-cider on a big scale is already being drawn up.

*Translated by Ruth Weiss and Wu Jui-lin*

## SCENES OF THE GRASSLANDS

Hsiao Ch'ien

The train dropped us at Saihan Tal and continued its long, weary journey towards the People's Republic of Mongolia. Even from far away the sound the wheels made on the tracks could still be heard in the quiet air, while its whistle seemed to bring us its last admonitions, letting us go only grudgingly.

The Chining-Erhlien Line cuts right through the western part of the Silingol League. If we compare the grasslands to the sea, then Saihan Tal is its only port. For people who have always lived on land, travel by sea is a great novelty, to be undertaken with a mixture of curiosity and fear.

Vehicles that have seats are easy to use, like paper divided into squares for writing Chinese characters. But when eight of us climbed on a lorry without any seats we did not know at all how to arrange ourselves, especially since it was already packed so that there wasn't enough room no matter how we sat. All we could do was huddle in one corner in a circle, our sixteen legs crammed into the centre.

When we had thus settled down somehow, we were ready to examine the other passengers on the lorry. There was a bemedalled soldier, several men and women were in cadre uniform, a Mongolian wore a deep-red gown. Most of them were probably going to the grasslands for the first time just as we were. We would have to spend two days together to cover a three hundred miles' distance. So we nodded cordially to one another.

"Where are you bound for?" I asked the young man who had wriggled in back to back with me.

"For Silinhot," he replied. "You see, we are recent graduates and we're assembling in Silinhot. From there we'll be assigned to different places." He pointed at the group of boys and girls, none older than eighteen or nineteen, to which he belonged. A short, pretty girl in blue uniform was among them, sitting next to the Mongolian, with a white scarf tied around her head. Another girl was teasing her for having called her mother baby-fashion in her sleep the night before. The short one pouted and pulled her fist out of the general mêlée to pound her tormentor playfully.

"Assigned to do what?" I continued my questioning. But it really was stupid of me to ask when there was all sorts of prospecting equipment lying this way and that under the young people's feet.

The passengers were becoming impatient. Why wasn't the lorry starting yet? If you travelled through the grasslands, you might as well start early, so as to be sure to make a village or other stopping place by nightfall.

At last the station-master appeared and, with a business-like glance at his wrist watch, blew a whistle. On the autumn grasslands it sounded lugubriously sharp, but the solemn occasion, even though it was only a poorly equipped lorry he was dispatching, called forth our respect.

The engine started and the lorry with its red pennant inscribed "Safe Driving" roared like a steed, eager to carry its master off in full gallop. Everyone on the lorry was excited, for all had been looking forward to this moment for many days through all the twists and turns of the long train journey. Now we were going to have the traveller's greatest thrill — to be able to explore a far-away place we had never visited before, where the customs and the very geography were so different from what we were used to. We felt a novel feeling stirring in us.

My first impression of the grasslands was that they were so much like the sea! Only on the sea do sky and earth connect so nicely, like two lengths of cloth sewn together. Only the sea can be so calm and broad, like a picture without a frame. Only on the sea can one feel so ridiculously small and shelterless that one is afraid of getting lost.

The wind roared at us like thousands of soldiers advancing on horseback. The yellow tips of the withering grass swayed; the blades flashed in silvery light. Occasionally a thin, mast-like stick was seen against the horizon. Getting closer, one would discover that it was the stick a Mongolian herdsman uses to drive horses with as he rides along in his deep-red gown, with a gun swung over his shoulder. These sturdy people on horseback excite one's passionate admiration whenever one catches sight of them.

To get from Saihan Tal to Zun Sunid we had to cross Tamchin Tal, which used to be called a "dried-up sea" — probably it was a sea hundreds of thousands of years ago. For about seventy miles there was not a single

drop of water to be found, nor any human being; it's an area herdsman and traveller alike are afraid to pass. There was nothing on the boundless plain to tell us where we were at all, except an occasional lonely mound by the highway that might have been the grave of a traveller or, simply, a pile of stones on which to light a bonfire. Seen from afar, the black stones were like wild animals lying in wait for their prey, while the cattle and horses grazing here and there looked like huge rocks.

Perhaps because the area lies a thousand feet above sea level, it seemed one could touch the sky with one's hand. We became especially aware of the quickly drifting clouds. They rolled and flew and danced madly against the background of blue sky, now like so many lions, now turning into a broad coal seam. As the lorry was racing towards them, rain drops began to fall from the coal seam. But when you peeped out from under the tarpaulin instead of watching through the open back of the lorry, you found that beyond the black clouds the land was still bathed in the sun's golden rays. And even before the downpour stopped, the sun appeared between the clouds like a thin gauze curtain.

Then we beheld a magnificent scene: a perfect rainbow rising from the grasslands to the sky — perfect because both ends were clearly to be seen.

Soon the wind blew the clouds away and the rain stopped. The clouds turned fleecy white again. Some were like the ribs of a skeleton, some like scattered islands on which ancient pine and cedar trees could be seen vaguely. Some had been blown into such narrow strips that they looked like half-transparent fish swimming leisurely in the blue sky.

Under this sky the highway was like a yellow ribbon with many bends. When the lorry went uphill, it was as if we were on a big road leading straight up to Heaven. But on a level place, we were back on the boundless grasslands again.

"Look there — wild goats!" someone shouted excitedly.

Hundreds of light-brown goats were frisking about to the right of the highway. One of our fellow-passengers told us that, when motor traffic had first been extended to this area, the Silingol League, the goats thought it great fun to run near the lorries and even cross in front of them to and fro, like naughty children.

Some time after that, the lorry slowed down as the engine started coughing. After a while, it stopped altogether and refused to be coaxed back into motion. A break-down in this out-of-the-way place was the last thing we wanted, but to get off the lorry for a little while and stretch our legs was a very welcome diversion for all of us.

The grasslands are like the sea. . . . But can the captain of a ship let his passengers alight on the sea and appreciate the scenery? Also, to look at the grasslands from a lorry in motion is quite a different thing from standing right on them. On the lorry I had thought that there was

only one kind of grass on the grasslands. But to my great surprise I found there was a feathery kind of grass redder than maple leaves, another, silvery kind, and the grass for which Inner Mongolia is famous, that grows in bunches like reeds and is the best raw material for the paper from which banknotes are made. If we had come earlier in the year, we would have found wild lilies and tulips in bloom. I pulled some blades of grass whose colour attracted me — somebody soon enough told me that this was the camels' favourite, while horses preferred another kind.

Suddenly we discovered there were many semi-precious stones around and bent down to gather them. They had the most interesting shapes and bright colours. There was a kind of cream-coloured stone almost transparent, with a pattern inside that could be seen against the sun. Some of us exclaimed thinking they had found a real agate, while others thought they'd got hold of crystal. . . .

A hawk circled above, searching for prey. In the grasslands where there is no shelter of any kind, the animals burrow into the earth for protection, so that the ground wherever you look is riddled with holes. Snakes, moles, lizards, and even swallows may be seen coming out of such holes for which, apparently, the hawks are watching.

We heard the sound of an engine some way off. This meant another lorry was coming. We put down the semi-precious stones we had collected and ran towards the sound, like grassland goats. In these regions, more than anywhere else, human beings are dependent on one another. If something drops off a lorry in front, the lorry behind will stop and pick it up. If one lorry breaks down, the other will stop to lend a helping hand. The new lorry did stop. As its driver and assistant driver got off, they were immediately collared by our team. All four of them bent over our lorry's open bonnet like doctors and nurses over a patient, and consulted.

I cast a look into our lorry — two people had not got off with the rest. The young man who had been sitting behind me was pouring water from a flask for someone stretched out beside him. When I looked closer, I found it was the short girl in blue uniform, her face pale now, her brows contracted, her hair dishevelled. Quite obviously, she didn't take the strenuous journey at all well.

Then another lorry loaded to the top came up, with goods piled high above the driver's cab. As it pulled up, the door swung open and out jumped a girl driver in a man's suède jacket, with a green silk scarf around her neck. Her cap, perched on the back of her head, only emphasized her thick black hair.

"What's wrong?" she called in clear Shansi dialect.

"Don't worry, we'll be all right soon! Go ahead!" two of the consultants called back.

She hesitated a little before she climbed into the lorry again and started the engine.



It was entertaining enough to look for semi-precious stones on the grasslands, but we were, after all, anxious to continue our journey. Someone asked the drivers what was wrong, and one of them said the lorry had a bit of "heart trouble," which is the proper way to put it if the engine of a lorry gives out in the midst of nowhere. To me, the most beautiful sound while travelling is when the engine starts again, after repairs are done and the bonnet is banged down shut.

After our lorry had thus been given the necessary treatment, it was ready once again like a strong horse to gallop at full speed across the grasslands.

It seemed we had passed the "dried-up sea." A long, silvery strip of water appeared on the horizon — perhaps a lake of some size? Then there were flocks of cattle and yurts standing close in groups. There were suddenly also birds in great number. Albatrosses alighted in twos and threes by the roadside meditatively turning their heads towards the sky. They flew off only when the lorry came quite close, as if to show off their gleaming wings. There were also little birds flying overhead, chirping and showing their soft white breast. Somebody espied a tree from afar that really was a tree. The fierce winds of the region had bent it and there it stood, crooked but sturdy.

Something was moving on the horizon as orderly as a row of teeth — they were ox-drawn carts transporting salt across the grasslands.

Because of the rains the road was very bumpy. Sometimes we were thrown up into the air and stayed there several seconds before dropping back on our seats. The next bounce would make it quite uncertain whether our innards were still in their places! Covered with dust as we were from the long journey, we felt like mud-pies, and even those who had been feeling well up to this time, were looking for pills. . . .

The little girl in blue uniform was the first to get car-sick, and the strong wind made us all her victims, although the Mongolian sitting next to her got the worst, all over his deep-red gown. Now he took a handkerchief from his sleeve, not to attend to his own clothes first, but to those of the poor, car-sick girl.

Nor did her fellow-prospectors leave her in the lurch. One offered her medicine, another poured her some water. But since the lorry was going so fast against the wind, most of the water did not reach the cup, but blew in a fine sprinkle into our faces as well.

The girl was very sorry for the mess she had made of her neighbour's clothing; now he was so kind to her! She crumpled her handkerchief into a ball and tried to wipe his gown with it. To the other people around her she said apologetically, with a brave, little smile: "I feel better now."

"A tent, a tent!" someone called out. We were as happy as if we had sighted a lighthouse on an uncharted sea.

The tent was the stop at Zun Sum where the lorry added water and where drivers and travellers took a little rest. Another lorry was parked in front of the white tent. We still had another nearly forty miles to go that day. . . .

The driver stood there, wiping the sweat mixed with dust from his face as he said reassuringly to us passengers: "Don't worry, you won't have to bounce up and down on this road much longer! They're surveying now for a highway and buses have already been imported from Hungary. This winter there'll be heated buses running on the grasslands, just think of it!"

The passengers who, only a moment ago, had been complaining about all their bones being out of joint from the lorry's jolts, now felt happy and relieved at these prospects.

The other lorry was starting up again just as our driver was ready to amble over for a chat. In solace to his obvious disappointment, the girl driver put her head out of the cabin window and called, "See you in Zun Sunid!"

The hills that surrounded Zun Sum gave the place natural protection against the wind. In the white tent you could get boiling water that showed a sandy colour when put into a white enamel mug and left the bottom of the mug covered with sand. But on the grasslands even such sandy water is priceless. The herdsmen and their cattle within an area of over thirty miles were dependent on a well some two dozen yards from the tent. An ox-drawn water-cart was pulled up near the well and two Mongolian girls were pulling up water. Obviously they had come a long way, so they let the animals quench their thirst too after the cart was filled up.

Behind the tent some workers were busy making bricks. The driver, standing at the door of the tent, a big bowl of hot water that steamed his face in his hands, said in a definitive tone of voice: "You can't tell about the grasslands! There's only a tent here now, but there may be a big building instead when you come next time." And for emphasis, he drank down the water in one big gulp, as if it were the purest nectar.

His confident smile and tone of voice was a great encouragement for all of us who were on the grasslands for the first time. When the lorry went on again, we made the land reverberate with our singing. Even the girl who had been sick only a while ago joined in *The Sun Never Sets on the Grasslands*.

Mongolian temples are built half way up a hill, usually facing south, while obos or stone altars, with twigs stuck in their middle, probably for worshipping the mountain god, are piled up on the rocky outcrop on top. The main halls of the temples invariably have pointed golden roofs. As far as seven miles away from the Zun Sunid banner we caught sight of the obos first and then of the golden temple roof reflecting the sunlight.

Like children the world over, the Mongolian Young Pioneers loved running after a lorry, racing this noisy thing with all the strength in their little limbs. In the lead was a boy in Mongolian boots and a dark-blue gown with four orange buttons on the upper part. A light-green sash was tied around his waist. Atop his red Pioneer scarf a blushing but mischievous little face was smiling. Shouting his welcome in Mongolian as he ran, he was a pleasure to behold in his youthful vigour.

When the lorry pulled up at the next stop, our interpreter was the first to alight. Dumbfounded, he turned to us: "I don't recognize a thing, everything has changed so since I came here last, a year ago!" Even I, a complete newcomer, could see the new houses, rows and rows of them, around an old lama temple. Although everything was rather primitive—three rooms in a mud hut might proclaim themselves a "department store"; two other rooms bore the signboard "Hsinhua Book Store"; meteorological equipment was installed on the roofs of a number of mud huts—it was clear that modern business methods, as well as the new culture and science with which man can control nature, were beginning to strike roots here. And if one should come back here in a year or two, he would say again, "How everything has changed!"

We took our luggage down, washed our faces and went into the canteen. I was surprised that, after all these hundreds of miles, we still hadn't got away from the canteen system—buy your food tickets first, then wait at your table till your order is brought to you. The only difference was that here you saw people in different clothes—Mongolian and Han—line up together to buy tickets, while you couldn't distinguish one language from the other in the general hubbub, and that here one smelled the strong smell of milk products for the first time on the whole trip.

A young woman in slacks sat in a corner of the canteen, one foot pulled up on the bench. She looked rather familiar, I thought. A large platter of meat patties stood before her. She pushed her cap up at a saucy angle and her hair under it, then attacked the patties with relish. Next to her sat a Mongolian girl in boots and brown gown with a saffron silk sash around her waist. She had a leather brief-case slung over one shoulder by a strap so that it looked as if she had a breast-feeding baby nestling in her arms that got in her way when she ate. Probably she was a local government employee.

Suddenly the young prospectors ran into an old schoolmate. Crowded round a cart they were chatting away, in front of the canteen. The girl who had been sick had cleaned herself up and was sitting on the shaft of the cart, gesticulating as she was talking and laughing with the rest. They were probably relating their experiences on the way or asking for news about their destination.

Only when the girl in the corner had finished all the meat patties, did I recognize her as the girl driver we had met on the way. It would

be fun talking to her if she were also staying overnight at this place, I was thinking. But, wiping her mouth, she walked out of the canteen, climbed into the cabin of her lorry and started the engine. She put her head out of the window and sounded the horn, as she reversed the lorry carefully.

An old man squatting on the steps smoking a pipe asked her why she didn't stay for the night.

"No, grandpa," she smiled at him sweetly. "I think I'd better rest at the next stop only, get a bit further on, this way!"

As I turned, I saw that the Mongolian girl with the leather bag was mounting her horse, too.

The lorry loaded with goods was off again into the grasslands which were now bathed in the glow of the sunset. What were these goods—everyday necessities or construction materials? But the important thing is not really what goods the lorry was carrying, but the young hearts that beat behind its wheel—hearts full of ideals and enthusiasm to conquer the grasslands and make them habitable.

*Translated by Yu Fan-chin*

## Controversy over Art and Literature

On May 26, 1956 at a meeting of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the All-China Federation of Writers and Artists Lu Ting-yi, director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, made a speech\* in which he explained the policy of the Communist Party on art, literature and science. "If we want art, literature and science to flourish," he said, "we must apply a policy of letting flowers of many kinds blossom, letting diverse schools of thought contend."

This policy, Lu Ting-yi continued, "means that we stand for freedom of independent thinking, of debate, of creative work; freedom to criticize and freedom to express, maintain and reserve one's opinions on questions of art, literature or scientific research."

"... It means freedom among the people. And we urge that, as the people's political power becomes progressively consolidated, such freedom should be given ever fuller scope."

Turning to works of art and literature Lu Ting-yi said: "The Party has only one point to make, that is, that they should 'serve the workers, peasants and soldiers,' or, in terms of today, serve the working people as a whole, intellectuals included. Socialist realism, in our view, is the most fruitful creative method, but it is not the only method. Provided he sets out to meet the needs of the workers, peasants and soldiers, the writer can choose whatever method he thinks will best enable him to write well, and he can vie with others. As to subject-matter, the Party has never set limits to this. ... If literature and art are to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, it stands to reason that we must praise the new society and positive people. But at the same time we must also criticize the old society and negative elements; we must praise what is progressive and criticize what is backward. So the choice of subject-matter in literature is extremely wide. ... Taboos and commandments about choice of subject-matter can only hamstring art and literature and result in writing to formula and bad taste; they can only do harm. As for questions relating

\*Let Flowers of Many Kinds Blossom, Diverse Schools of Thought Contend by Lu Ting-yi, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1957.

to the specific characteristics of art and literature, the creation of the typical, and so on, they must be the subject of free discussion among writers and artists, letting them freely hammer out differences of opinion till they gradually reach agreement.

"In the theatre we have already had experience of applying the principle, 'Let flowers of many kinds blossom side by side, weed through the old to let the new emerge.' That has been most valuable. What we must do now is to apply the same principle to all other branches of art and literature."

Lu Ting-yi's speech was extremely well received by intellectuals throughout the country. A new atmosphere appeared in the fields of art, creative writing and scientific research. A bigger variety of themes have been written about, and diverse ideas and views have emerged to vie with one another in the various branches of learning.

Not everyone in the world of letters, however, has shown a proper understanding of the positive significance of this new policy. Some were alarmed the moment they saw a few unhealthy writings among all that were published, and jumped to the conclusion that this was the upshot of the policy. They complained that the "blossoming" had gone out of hand and that "contending" had become chaotic. Whether they were conscious of it or not, these persons wanted the policy changed or at least adopted with limitations. Representative of this kind of opinion was the article "Our Views on Contemporary Literature and Art" by Chen Chi-tung and three others which was printed in the *Jenminjihpao* (People's Daily) on January 7, 1957. It aroused widespread interest; newspapers and literary magazines all over the country carried articles with different views on the question. In order to help intellectuals get a clearer understanding of the policy, the Shanghai Wen Wei Pao interviewed Chou Yang, vice-director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. His answers are reprinted here as well as several other articles of a representative nature and the original article by Chen Chi-tung and others.

—Editor

## OPPOSE DOCTRINAIRE AND PETTY-BOURGEOIS THINKING

Mao Tun

About eight months ago the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China made the proposal "Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" — a long-term policy to enable our academic work, our literature and art to perpetuate our finest traditions while expanding them along new paths, to assimilate the best that may be produced in a widened range of activity. It would hardly be reasonable to expect them to show any brilliant new achievements in only eight months. Nevertheless, even during the short time which has elapsed, not only have many new things emerged to vie with one another, but we have also attained what I think deserves to be called a first harvest. We have progressed too in our efforts to conquer doctrinairism and sectarianism — those enemies of academic research and artistic creation.

Of course, it hasn't been as easy as some people anticipated. We are not yet "blooming" and "contending" in a big way, and in the course of opposing doctrinairism a few of us have revealed a rather rightist attitude. The latter has manifested itself in an uncritical writing off of all our past accomplishments; in a relaxation of, or even contempt for, the study of Marxism; in an over-emphasis of the special nature of the arts; in using this special nature as an excuse to weaken the ideological aspect of literature and art — to the point of doubting that they should serve the working people, to the point of doubting the function of a Marxist world outlook as an ideological guide to artistic creation.

In literature we have seen the appearance of "love for love's sake" and pornographic writings, as well as works soggy with mawkish introspection, works much concerned with the triviality of life and almost devoid of any thought content. Someone has even come forward with the strange theory that the source of all schematic, stereotyped work in literature and art is the line of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers.

These erroneous ideas, these "weeds" and "poisonous herbs" which we so dislike, are manifestation of petty-bourgeois thinking. As long as the petty bourgeoisie continue to exist, their ideology is sure to make itself felt. But while we should not shut up our eyes to it, neither should we

let it panic us. Our literature and art are essentially healthy; they are going forward.

Rightist thinking is apparent in all branches of the arts to a greater or lesser degree and this, of course, has attracted widespread attention and caused some dismay. I'm afraid quite a few people have been not just dismayed, but terrified. The article *Our Views on Contemporary Literature and Art* by Chen Chi-tung and three other comrades is typical of the reaction of a considerable number of people. While I sympathize with their concern for the worker-peasant-soldier literary principle and for the preservation of socialist literature, as well as their ardour in attacking petty-bourgeois thinking, I find their article unconvincing because its criticisms are doctrinaire. It not only fails to strike an effective blow against petty-bourgeois thinking, but it gives its readers the impression that there is more harm than good in encouraging free contention in the arts and sciences. To the great majority of our intellectuals, just in the process of new creative activity under the stimulus of this line, the article is like a dash of cold water.

Its writers did not compare and correctly evaluate the relative strength of the positive socialist forces in the arts as against that of the backward petty-bourgeois elements. Observing that since June of last year some "weeds" and "poisonous herbs" have appeared among the "flowers" and that a few queer and muddled theories have been advanced during debates among the diverse "schools," they did not take the trouble to analyse, but jumped to the conclusion: "This has weakened the fighting spirit of our art and literature, blurred the face and muffled the voice of our age, obscuring the splendour of socialist construction in the art and literature which should reflect it." This is not in keeping with the facts.

The article poses a number of important literary questions, such as the choice of themes about "trivial domestic affairs" and "sentimental slush," the problem of schematic and stereotyped writing, the unearthing and re-editing of traditional dramas, discussions of socialist realism, and so on. Unfortunately, Comrade Chen Chi-tung and his co-writers oversimplify these questions in their article. Instead of examining them comprehensively, they lightly dismiss any views which do not coincide with their own. This kind of criticism is doctrinaire — it will convince no one. They categorize the views some comrades raise about socialist realism as "sceptical and abrogatory," "the products of petty-bourgeois thinking in the arts." It is difficult to agree with such a judgement.

They oppose petty-bourgeois thinking in the arts. With this opposition I completely agree; moreover, I feel it should be one of the major elements of our ideological approach to art and literature. But in the course of this struggle in our thinking we must be careful not to hark back to the same old dogmatic tunes; we must oppose doctrinairism with all our might. The simple laying down of restrictions against "blooming"

and "contention" will not solve anything. Eliminating petty-bourgeois thinking is a long-term, complicated and painstaking job. Our criticism should be motivated by a desire to win over the man being criticized; it should result in a new unity with him on a new basis after criticism and struggle. We should let everyone "bloom" and "contend." We should throw open the doors to free discussion, and in the course of these discussions educate our people in Marxism-Leninism. Let us encourage and help people in the arts to go deeply into life, into struggle, into socialist construction, so that they may improve their thinking.

There is a theory now going round to this effect: A writer's most important capital is experience in life, and truth is the "soul" of a creative work. This looks all right on the surface, but when you probe into it a bit you find another "theory" — that the study of Marxism-Leninism is unimportant, that it is not necessary for a writer to improve his thinking. In other words, a writer does not need a Marxist world outlook.

This so-called theory is wrong. If a writer does not have a Marxist world outlook, he's sure to have another kind — a bourgeois outlook, or perhaps even one that is tinged with feudalism. When he confronts life, or artistic creation, this is the outlook by which he is going to be guided. Isn't this rather dangerous?

I believe that a Marxist world outlook is something all we creative artists must have. I would like to see everyone in possession of this magic charm. But let's speak plainly: Unless the choice is left entirely to the author — after giving him an opportunity to study and experience life, after giving him collective, patient help — he's not really going to acquire it. If we were to demand that an author have a Marxist world outlook before writing anything, we would be unrealistic and setting too high a standard. What is more, if a writer (however sincerely) should demand it of himself as a condition prerequisite to putting pen to paper, he would either end up writing under the illusion that he had a firm grasp of Marxism, or remain inactive, paralysed by an uncertainty as to whether his ideological understanding was sufficient.

A Marxist world outlook is not an academic course in school, where you read a few texts, learn to say a few things on the subject, and are then considered to have mastered it. The test of whether a writer has acquired a Marxist world outlook is: Does he take a long and deep view of society? Can he pick out the key problems? Is he able to grasp the essence of social development? . . . Only his writings are the measure of whether he has these qualities.

The writer's best form of self-help, therefore, is continuous study, a never-ending experiencing of life, of taking part in struggle, and — writing and more writing. The best way others can help a writer is by scientifically criticizing his works. As to the critic, his knowledge of Marxist literary theory can be judged only by his criticism. Aside from study and writing, the critic's own best method of self-help is also the obtaining of

a broad understanding of life. The way to help the critic is by criticizing his criticism.

We don't have to fear that some of our "flowers" may not be too fragrant; we can rely on timely, friendly criticism that is careful and scientific. Nor need we worry that some of our "contention" may be too raucous; here we can criticize the critics, and engage in free debate.

What we should shun like the plague is doctrinaire criticism. This is the worst kind of criticism — whether directed against a creative work or against a critical article.

While opposing doctrinairism, we must, at the same time, oppose rightist thinking. These are two fronts of the same struggle. It is a long arduous task; don't think one campaign will solve all problems. Rather it will mean doing a bit wherever and whenever one can. But there also should be a comprehensive and long-range plan.

My own idea is that we writers should attack simultaneously from three angles: Intensify our study of Marxism-Leninism, plan our artistic creation, and plan our learning about life — that is, learning about the people and society. We've had quite a bit of experience in this regard, winning some successes, while revealing certain shortcomings.

Our most serious failings, it seems to me, have been formalism (in a part, though not in most, of our study and our learning about life), doctrinairism (primarily in our study), and uniformity (in setting up methods of study and in arranging for writers to learn about particular kinds of life).

We must all use our heads, sum up our experiences and improve our methods. To better our study and work methods, we should dig deeply into the essence of Chairman Mao's recent talk at the enlarged session of the State Council, "Toward a Correct Handling of the Contradictions Within the Ranks of the People." We should study the whole speech, not just the section dealing with free contention in the arts and sciences. It will help us greatly in overcoming our doctrinaire, bureaucratic and sectarian faults.

(From *People's Daily*, March 18, 1957)



## ANSWERS TO WEN WEI PAO CORRESPONDENT'S QUESTIONS

Chou Yang

*Deputy Director of the Propaganda Department of the Central  
Committee of the Communist Party*

**Q.** What important achievements have been made in science, art and literature since the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party put forward its policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend"?

**A.** It is hardly a year yet since this policy to promote the growth of the arts and sciences was put forward. So, of course, it's too much to expect that it should already have resulted in the production of great artistic, literary or scientific works. However, we already see some positive results. More and more people are taking part in free discussions held in academic circles. In the past twelve months there have been lively discussions on genetics, questions of Chinese history, the history of Chinese philosophy, aesthetics and realism in art and literature. There has been a notable increase in the number of periodicals devoted to scientific research, art and literature. They have sprouted, as the Chinese saying has it, "like bamboo shoots after a spring shower."

Thanks to this policy and the call "Forward to science!" more books on the arts and sciences were published last year than in the six years from 1950 to 1955.

Last year a great many traditional plays were re-edited and re-staged in various parts of the country. This is a big event in the theatrical world. More themes are being adopted by our writers and their styles are becoming more varied. Readers are paying more and more attention to the type of literature that boldly exposes and sharply criticizes the negative sides of life. All this is to the good; it's a fundamentally healthy and normal state of affairs and a sign of a flourishing state of activity in the arts and sciences.

The arts and sciences need suitable soil for their growth. A socialist society is naturally much more favourable for such a growth than a capitalist society, but we still have things in our society that hinder the growth of art and science, things like doctrinairism, sectarianism and such bureaucratic ways of work as "commandism" or bossiness in dealing with artistic and scientific affairs. It is these things that damp the keenness,

creative energy and initiative of artists and scientists, and prevent their work from getting the encouragement and support they deserve.

Many of our artists and scientists have, after years of self-education, begun to throw off the shackles of a bourgeois idealist world outlook. But now they find themselves confined to a greater or lesser degree by new shackles — the shackles of doctrinairism. Only when our intellectuals free themselves from these two kinds of shackles can they attain to a new ideological level, can their initiative be fully developed.

This policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" has given fresh impetus to the initiative of our intellectuals. An enhanced value is put on independent thinking and objective analysis; our intellectuals are casting out the old shibboleths and ridding themselves of the habit of blindly following too well-trodden paths. They are standing their ground for what they believe to be right and giving an effective rebuff to views and criticisms that are not well founded, no matter whose they are; they are boldly exposing and criticizing the undesirable things in our life.

Art and science are highly creative activities. Their devotees need courage to formulate new theories and put forward new ideas. It's quite true that we are showing more daring than before, but initiative and courage alone can not produce great works of art or science; we still need honest hard work. An artist, for instance, needs a wide experience of life and a high level of expressive skill; a scientist must have an immense amount of data at his disposal and follow a correct line of research. The most notable achievement since the implementing of this policy is that our artists and scientists are getting keener than ever on their work.

This policy has in fact proved to be an effective way of mobilizing all that is good and positive in the world of art and science to serve the common cause of socialist culture. But it is inevitable that certain undesirable things should also crop up. We can already see a recrudescence of idealism in academic studies, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois trends in art and literature and the tendency to take over all our cultural heritage without showing enough discrimination. But there is no reason to be alarmed by all this. This sort of thing is bound to happen.

Diverse ideas and viewpoints are bound to exist as long as the complex social conditions exist of which they are the reflection. We should be fully aware of the fact that under our social conditions the positive factors are always the guiding ones, the predominant ones, and that with the help of a correct policy some part of the negative factors may also be changed into something positive. For instance, much of the heritage of culture, created in feudal and capitalist times, can be adapted consciously to become part of our new culture catering to the needs of the people. What's left as a residue will die out naturally. Even the philosophy of idealism provides us with something rational to draw on. We know truth can only grow out of the struggle against error. It is not only the true,

the beautiful and the good that we should put before the people but we should also let them see and understand what is false, ugly and bad. We should not try to prevent people from seeing the seamy side of things, but help them to see it in its true light: to distinguish right from wrong, beauty from ugliness and good from bad.

We can put our trust in the power of discernment of the people, in the power of materialism and truth. At the same time we must do our best to help the people sharpen their sense of perception and reinforce the power of truth in its struggle against falsehood and error.

Q. Do you think that we have, over the past few months, fully implemented this policy? And if not, what still stands in the way of fully implementing it?

A. "Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" is a long-term policy of the Party. The question whether we have done enough to implement it simply does not arise. We shall never have done enough in this line.

Even in communist society, where most of the people will have communist ideas, there will still be a clash of views in the academic world and competition between different styles and schools of art. Many old principles in science will be replaced by new ones. Art and literature will undergo a constant process of renovation. Contradictions between right and wrong, between the advanced and the backward are eternal: they will never die out as long as human life subsists. But in communist society the people will gradually slough off the remnants of bourgeois ideology; the distinction between manual and mental labour will gradually disappear; everyone will have a pretty rich stock of scientific knowledge and artistic ability and a monopoly of learning will be something inconceivable. At such a time the implementation of the policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" will naturally assume an entirely different aspect. But that is looking pretty far ahead into the future and I think there is hardly any need to discuss that now.

What stands in the way of implementing this policy now? From the ideological point of view there are mainly two things: "Leftist" doctrinairism and rightist opportunism, both of which stem from one-sided thought.

We believe in Marxist materialism and in the field of culture we stick to the principle of serving the working people. But the doctrinaires and opportunists regard this as an antithesis to our policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend."

To the doctrinaires, this policy seems incompatible with Marxism, materialism and the principle of serving the working people. At best, they pay some lip-service to the policy as a bit of window-dressing. Actually, they are sceptical of this policy; they are against it.

At the other extreme, the right opportunists "welcome" this policy. But they "welcome" it for reasons of their own. They have long been a bit fed up with Marxism, materialism and the principle of serving the

working people and they think that this new policy gives them justification for jettisoning all this "baggage" of Marxism, serving the workers, peasants and soldiers, etc., as "doctrinairism" or "vulgar sociology" which must be got rid of if the new policy is not to fail. Superficially they appear to be supporting the new policy, but in fact they are ruining it — by taking the very soul out of it.

Both doctrinaires and opportunists try to make out that the recognition of achievements and correction of mistakes are two diametrically opposed things. The only difference between them is that the doctrinaires only want to allow people to make much of our achievements but not criticize our mistakes. In fact, they do their best to defend those mistakes. On the other hand, the opportunists, while criticizing our mistakes, want to wipe out all our achievements.

We, on the contrary, believe that while we actively publicize Marxism, we must give effect to the policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend." We must recognize and affirm our achievements, but at the same time uncompromisingly correct our mistakes.

In this question of ideological struggle the "leftists" make the mistake of not using persuasion, but resorting to suppression. They don't reason, but just give orders; they don't lead people patiently to accept Marxism of their own free will, but attempt to force Marxism down their throats. On the other hand, the rightists make the mistake of entirely abandoning educational work in Marxism, and compromise, pander or even capitulate to bourgeois ideas.

In carrying out our policy, therefore, we must struggle against both "leftist" doctrinairism and rightist opportunism.

Q. What do you think of the article "Our Views on Contemporary Literature and Art" by Chen Chi-tung and three other comrades and the article "Discussions on the Cinema" by a commentator in *Wen Yi Pao* (Literary Gazette)?

What will criticism of these articles mean in implementing the policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend"?

A. The article by Chen Chi-tung and his three comrades stressed the point that on the front of art and literature we should hold firmly to the policy of serving socialism and the people. It also pointed out some aspects of our contemporary art and literature that are well worth our attention. This is all to the good and we should say as much. But this article contains many glaring errors.

In the first place, its authors give an incorrect evaluation of our art and literature since the proclamation of our new policy. They are blind to the bright side of things — which is, needless to say, the main side — and have improperly exaggerated the negative side of things — which is of secondary importance and is only exemplified by a few individual cases.

Secondly, they do not give a proper analysis or a well-reasoned criticism of those things which, they say, are part of the bad results of

this policy. Furthermore, some of the things they fulminate against for being "seamy" are, in fact, by no means so, or, at least, are not as seamy as they make out. Take, for instance, the discussion on socialist realism, the revival and re-editing of traditional drama, the increase in the number of satires and literary pieces dealing with love and family life — you can't call all these "seamy." It is true that there are some things which are a bit seamy about some of them, but, in the main, they are healthy and positive contributions to our art.

Thirdly, the way they criticized the ideas which they regard as wrong is not of well-reasoned arguments; it is brutal and over-simplified. At the very time we are doing all we can to get rid of the obstacles that have hindered implementation of the policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" and encouraging people to "bloom" and "contend," this article in fact confuses the issues.

The examples cited in the article give the impression that so many undesirable things appeared during the short period of a little over six months after the announcement of the new policy and found expression in our art and literature that they "blurred the face and muffled the voice of our age." The inescapable and logical conclusion to be drawn from this argument would be to renounce this policy.

The urgent question confronting us is: "Shall we carry on with this policy or end it?" And basing themselves on incorrect premises these authors give a wrong answer.

The reason why they make this gross mistake is that they are biased in assessing contemporary art and literature; they see things through doctrinaire spectacles and their approach to the question is sectarian.

If we are justified in saying that this article reflects "leftist" doctrinaire tendencies, then there is no doubt that the article "Discussions on the Cinema" is an expression of rightist opportunism. The commentator who wrote this article in *Wen Yi Pao* is the same who, under the pen name Chu Chu-chu, wrote "For Progress" the article in *Wen Wei Pao* of January 4. This comrade has kept in pretty close touch with the film industry and it would have been a great help if he had stuck to sound reasoning, called a spade a spade and properly criticized the mistakes and defects in our film work. It's a real pity that he did not do so. As it is, his criticism is a sweeping negation, a complete denial of all achievement in the Chinese cinema since the liberation.

According to him, our film art has nothing good to offer, starting from methods of production and ending with the content of our films. It seems that the more we stress the principle of serving the working people, the smaller the audience we get; the stronger the leadership we give, the more chaotic our work. Of course, we must see to it that our films meet the taste of our audiences; film workers should pay serious attention to the fact that some of our films have proved unpopular, but the writer of this article puts up the wrong-headed view that we should judge the worth

of our films by their box-office success. He asserts that box-office receipts are poor. First of all, that's using a partial fact to obscure the whole truth, and, secondly, although we naturally want our films to be popular we aren't engaged in an unprincipled chase after box-office takings. We always attach more attention to the educational value of films.

By emphasizing the "take" and defending the old "traditions" of Chinese films (which should, there is no question, be respected), our author simply erases, at a stroke, the principle of serving the working people. If this erroneous view goes unchecked, there is the danger that our cinema will be led back to the road of capitalism.

Our author, in fact, frankly voices the slogan: "Let's turn back!" This doesn't seem to be accidental. Such a rightist opportunist theory of "turning back" is certainly harmful.

The criticisms that have been levelled against these two articles are designed to free us from two kinds of biased thought. We are criticizing distortions of the Party's policy from the right and "left." Such criticisms are most important in carrying through our policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" and in putting our thinking on a new and higher level.

Q. What are your comments on the discussion on the cinema which is being carried by *Wen Wei Pao*?

A. I think *Wen Wei Pao* is performing a useful service in organizing this discussion. We do have defects and mistakes in our film work; that is a fact. Even before the discussion started, they had already been noted by those in charge of film work and suitable steps were being worked out to remedy them. The discussion, however, has served to give an impetus to the work of reform.

Most of the opinions expressed by film workers and published in your paper are good. They expose the defects and lay a finger on the problems in film work and suggest practical improvements. As to some erroneous views expressed in the discussion, since this is a discussion, it is only to be expected that different opinions, both correct and incorrect, will be expressed and that even in the opinions expressed by any one person there will be correct as well as incorrect parts. There's nothing strange in that. We cannot expect all the opinions in every article published in the newspapers to be correct. Correct or relatively correct opinions can only be reached as a result of full and free discussion.

Q. What would you suggest should be done to give fuller effect to the policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" and so bring about a greater flourishing of art, literature and science?

A. Many things should be done.

First of all, we must overcome this "leftist" doctrinairism and rightist opportunism, because they are the main obstacles in the way of imple-

menting this policy. I have already dealt with this at some length in my other answers.

Secondly, we must actively promote the study of Marxism among intellectuals and help them strengthen their ties with the working people. This full implementation of this policy will enable more intellectuals to accept and believe in Marxism in a conscious and voluntary way, and encourage those who have already got a rough idea of a Marxist outlook to further improve their understanding and integrate theory more effectively with practice and creatively apply and develop Marxism. Our scientists have mapped out, as a start, a twelve-year plan for the development of natural science, social science and philosophy, and our writers have also drawn up plans to go into the thick of the life of the people and plans of their work. The Party and the government will do all they can to help them realize their plans.

Thirdly, we must improve the Party's leadership in the arts and sciences. To provide good leadership we must, first of all, rely on the artists and scientists and co-operate with them closely. We must have confidence in them and consult with them more frequently on questions as they crop up. At the same time, those in leading positions must learn to master the fundamentals of work concerning art and science.

For those of us in leading positions, the most important thing is to learn. We must learn from the artists and scientists, for in a professional sense, they always have a better and richer knowledge than we. We cannot rest content with what little we know now. And when we get an inkling of knowledge, we shouldn't pretend to be people "in the know" and get swollen-headed.

Most of our artists and scientists have faith in our Party and are ready to accept the leadership of the Party. But they have a thorough dislike of subjectivism, sectarianism and bureaucracy in the leadership. If we can effectively combat subjectivism, sectarianism and bureaucracy this will make our way smooth. This is true in all things, and work in the arts and sciences is no exception.

(From *Wen Wei Pao*, April 9, 1957)

## OUR VIEWS ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND ART

Chen Chi-tung, Chen Ya-ting, Ma Han-ping and Lu Leh

While celebrating New Year, a few of us have been looking back at the work done in literature and art during 1956. We agree that the directive issued by the Central Committee of the Party—Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend—has opened up new vistas and served as a powerful incentive to our socialist literature and art and vastly widened their scope. All writers and artists are overjoyed by this. We take exception, however, to some of the opinions expressed in certain literary and art periodicals, and would like to have a frank discussion of them. Though our views are not well thought out and we have not had time to go into theoretical analysis we are raising a few questions—throwing a sprat to catch a whale—activated by our sense of responsibility to socialist art and literature.

During the past year there have been fewer and fewer people writing to uphold the line that art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, and to advocate socialist realism as the right approach to creative writing. Some feel that we limit ourselves unduly if we deal only with workers, peasants and soldiers, and propose, as a substitute to the line, the slogan of writing on a wide range of subjects. Others believe that since our country has embarked on the new period of socialist construction, all our stress should be laid on "Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" not on serving the masses. Yet others consider that since socialist realism is not the only method of writing, we need not insist on it. Some even doubt the validity of socialist realism, which we have always believed in, and guided by which we have produced many good works. More than this, they call our interpretation of socialist realism dogmatic, and claim that it has acted as a drag on our art, producing formulism and schematism. So they propose to get rid of "socialist realism," keeping only "realism," or to substitute for it the vague concept of "realism in the socialist period." We believe such sceptical and negative trends are the outcome of petty-bourgeois ideas. The Party's new directive allows different ideas and methods of writing to exist, but Party writers and artists themselves must aim to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, and advocate the method of socialist realism; for though not all may consider this correct, for us it is the only correct path. Under the watchword

"Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" we should stick to our principles; and instead of remaining silent while sceptics attempt to debunk them, or echoing their opinions, we should raise high our banner, stand our ground, and battle for our convictions. Otherwise, there would be little sense in diverse schools contending and the socialist forces in literature and art will be beating a quiet retreat of their own free will.

Throughout the past year we have carried on a great campaign against formulism and schematism, with favourable results. This is a positive achievement. Formulism and schematism should be opposed, for they benumb our faculties and weaken us as writers and artists. But owing to a certain lack of plain speaking, some people have come to regard the struggle against formulism and schematism as a pretext to oppose our view that art should serve a political purpose, have a high ideological content, and educate the masses. Consciously or unconsciously, they identify formulism and schematism with the political struggle. Any talk of the ideological content of literature, any analysis of the educational value of a certain work from a political standpoint, any treatment of a theme of major political significance is branded by them as formulistic and schematic. As a result, some authors are afraid to write about subjects which really reflect major political conflicts today, and very few advocate a choice of such themes. Accounts of trivial domestic affairs, sentimental slush and thrillers are taking the place of novels, dramas and poems depicting momentous social changes, the war of liberation, and the heroes who command respect and can educate and inspire readers. This has weakened the fighting spirit of our art and literature, blurred the aspect of this age and muffled its voice, obscuring the splendour of socialist construction in the art and literature which should reflect it. Things have gone so far that some writings have lost all sense of direction, fewer works are appearing in our periodicals on the all-important theme of the splendour of socialist construction, while satires filled with discontent and disillusionment are increasing. Of course, we need satires too. But if we draw no clear line between upholding and attacking socialism, then our satire will be inaccurate, one-sided and harmful. We oppose formulism and schematism, but we must differentiate between them and ideological content in literature and art. We must be able to distinguish them from the lack of artistic finish and faulty execution. Otherwise, we shall oppose everything, do away with political content, abandon our eagerness to depict the major political struggles of the day, and sink to vulgar descriptions of trifles in the life of some individual, and his or her individual sentiments. To cut down political content would not lead to the elimination of formulism and schematism. A writer must have strong political convictions and a sense of responsibility towards his readers.

It is undeniable that the call to "let a hundred flowers bloom" has resulted in a few delightful blossoms this year. But we want all flowers to

bloom, not just one variety; and first and foremost we want the new socialist realist flower which springs from the soil of our new life. This is where the problem arises. Since the new call was issued, many writers have spent all their time hunting through old books, re-editing them, or even making some slight alterations to one of our precious classics and then putting their names to it to win fame or profit. Of course, our national heritage should be studied and developed, and our repertoires should be enriched in this way; but we must not think these are all our flowers or even the best of them. On the contrary, our main work should be to create new, socialist flowers on the basis of our national art. The old flowers do not wither, but the new have more vitality. It is rather unnatural, surely, to concentrate on the old at the expense of the new, instead of tending the new to make it bloom. Our main task, then, is to tend and raise new blossoms, to let new flowers bloom. They may look less attractive to begin with, while their colours lack vividness and their foliage luxuriance. Still these blooms have a new vitality and they are our greatest hope.

These are some of the points which occurred to us when thinking back over 1956. We raise them frankly here for general discussion.

(From *People's Daily*, January 7, 1957)



## SOME COMMENTS ON THE VIEWS OF CHEN CHI-TUNG AND OTHERS

Chen Liao

After the article "Our Views on Contemporary Literature and Art" by Chen Chi-tung, Chen Ya-ting, Ma Han-ping and Lu Leh was published on the *People's Daily*, I read it several times with great interest. I consider it contains many opinions of use for writers and artists today—for example, we ought to advocate the view that art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers and uphold socialist realism as the right approach to creative writing; and we ought to produce more and better works on themes reflecting contemporary life and its struggles. Some of their opinions, however, are incorrect, because they are based on a one-sided and therefore inaccurate estimate of the writing and art produced since the Central Committee of the Party last year issued the call "Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend." And this being the case, some ideas which are correct fail largely to carry conviction. Moreover these mistaken views have had a damping effect on new ventures in the field of art and letters, and cast a general gloom. That is why I feel it necessary to discuss some of the points raised.

The article starts by saying: "We agree that the directive issued by the Central Committee of the Party—Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend—has opened up new vistas and served as a powerful incentive to our socialist literature and art and vastly widened their scope." Yet when these comrades really get down to appraising our recent literature and art, they reach a number of pessimistic conclusions out of keeping with the facts. They claim that "during the past year there have been fewer and fewer people writing to uphold the line that art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, and to advocate socialist realism as the right approach to creative writing.... Some authors are afraid to write about subjects which really reflect major political conflicts today, and very few advocate a choice of such themes. Accounts of trivial domestic affairs, sentimental slush and thrillers are taking the place of novels, dramas and poems depicting momentous social changes, the war of liberation, and the heroes who command respect and can educate and inspire readers. This has weakened the fighting spirit of our art and literature, blurred the aspect of this age and muffled its voice, obscuring the splendour of socialist construction in the art and literature which should reflect it . . . while satires filled with discontent and disillusion-

ment are increasing. . . . Since the new call was issued, many writers have spent all their time hunting through old books and re-editing them, or even making some slight alterations to one of our precious classics and then putting their names to it to win fame or profit." This is the picture they draw of the situation in our contemporary literature and art.

But is the situation as bad as all that? Let us examine some of their arguments to gauge their correctness.

Firstly, there is their contention that "during the past year there have been fewer and fewer people writing to uphold the line that art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, and to advocate socialist realism as the right approach to creative writing."

Early last year, after the Central Committee of the Party announced the policy "Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" literary and art periodicals throughout the country devoted much space to discussion of it, responding to it most enthusiastically. This meant, it is true, that they published less on serving the masses and the methods of socialist realism; but this was quite natural and inevitable. For if we want to carry out this directive, we must spread the idea as widely as possible, to remove various doubts in the minds of writers, artists and scientists, and sweep away all the obstacles in its path. Only when this directive has made a deep impression throughout the country, shall we have the conditions necessary for its successful implementation. So our periodicals are quite right to have given more space to this, and less—for the time being—to other fundamental problems. We are not entitled, after so short a period, to leap to the conclusion that there are fewer and fewer advocates of socialist realism.

In fact, discussions on socialist realism continued unabated. A fairly thorough study has been made by the literary circles, of the essentials of this method of writing, its relationship to the realism of the past and the differences between them, the specific ways in which it excels, and the socialist realist elements in the works of Lu Hsun and other modern Chinese writers. Of course, while this study was being made, some people queried the wisdom of using socialist realism as a method, and some proposed substituting the concept of "realism in the socialist period" for socialist realism. But since we want diverse schools of thought to contend, the appearance of different views is a logical and natural phenomenon, and there is no need to be alarmed by it. We can produce well-substantiated arguments against these views, using the existence and growth of socialist realism to refute them, explaining our views calmly and rationally to convince readers that the truth is on our side; but we should not pin labels on comrades without giving reasons, or say "such sceptical and negative trends are the outcome of petty-bourgeois ideas." This method of pinning labels on others never solves any problems. If we want to criticize their views, we must have comradely, scientific discussions, not forbid them to speak.

I have similar feelings about the question whether during the past year there have been fewer and fewer advocates of serving the masses. We cannot say that we ever advocated this aim sufficiently. Before Hu Feng's\* views on literature and art were exposed and refuted, many writers and artists believed in or sympathized with his reactionary ideas. But it is not true that in the past year the supporters for the line of serving the masses suddenly became fewer and fewer. To take one example, last November and December when China's film industry was being discussed, many comrades pointed out quite correctly that we must not forget our past achievements in serving the people, and must not falter in this aim in future. The fact is, there were quite a large number of people last year who urged that art should serve the masses — they have not been getting fewer and fewer.

It is clear, then, that these views are one-sided and arbitrary, not according with the actual situation last year.

Next we come to the statement that "some authors are afraid to write about subjects which really reflect major political conflicts today, and very few advocate a choice of such themes."

This argument is even more shaky. It is true that in recent months there has been more writing about trivial domestic affairs, more sentimental slush and thrillers; but we should not draw too hasty a conclusion, for if we turn to *People's Literature*, *Liberation Army Literature*, *Yangtze Literature* and other periodicals, we can see at once that our writers last year did produce a good many works reflecting major political conflicts of the day, and "depicting momentous social changes, the war of liberation, and the heroes who command respect."

Then there is the contention that "satires filled with discontent and disillusionment are increasing."

This, I think, is not only belied by the actual facts but may discourage authors from writing. For it is quite legitimate to express discontent, and a writer may well feel dissatisfied with reality because he wants something even better. But disillusionment is well-nigh inconceivable. If a man is "disillusioned" with life as it is, that raises a serious question: What way of life does he want? So this view of Chen Chi-tung and the others is actually a sort of threat to writers of satire. If instead of opposing this view we tacitly agree to it, it will do much to undermine the confidence and courage of our writers, whether they be professionals or amateurs. Let me quote a case I know. A friend of mine wanted to write a satire, but after reading this article he dropped his plan. Of course my friend was wrong to suppose that the views of a few Party members represented the Party as a whole. But it is also a fact that such arguments have a bad effect on some writers.

\*See *Chinese Literature*, 1955, Vol. 3, p. 164.

During the last year more essays and satires have been published, and we should affirm that this is an excellent thing. It shows how enthusiastically writers are responding to the Party's call, and as Party writers and artists we should welcome this. A few of these essays and satires have been one-sided and defective because the authors could not see the wood for the trees or tell what to approve and champion, but condemned everything indiscriminately. In this way they injured the good as well as attacking the bad, and so gave a false picture of reality. We should criticize these works in a way that carries conviction, and out of the desire to help these writers. But such a sweeping statement as "satires filled with discontent and disillusionment are increasing" can only confuse our authors.

Finally there is the charge that "many writers have spent all their time hunting through old books, re-editing them...."

We should analyse this question seriously too. It is true that since the Party's directive "Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend" more writers have been hunting through old books and re-editing them. This shows that the Party has taught us to value our national heritage, which is surely not a bad thing. It has led to our adaptation of the *kunchu* opera *Fifteen Strings of Cash*\* and other excellent works like the Szechuan opera *Tan Chi-erh* based on a Yuan dynasty play. It will do us no harm, I think, to re-edit more of these admirable old classics. We have not sufficient evidence to prove that our writers in general have turned their back on the present.

In conclusion, I believe that Chen Chi-tung and his friends hold these mistaken views because they consider isolated, minor shortcomings which have arisen in our literature and art since the Party issued its directive as general, basic mistakes. This is why they think our present-day writing such "an awful mess," and are so worried about it. In my opinion, we should recognize these shortcomings but not exaggerate them. We should analyse them properly and discover the main trend today. To my mind, the main trend of our present-day literature and art is not so bad. These views expressed by Chen Chi-tung and the others remind me of the description of "women hobbling along on bound feet" in Chairman Mao's article *The Question of Agricultural Co-operation*. During the last year, thanks to the help and encouragement of the Party's policy our writers and artists have just begun to walk more naturally, yet already Chen Chi-tung and his friends are alarmed. But this is quite unrealistic, when our literature and art are advancing so rapidly.

(From *People's Daily*, March 1, 1957)

\*See *Chinese Literature*, 1956, Vol. 4, p. 230.

## FOR THE FLOURISHING OF SOCIALIST LITERATURE AND ART

— Editorial of Wen Yi Pao (*Literary Gazette*), April 14, 1957 —

### I

The policy proposed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party — “Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend” — is a creative application of Marxism-Leninism to the arts and sciences during our socialist construction. The correct and firm implementation of this policy will not only raise the ideological level of our intellectuals considerably — it will impel our science, literature and art to new heights.

Our socialist revolution has already won — the class struggle within the country is essentially over; we are now in the process of building a new socialist society. Steeled for years in the fires of the revolution, our people generally have deepened their political understanding. Our intellectuals too have made great progress both politically and ideologically, the vast majority of them are united on a basis of love of country and support for socialism. As a result of a series of ideological struggles and reformations, Marxism-Leninism has taken the helm in our cultural and academic worlds; more and more people today are becoming engrossed in the study of it. Although only very few intellectuals have a true grasp of the Marxist world outlook and many retain quite a few idealist concepts, intellectuals on the whole are moving steadily towards progressive thinking.

“Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools contend” is a means of spreading Marxism-Leninism among all the intellectuals and all the people of China through free discussion, a means of forging and maturing new literature and art in free creative competition. Idealists have the right to speak; flowers, reflecting all sorts of thinking, can bloom. Differences in ways of looking at things are an objective fact which cannot be ruled away by executive fiat. We believe in the principles of Marxism-Leninism. If we grasp these principles, we need not and should not fear any erroneous ideologies. What is more, we should have faith in the people’s ability to judge correctly. It is our conviction that the principles of Marxism-Leninism will spread through free debate, that free competition will bring about a further flourishing of socialist literature and art.

There is an interconnection between free contention in the arts and sciences and the theory advanced by the Central Committee of the Communist Party last year regarding contradictions among the people. This theory is a creative development of Marxism-Leninism. Contradictions among the people are reflected in the realm of thought, and the present differences and debates among our writers and artists are just such reflections. The line of free contention offers a correct path to their solution because it is lofty and long-visioned, because it is an application of the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete actualities of our country, taking into consideration our social conditions, the present situation of our intellectuals, as well as the laws of development of science, literature and art. It is certain to exercise a profound influence on our culture.

Only nine months have elapsed since the enunciation of the new policy, much too short a time in which to evaluate its effectiveness. But in the world of literature and art, things are already stirring: The boldness and confidence of writers has greatly increased; many writers have made long-range plans for entering deeply into the life of the people and reflecting their struggles; old poets and novelists who were inactive for years have again taken up their pens; a number of talented young writers have also come forward. A new breeze is blowing through our literary world, a breeze of free discussion and debate that indicates the growing liveliness of our literary thought.

Some comrades do not realize that free contention is a development of Marxism-Leninism and socialist culture. They recognize the harmfulness of dogmatism and sectarianism and want to give them battle, and it is right that they should. But while doing so, they take the position that one need not firmly adhere to the principles of Marxism-Leninism and to the tenet that literature should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers; they say that literary work does not require the leadership of the Party; they think that everything we insisted upon in the past is wrong. They talk of Marxism-Leninism and doctrinairism in the same breath, and confuse a correct working-class stand with sectarianism. Because everything looks black to them, they cannot see the road ahead. To pose, as they do, right liberalism as the antidote to “left” doctrinairism, is only to fight bias with prejudice, one kind of metaphysics with another. Not only will this fail to defeat dogmatism and sectarianism — it will amount to stripping our Marxist-Leninist armour in the face of bourgeois ideology. A typical example of such right opportunism is the editorial carried in this paper last December entitled *Discussions on the Cinema*, an editorial which everyone criticized, quite correctly.

This year on January seventh the *People’s Daily* published an article representing another tendency — the tendency towards doctrinairism. Written jointly by Comrades Chen Chi-tung, Chen Ya-ting, Ma Han-ping

and Lu Leh, it is called *Our Views on Contemporary Literature and Art*. These comrades express grave apprehension over the right opportunism they find in some Party members and over the petty-bourgeois sentiments—or so-called “poisonous weeds”—appearing in certain recent literary works. This, they say, is the result of letting flowers bloom “too freely.” They propose a quick tightening of “controls,” “standing our ground, and battling for our convictions” to defend Marxism and the worker-peasant-soldier line.

Of course their intentions are good, but they exaggerate the negative aspect of the situation and make an incorrect, pessimistic appraisal of the status of literature and art since the introduction of the new policy. They don't realize that bourgeois and petty-bourgeois sentiments are things already in existence; it was not free contention which produced them. Moreover, these four comrades use an over-simplified doctrinaire approach to problems of literary thought. Intoxicated with past successes, and taking too light a view of the shortcomings in our work without seeing the urgent need for its improvement, they tend to resist the important reform measures the Party has proposed. The free contention proposed by the Party to develop Marxist principles and socialist culture, they see as harmful to Marxist principles and socialist culture, or at least as doing more harm than good. They regard the proposal with gloom and suspicion, thus seriously impeding its proper implementation.

In order to carry it out, we must shunt off the bonds of doctrinairism and conquer the wavering and back-sliding of right opportunism; we must wage an ideological struggle on two fronts.

## II

Debates have arisen on a number of literary questions since free contention was proposed. These are most necessary and should be encouraged, for only by debates of this sort, will we gradually reach a common understanding. During these debates some comrades have claimed that because the “hundred flowers” policy advocates the broadest choice of subject matter, many authors have taken to writing love stories and tales of family life. These comrades maintain that both subjects are far removed from our present struggles, and that choosing them constitutes an abandonment of the principle of writing to serve our workers, peasants and soldiers. Other comrades hold the opposite view, insisting that an exaggerated emphasis on the worker-peasant-soldier principle is precisely what caused the tendency towards schematic and stereotyped writing, with the result that our literary works were limited to only a narrow aspect of life, and were dull and vapid in style. Some comrades feel the only duty of an author is to write the truth, that there is no need to over-

emphasize purpose in creation—and so they doubt the soundness of socialist realism. Still other comrades consider this doubt a form of libertinism, an expression of petty-bourgeois thinking which is contrary to Party policy.

We should like to offer a few simple opinions regarding these questions.

The true worth of a literary work, we believe, depends mainly on its thought content and its artistry; it is not just a question of subject matter. The Chinese Communist Party never proposed any restrictions on choice of subject matter at any time. In fact, on several occasions the Party criticized the view that our literature should describe only present-day matters and deal with nothing but workers, peasants and soldiers. It is wrong to place the worker-peasant-soldier literary line in opposition to a broad choice of subject matter, just as it is wrong to treat worker, peasant and soldier life as something opposed to love and family affairs. To do so, obviously, is doctrinaire.

We also disagree with those who would confuse worker-peasant-soldier subject matter with the worker-peasant-soldier principle, just as we disagree with those who say that the tendency towards schematic and stereotyped writing is directly attributable to this principle. These views are clearly right opportunist.

As a matter of fact, all patriotic writers, of whatever school, support the principle of serving our workers, peasants and soldiers. The workers, peasants and soldiers constitute the overwhelming majority of our population. If we writers don't serve them, whom shall we serve? To advocate the broadest choice of subject matter is in conformity with upholding the worker-peasant-soldier principle; nor is there any conflict between a broad choice of subject matter and putting stress on describing the struggles of the people. We do not impose any regulations as to choice of subject matter on our authors, and if one prefers to devote himself to writing about workers, peasants or soldiers, that is very creditable; if he writes about them well, it is of all the greater value. This kind of writing is therefore worth advocating and worth encouraging.

We believe that all authors, whether Party or non-Party, should be free to use whatever creative methods they wish. Any attempt to impose certain advanced methods of creation upon them by administrative order would be doomed to failure. We disagree with the “leftist” approach which says, in effect, that to communist authors only socialist realism is suitable and that if a communist writer has any doubts about this method he is virtually flying in the face of Party policy.

We are also opposed to the rightist view, which implies that socialist realism is equivalent to dogmatism, that it has no real existence, that socialist realist literature is not a new development of world literature, that there is no essential difference between socialist realism and the realism of the old days.

The interpretation of socialist realism may be a topic of academic debate, but the recognition of it as the most advanced form of artistic thought and method is sweeping the world like an irresistible tide. In our opinion, it best meets our needs for a creative method reflecting life and our understanding of life. If a realist writer accepts and grasps the communist world outlook, his means of understanding life will change, and gradually and naturally so will his method of artistic creation; in the end, it is quite likely that he will take the path of socialist realism.

Needless to say, we still have to do a great deal of serious, painstaking work before socialist realism can develop further in our country, before it can be rounded out, enriched and expanded in the course of artistic creation. First and foremost, we must overcome the various dogmatic, sectarian interpretations that have been given to it.

Most important of all, if we really are to "let a hundred flowers bloom" and develop socialist literature and art which will create works deeply realist in content, rich and varied in style and form, it is up to our writers and artists to work hard, to join their lives closely with the life of the people. The life of the people is the source of all creation. Leaving this source we can produce nothing but empty talk. Only by going among the people, making friends with them, can we truly understand their thoughts and emotions, can we do everything with them in mind, can we be bold enough to act as their spokesmen.

This point has special significance for us today. In the past few years, our writers have been able to lead a fairly settled life and the conditions under which they work have also improved. This is as it should be. We have seen, too, many determined individuals, including many famous authors and young writers, in the movement against American aggression in Korea and on our own national fronts in the build-up of industry and agriculture, maintaining a very close and intimate relationship with the people.

But there are also some who have divorced themselves from the people, who have become complacent and whose works, as a result, are gradually losing the atmosphere of the times. Such an attitude can only enervate the writer's fighting spirit and wither his artistic vitality.

Many comrades have recognized this fact. At the meeting recently called by the Chinese Writers' Union, they drew up long-range plans for going deeply into the life of the people and reflecting their struggles, and discussed many means of guaranteeing constant contact with the life of the people. This is an excellent sign indeed.

### III

Because we are letting all flowers bloom, socialist, Marxist, fragrant blossoms are certain to flourish. But it is unavoidable that some poisonous weeds—bourgeois, petty bourgeois, idealist—will also come forth.

In a situation where flowers and weeds are growing together, what should our attitude be?

As we know, Marxism-Leninism is a fighting science, developed by struggling with and overcoming antagonistic ideologies. Socialist literature is not something dropped like a gift from Heaven either—it grew and developed as a result of struggle with its bourgeois and petty-bourgeois counterparts. Growth through struggle is the law of development of all new things.

The contradictions between things Marxist and non-Marxist, socialist and non-socialist, fragrant flowers and poisonous weeds exist, complicated and involved, in life itself. We should not fear these contradictions or shut our eyes to them. Our policy is to expand upon the principles of Marxism-Leninism. We believe that contradictions must lead to the discovery of more truths. It is our responsibility to create conditions facilitating this inevitable development.

Because we are materialists, we do not indulge in wishful dreams that we can end idealist, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideas, which exist in fact, merely by issuing orders on paper. Our way to develop materialism and conquer idealism, raise flowers and eradicate weeds, replace negative things with positive, is through long-term competition and struggle.

Whether a thing is right or wrong, whether a green shoot will turn into a weed or a flower, is not something one can tell at a glance—especially at a time when good and bad are mixed together. Only competition and debate can improve our powers of recognition and enable us to draw correct conclusions.

When something new appears on the horizon it frequently is called a noxious growth, and suppressed—either because of the prejudices of the exploiting classes, or because people lack the power of discernment, or from just plain force of habit. How many new ideas, inventions, creations were slighted and crushed in the old society in just this way! In our society today, our over-all policy is to encourage the growth of new things. But we are still strongly influenced by the old society; bureaucracy, sectarianism and subjectivism are still with us. When leaders are bureaucratic or sectarian, good rational ideas from the people meet a stone wall. In the arts, wherever the doctrinaire ideas of crude sociology are current, new artistic creation and exploration is inevitably ridiculed and scorned.

The Party's policy of free contention in the arts and sciences, on the other hand, supports and develops new things, supports all new ideas, discoveries, creations and inquiry in the arts and sciences that are useful to social growth; it clears the road for them.

Some comrades are terrified that noxious weeds—idealist, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideas—may appear. There is no need for them to be so pessimistic. The appearance of things that are non-Marxist or



anti-Marxist will only cause a clash with forces of Marxism. However bitter this struggle may be, in the end Marxism is sure to triumph. Didn't the ideological remoulding of our tens of thousands of intellectuals take place precisely in this manner?

Looking at the question from this angle, it can be seen that it is all to the good for the proponents of idealism to speak freely. This will not only temper our sciences and our arts—it will rid us of our complacency, inertia and backwardness, and teach us to live in a vital, militant atmosphere of advance.

Accordingly, the line our literary criticism should follow also becomes much clearer: One—Among the people, and in the realm of literature and art as well, contradictions between proletarian and non-proletarian thinking, Marxism and non-Marxism, are bound to occur. These contradictions can only be resolved by fairly reasoned discussion and criticism, which distinguishes right from wrong and has mutual progress as its goal. It is therefore necessary to oppose the kind of criticism that meets one-sidedness with one-sidedness, metaphysics with metaphysics, and is inclined to be dogmatic. What we want is an atmosphere of facing the facts, of serious research.

Two—Our criticism should be motivated by a desire to win over the man being criticized; it should result in a new unity with him on a new basis after criticism. It is therefore essential that we vitiate the sectarian haughty attitude, and promote an atmosphere of helpfulness, of modesty, of talking things over.

Three—As to so-called poisonous weeds, we should not forbid their growth, but neither should we give them complete licence. Rather we should let the fragrant flowers and poisonous weeds compete, and use friendly criticism to win people over from their erroneous ideas. In the course of this competition, comparison and struggle, Marxist principles and the fragrant flowers of socialist literature and art will thus emerge with more vitality than ever.

People cannot be forced to change their world outlook. Our experience proves that correct ideological struggle, self-education and self-reformation can hasten an idealist world outlook, or those parts of a world outlook which are idealist, to change towards materialism. We have all had this kind of experience in movements for intellectual reformation. We should make better use of this experience.

In an era of free contention, the function of literary criticism becomes more important, not less. The dogmatists always adopt a sectarian attitude, blasting instead of convincing, castigating instead of reasoning, in approaching the complicated ideological problems existing within the ranks of the people. Doctrinaire criticism is not only harmful to unity—it has a bad effect on literary criticism itself. A firm implementation of the free contention policy will necessarily curtail over-simplified crude criticism; it will leave dogmatic, empty, pointless criticism without

a leg to stand on in the literary world. It will compel us to drop any off-hand attitude towards incorrect and antagonistic ideas, substituting instead deep, careful, convincing criticism based on thorough research and hard work and thinking, building theory step by step in the course of militant criticism. Thus, the level of our literary criticism will gradually be raised.

Ridding ourselves of the fetters of dogmatism and eliminating sectarian prejudices will be beneficial to literary creation and criticism, and to the unity of our literati as well.

The construction of a socialist cultural edifice is a big and complicated task. It requires the fullest mobilization of all the positive elements who can help. Let everyone come and take part in the planning; let us all carry bricks and shift earth. The purpose of the policy of free contention is precisely to mobilize all the positive forces among our intellectuals to compete in the building of a socialist culture, while helping one another through criticism and competition to attain unity and common progress.

Free contention in the arts and sciences has aroused the greatest enthusiasm among our country's intellectuals, and is raising their ideological level. A new high tide of socialist culture is rising before us. We definitely shall clear any obstacle standing in the way of the implementation of this policy and strive to attain new heights in socialist literature and art.

## WRITING ABOUT CONTRADICTIONS

Chang Tien-yi

I should like to raise the problem of how contradictions among the people should be expressed in our literary works. I think that this is still something new to us.

Fairly influential works with these contradictions as the theme have already appeared, such as Liu Pin-yen's *At the Bridge Construction Site*, and *Inside Information on Our Newspaper*, and Wang Meng's *The Young Newcomer in the Organization Department*. They aroused much interest and controversy, particularly the one by Wang Meng.

Sometimes a work is received with different, even conflicting, readers' reactions. I myself have experienced this. The same character in a story, for instance, may be very much liked by some readers who approve of him and call him a worthy model for the youth, and yet at the same time earn the dislike and disapproval of others who would call him a petty bourgeois. Some of these opinions might very well astonish the author.

What is the reason for the widely differing opinions?

I used to think it was because our readers included all kinds of people from very different classes and strata with inevitable differences in approach, interest, and grasp. Furthermore, if a work is published at a time when the ideas of the reading public are in a state of flux and change, when the contradictions between different ideas have come to a head and are in conflict, and when we stand on the threshold of new developments in our mental world, contradictions in the minds of the readers cannot but be reflected in their approach to the work.

This is of course the actual situation, but only so far as the readers are concerned. There is another side to it: what about the writers?

We tell the readers: I'm sorry but you've got it all wrong, I didn't intend to make it appear like this at all. But our readers will retort: we don't care what your original idea was; what counts is what you've written.

It is true that the readers with their different ideas and emotions look with different eyes on life's events. But the subject matter which our pens describe is no longer a thing taken in its primitive form from life; the writer has spent both mental and emotional efforts in collecting, summarizing and picking out his material in which is embodied his own approach and attitude which he means to convey to his readers and so to influence and educate them. Of course, there will be some readers,

who, limited by their knowledge of life, vary a good deal in their depth of understanding and perhaps misunderstand completely or just simply fail to understand the author. But the general reader, I should think, would be able to follow the writer in his basic approach to the characters and the things under description; there would not be basic differences or contradictions in this respect. If there are, then, we ought to examine ourselves: are there not perhaps contradictions in our own approach and attitude? If I were in a state of conflict when I dealt with a character — I might not even be aware of the contradiction; I might just feel I had not made up my mind, or that I was not very clear about the rights and wrongs and likes and dislikes involved, or I might simply be unsure about the exact degree of right and wrong, etc. — it is only inevitable that the readers will react in different and conflicting ways.

That is why I want to raise a few points, to see whether they really are problems and whether I have posed them right.

The first one: Where does the writer stand in dealing with the shortcomings that exist among the people themselves? From what angle should he speak and what should be his attitude towards them?

In this type of subject, the author's likes and dislikes, his approval of this and disapproval of that play a much more complicated role than in the writing that deals with contradictions between ourselves and the enemy. Before the liberation, when we wrote to expose the enemy, right and wrong, love and hatred were all quite clear to us. The writer stood with the people; this made it easier to handle the subject. But now, it is a question of dealing with contradictions within the people. There are more than one class among the people, and between the various social strata and classes there are such complex inter-acting relations, with ourselves caught up in them, that the question of where we stand is no longer a simple one; it has become far more intricate.

Nevertheless, we must stand somewhere. Even if what I write is taken from real life and depicts real people, and all I do is to take down what I see, I would still have to stand somewhere, observing things from a certain angle and adopting a certain attitude whether I am conscious of all this or not. Sometimes, quite inadvertently, I may become concerned with and interested in certain aspects of life or become partial to certain things. Sometimes I may vacillate between different stands so that my own attitude will also become rather uncertain. The more reason then why we ought to face the question seriously. Then, of course, there is the question of the dimensions and depth, and degree, of our loves and hatreds. This cannot be solved unless the other is clarified.

Secondly, the question of what aspects of life the writer observes and what he writes about.

A piece of writing, especially a short one, naturally cannot deal with all the aspects of life. But when we go out "to experience life" we often have to look at every aspect and try to have a more or less overall view;

we certainly cannot write when we have seen only a little part of the whole. A writer who observes life from all sides sees the contradiction and struggle between the advanced and the backward and also how the contradiction must be resolved. Even if he only exposes the backward and devotes a few lines or none at all in depicting positive characters, I think his writings will turn out to be basically different from the work of a writer who sees only the backward aspects and fails to see the progressive side; he will still be able to make the readers feel that things have two sides to them.

The same question exists in portraying people. I may depict only one side of a person but I must see him from all sides. If I look at only one side of him — not bothering whether this side is basically and essentially true of him or is merely an incidental expression of certain traits, and claim that my description is authentic — and if I judge a person from this one aspect alone and so describe him, my writing will not be much convincing. However, if we look at more sides than one, observe more people and find out what is basic in the nature of a character, the origins and development of this nature — we could possibly portray a few typical bureaucrats this way and boldly expose their old roots — and produce works with this method we could be doing a very good thing.

When writing on inner contradictions, I think we should give some thought to the reactions and feelings of our readers.

Before the liberation, when we wrote exposing evil, we often did it in such a way that the readers come to the conclusion that the evil things were not incidental, temporary or local but the inevitable product of the ruling system of that time; to destroy the blight the vicious system itself had to be overthrown. Now that has been done. Today, we still cannot avoid certain shortcomings and weaknesses in ourselves but since the system is a different one, the problem is also completely different. Shortcomings, such as bureaucracy, are serious indeed and really are exasperating, but they are nevertheless only cases of backwardness in the progressing mainstream of life and therefore could be solved among the people themselves. The laws of development of our society being what they are, we should not be afraid of the backward in our midst; nor should we think it a mistake of schematism and formulism to take both the progressive and the backward into account. We are against formulism and schematism but that does not mean we should close our eyes to the laws of social development. In fact a genuine understanding of the laws of social development, I should think, is a good dose of medicine to cure formulism and schematism.

There are still a good number of questions as to how contradictions among the people may be reflected in literature. I have only thought of a few and have raised them in the hope of getting them clarified and solved.

To solve them we must of course learn diligently. We must study theory and, more important than that, study real life so that we may learn to solve contradictions among the people by actually doing it. Of course we must also learn how to write. It goes without saying that our product will appear naive at first and will contain shortcomings but we hope that good criticisms will be offered and that our work will be fostered.

(From *People's Daily*, March 19, 1957)

# CHRONICLE

## Discussion on Aesthetics

On June 30 last year the *Wen Yi Pao* (Literary Gazette) published an article by Professor Chu Kuang-chien criticizing his own former viewpoint on aesthetics. The article gave rise to a spate of discussion that is still going on. The crux of the contention is: Is beauty real or imagined? Does man's aesthetic sense determine beauty, or does beauty determine man's aesthetic sense? A scanning of the pertinent articles published in the *People's Daily* and certain periodicals shows various trends of opinion.

The literary critic Tsai Yi can be taken as representing one school of thought. He holds that beauty is real, something inherent in the object itself; that just as the object exists independently of man's appreciation, so does its beauty. In taking issue with another literary critic, Professor Huang Yao-mien, for his views on objects and their aesthetic qualities, he maintains that there is no essential difference between Professor Huang's standpoint and that taken by Professor Chu Kuang-chien in his article of June 30. In the words of Professor Chu Kuang-chien, he says, "beauty arises from aesthetic experience," beauty in art is defined as "the mind using the appearance of an object to express an emotion," "the appearance of the object is the reflection of man's feelings," "scenes from nature reflect certain states of mind," and "there is no inherent beauty in anything, for all beauty is created by the mind." In other words, says Tsai Yi, the beautiful appearance of an object is the product of subjective mental activity; the appearance of beauty in an object is the projection of something subjective; and there is no such thing as beauty in an object unless man sees it there. Such a view is clearly one of subjective idealism. Turning to Professor Huang Yao-mien's article, he points out that although Professor Huang admits that beauty in art lies mainly in the truthful reflection of the essence and laws governing the object, he at the same time

holds that art form is at bottom the expression of subjective thought, feelings and ideals; that is to say, art, like other things, when its form becomes an aesthetic object, is only the symbol of man's character, the manifestation of his feelings and the expression of his aesthetic thought. Professor Huang's aesthetic viewpoint, therefore, is also one of subjective idealism. Tsai Yi himself maintains that although the beauty of an object is related to man's experience, his mental state at the time, his ideological tendencies and so forth, yet if its existence is wholly dependent upon these things, then there can be no objective criterion of beauty. In that case, he says, the conception of beauty would vary with different people; one would not be able to say what is right or wrong; beauty would be a thing of absolute relativity; and relativism in aesthetics is in fact the complete negation of beauty; it is nihilism in aesthetics.

After Tsai Yi's view was published, Chu Kuang-chien again entered the discussion, as the representative of a group of opinion. Beauty, he insisted, is dependent on man's subjective conditions; beauty is the unity of the subjective and objective worlds. In his article, *How Aesthetics Can Be Both Dialectical and Materialist?* while showing general agreement with Tsai Yi's criticism of Huang Yao-mien, he raises certain objections. Tsai Yi, he says, emphasizes that "being" determines consciousness, but pays too little attention to the fact that consciousness can also influence "being"; as he does not sufficiently take into account the effect of world outlook, class consciousness and so forth on aesthetic sense and artistic creation, his argument is one-sided and mechanical. Though based upon materialism, it is not dialectic. If we say that Professor Huang Yao-mien's mistake is that though he says beauty in art rests mainly in the truthful reflection of the object's essence and the laws governing it, but in fact deems that artistic form is basically the expression of

subjective thought, feeling and ideals, then Tsai Yi's mistake is just the opposite; for though he admits the influence of subjective elements like thought, feeling, world outlook and class consciousness on the aesthetic sense, yet in fact he negates them all. Professor Chu thinks, therefore, that the relations between the objective world and art, on the one hand, and science and other branches of knowledge, on the other, are fundamentally different. When science reflects the objective world, the subjective elements play no part, or very little part; it is fundamentally objective. But when the aesthetic sense reflects the outside world, the subjective conditions play a big or even decisive part. He proposes therefore to differentiate between the thing and its appearance. He thinks that the thing exists in its own right and is completely objective; it is an object of science, not of aesthetics. Only the appearance of the thing, as reflected upon man's consciousness and there tempered by subjective factors like ideology, emotion and so on—this alone is the object, as far as aesthetics is concerned. That is to say, the object of man's aesthetic sense is the appearance of the thing and not the thing itself. He thinks Tsai Yi's chief mistake lies in confusing the thing with its appearance as reflected upon the mind, and thus he deprives beauty of its subjective and social character. If we accept this view, then there is no relation between the aesthetic sense and beauty; though the sense of beauty changes all the time, beauty remains as a permanently immutable being of objectivity. Since Tsai Yi considers beauty as something entirely independent of people's aesthetic sense, his view is basically no advance on the objective idealism of Plato. Professor Chu maintains that not only can the aesthetic sense influence beauty, but beauty can also grow following the development of the aesthetic sense. To deny this, he says, is to deny that things are all the time developing, and Tsai Yi's view of aesthetics does just that.

The exponent of another group of opinion is Li Tse-hou, a research fellow of the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences. He thinks that on the one hand beauty cannot be separated from society, and on the other, it can exist independently of man's consciousness. In his article *The Objective and Social Character of Beauty* he first criticizes Chu Kuang-chien's view; the argument, he says, rests upon the objectivity of beauty: Is beauty subjective

or objective? Does the aesthetic sense determine beauty, or does beauty determine the aesthetic sense? Although Professor Chu has now admitted the social character of the aesthetic sense, his viewpoint is basically the same as before; he has failed to draw the line between the subjective character of the aesthetic sense and the objective character of beauty, thus confusing one for the other; so he arrives at the wrong conclusion that the aesthetic sense determines beauty. Li Tse-hou also disagrees with Professor Chu's thesis that aesthetic sense can influence beauty and beauty can grow with the development of the aesthetic sense; this, says Li Tse-hou, is the same as saying that social existence develops according to the development of social consciousness. In Li Tse-hou's view, the development of beauty does not depend upon that of aesthetic sense, but upon that of social life. Professor Huang's mistake, he considers, is on the whole similar to that of Professor Chu's, except that his views are not put so clearly. On the social character of beauty, Li Tse-hou also differs from Tsai Yi. He believes that Tsai Yi places too much emphasis upon the objective character of beauty, to the exclusion of the major factor—that beauty is dependent upon human society; to consider beauty merely as the natural property of an object is a metaphysical materialist viewpoint. Beauty, like goodness, is a product of human society; its significance is only towards man, towards human society. Before human society existed, nothing could be considered as beautiful or ugly, just as nothing could be good or bad. Beauty only exists in relation to man's social life; it is the concrete social or natural form which can be sensed and which contains the essence, ideals and governing laws of real life. The social character of beauty should not be confused with that of aesthetic sense; the social character of aesthetic sense is subjective and secondary, while the social character of beauty is objective and primary. Finally Li Tse-hou sums up by saying that beauty is social as well as objective; these two are united, and it is wrong to ignore either of these two aspects.

Then Kao Erh-tai, a teacher of Chinese literature, contributed an article representing another group of opinion to the discussion. Kao thinks that beauty is entirely subjective; that there is no such thing as objective beauty; that beauty arises from man's aesthetic sense and is then merged in the aesthetic sense, developing and en-

riching it. Beauty and the aesthetic sense, he claims, are one and the same thing. Beauty exists only when one senses it, otherwise it does not exist. It is impossible to study beauty apart from aesthetic sense. Beauty has no existence outside of man's aesthetic sense; any attempt to give beauty an objective character is contrary to science. Beauty is man's spontaneous evaluation of some object; so without man, without man's subjective feeling, there can be no such thing as beauty. The essence of beauty is the personification of nature. Beauty that is not felt is not beauty. Kao Erh-tai then proceeds to define the two basic principles in aesthetics as love and goodness. Without these, he says, beauty would have no significance. These principles are the only correct ones, for only these will apply to all circumstances. Poetry always expresses love and goodness; otherwise it would not be poetry. Poetry is the product of the aesthetic sense at its highest stage of development.

These views of Kao Erh-tai have been opposed by many. Two recent contribu-

tors to the magazine *New Construction*, Tsung Pai-hua, a professor of Peking University, and Min Tse, a research fellow of the Institute of Philosophy, point out that Kao Erh-tai's aesthetic standpoint is clearly that of subjective idealism. Elaborating on this, Min Tse says that Kao Erh-tai tries to prove that objective beauty does not exist, that beauty arises from man's aesthetic sense, that if beauty does not exist then it ceases to be beauty. All this, says Min Tse, is the subjective idealist viewpoint which is contrary to the Marxist aesthetic viewpoint. When Kao Erh-tai emphasizes the subjective character of art, and denies the objective criterion of beauty, he is in fact advocating such things as superman, or abstract human nature.

This controversy is drawing a great deal of interest not only because of its important bearing on literary and art criticism, but also because it reflects, as does many a debate going on in China today on other literary and scientific subjects, the ever-present conflicts of the two basic philosophical trends—materialism and idealism.

## *The Institute of Literary Research of the Academy of Sciences*

The Institute of Literary Research was founded in February 1953, for the study of the literary heritage of China and the world as well as for research into modern writing and literary criticism. Cheng Chen-to, an authority on the history of Chinese literature, is the director of the institute, and Ho Chi-fang, a well-known critic, is the vice-director. Originally a part of Peking University, the institute has now come under the Academy of Sciences.

The research work done can be divided into two main fields—Chinese and foreign literature. There are four departments for the study of Chinese literature. These deal with the early period from the Chou to the Sung dynasty, the Yuan, Ming and Ching dynasties, modern Chinese literature, and the folk literature of the national minorities. A department of Western literature has been established, one of Russian and Soviet literature is about to be set up, and another of oriental literature is in preparation. There is also a department for the study of literary criticism. In addition, the institute edits and publishes the quarterly *Literary Research* and the

weekly newspaper supplement *Literary Heritage*. From time to time it brings out symposiums of translations of literary criticism, to introduce the writings of Marxist literary criticism as well as the critical writings of the famous writers of the past. The first symposium came out in April this year.

The institute's main plan of research is to study world classics, the basic theories of literature, and the important problems in modern literary movement in the light of Marxism-Leninism.

Practically all the research work undertaken in the field of ancient Chinese literature has been chosen with a view to compiling a history of literature, and some members of the institute are now writing a school textbook on this subject. At the same time, in response to popular demand, anthologies of ancient poems are being published with commentaries and prefaces. The poet Li Pai holds a glorious place in the splendid literature of the Tang dynasty, but there are many differences of opinion concerning him; some research workers are arranging his poems in chrono-

logical order, writing his biography, and compiling past evaluations of his work. Others are engaged in similar researches on another great Tang poet, Pai Chu-yi.

Every research fellow has his own research plan. For instance, Professor Yu Kuan-ying's main work for 1957 is to continue his study of Han, Wei and Six Dynasties poetry, making an anthology of the poems of this period and writing a commentary and preface for it. Another classical scholar, Yu Ping-po, has made a notable contribution to our understanding of Chinese literature. At the end of 1955 he finished editing the eighty-chapter edition of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which has been published by the People's Literature Publishing House and is the best edited text we have of this famous novel. Last year Yu Ping-po wrote five essays on Li Pai, and this year he plans to study the Sung *tzu*—poems with an irregular metre. Some time ago, Yu Ping-po published a study of the *tzu* poems of Chou Pang-yen (Chou Ching-chen) of the Northern Sung dynasty, which he now intends to supplement, while studying this form of poetry as a whole and editing some of the earliest *tzu* found in the Tunhuang caves.

The literary critic Chen Yung, who has been making a study of Lu Hsun for the last few years, is about to write a monograph on the artistic qualities of Lu Hsun's stories. He has already written an essay on socialist realism and plans to write on *The True Story of Ah Q*, and take part in discussions on both these subjects. The department of modern Chinese literature is also making studies of Lu Hsun's early thought and its relationship to European philosophy, and his *Old Tales Retold*. Much material has been collected for a

biography of Lu Hsun, and a chronological table of his life is being compiled. The 1957 plan also includes comprehensive research into the literary groups formed after the May Fourth Movement, such as the Creation Society founded in 1920 by Kuo Mo-jo, Yu Ta-fu and Tien Han, and the Literary Society started in 1921 by Mao Tun, Cheng Chen-to and others. The chief writers of these groups will be studied too. A quarter of the time of the research members this year will be devoted to discussion of contemporary literary problems, so that their researches may be linked with writing today.

The department of Western literature has started studying some of the great writers of ancient Greece, England, France and America, and the research fellows are also translating some of their works. A study is now being made of Sophocles, Balzac, Molière, Shakespeare, Burns, Wordsworth, Shelley, Whitman, and the English novelists of the nineteenth century. Attention is also being paid to modern English and American literature, and to nineteenth century literary criticism.

Professor Pien Chih-lin, the poet who has been studying Shakespeare for the last few years, has written essays on *Hamlet* and *Othello*, and will write this year on *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.

The literary critic, Tsai Yi, is continuing with his study of aesthetics, a subject on which he lectures at Peking University, and is also concerned with present-day literary problems. This year the department of literary criticism proposes to study the chief characteristics of literature, and the problems of formalism and schematism in modern writing, analysing and exploring their causes.

## *Pai Chu-yi's Birthday Honoured*

Some fifty old scholars and literati gathered a few months ago in a hall overlooking the West Lake, Hangchow, to honour the birth of one of the greatest poets of the Tang dynasty—Pai Chu-yi (772-846 A.D.). Luckily his birthday falls on February 19, which is the best time of the year to enjoy the scenery at Hangchow, one of the two cities which the ancients likened to "paradise on earth." And it was not by chance that they chose the shores of the West Lake for their gathering—the poet they were

commemorating had been prefect of the area and, during his tenure, been responsible for the building and repair of irrigation works and reservoirs.

The gathering took place in congenial surroundings. A sculpture of Pai Chu-yi by the well-known folk artist represented the poet as reading his verses to an old peasant woman. Two rare copies of his collected works, printed from woodblocks, were also on show—one published in the 16th century, the other in the 17th. The walls were adorned with paintings,



Chinese calligraphy and fifty poems in memory of Pai Chu-yi, all of them by artists and scholars of the traditional school between the ages of sixty and eighty.

Sze Tao-ching, a 79-year-old scholar, contributed to the meeting a recitation of Pai Chu-yi's *Spring on the Lake*. An account of the service the poet had rendered as prefect of Hangchow was given by Cheng Hsiao-tsang, professor at Chekiang Normal College. He recalled the many poems Pai Chu-yi had left us, showing what Hangchow and the West Lake were like in his days, with gaiety and music everywhere, lotus flowers covering the lake and pine trees the hill-sides around. He also recalled how at the age of fifty-three Pai Chu-yi was, quite against his will, summoned back to Changan, the capital of the Tang dynasty. The poet was moved into composing his *Farewell to the Citizens of Hangchow* when they offered him a drink of wine at his departure. In these verses he

spoke of the people's sufferings under heavy taxation and natural calamities, to alleviate which "there was only the water of the lake that Nature has bestowed upon you."

A dyke built right across the West Lake bears the poet's name, and a temple at the foot of a hill by the lakeside was built in his honour. For over a thousand years to this very day, visitors to the West Lake walking over the dyke shaded by weeping willows have been inspired by the memory of one of China's greatest poets, while the Hangchow people take just pride in the fact that many of his best poems were written in their city.

All these things the aged scholars kept in mind in February this year as they settled down to write poetry in the traditional manner, to paint, to play the zither-like ancient *ku-chin*, or a game of chess. As in the days of old, the scenery of lake and hills gave them the necessary inspiration.

## Pre-liberation Films Screened Again

Several months ago, the best Chinese films produced between 1930 and the time of the liberation were screened again all over China, and aroused great interest among large audiences. These films help young cinematographers to a better understanding of the artistic traditions of Chinese film-making and the difficulties that had to be faced.



Crossroads

Sixteen films were shown. Most of them—like *New Woman*, *Morning over the Capital*, *The Stray Lamb*, *Lasting Sorrow* and *Song at Midnight*—were protests against the oppressive social conventions of pre-liberation China. *Fisherman's Song*, *The Prostitute*, *Crossroads*, *Fate of a College Graduate*, *All My Life* and *The Inn* went into greater detail of

describing the sufferings of the people robbed and exploited by the "Four Big Families" of the Kuomintang rulers. *The Big Road*, *Sons and Daughters of an Age in Turmoil*, *Clouds and Moonlight over Eight Thousand Li*, *Hope Lies with the People* showed the people's struggle against imperialism and fascism through which they made a place for themselves in the new society to come. *Crows and Sparrows* exposed the brutality and unbridled oppression to which the desperate Chiang Kai-shek

regime submitted the people shortly before its collapse on the mainland.

Some of these films were produced by the Lienhua Film Studio that had been founded in the early thirties by a group of patriots with the aim of encouraging the young Chinese film industry. After its founding, films dealing with people in a realistic way began to replace those prevalent then which were full of feudal superstitions, supernatural beings and robbers.

Among the productions of the Lienhua Film Studio, *Fisherman's Song* of 1934 deserves special mention.

This film dealt with the fishermen on both banks of the Yangtse River, who lived in cold and hunger, and were burdened down by heavy taxes. It reflected the unity of the people in their struggle against foreign imperialists and local despots. This film ran for 84 consecutive days in Shanghai, a record in the history of Chinese screen art. Its theme song quickly became popular throughout the country. When the Communist Party's broadcasting station was set up in northern Shensi, the *Fisherman's Song* became its signature tune. In 1935, the film was awarded a prize at the International Film Exhibition in Moscow, the first Chinese film to win international fame.

These films had deeply stirred huge audiences at the time of their first appearance. *Sons and Daughters of an Age in Turmoil* was the story of a poet who turned away from his earlier Bohemian life when Japanese imperialism began its invasion of north-east China with an "Incident" on September 18, 1931. The poet joined the volunteers in their struggle against the aggressors and later also participated in the liberation of his homeland. The theme song of this film, *Song of the Volunteers*, composed by the late Nieh Erh, with words by the playwright Tien Han, soon became very



Crows and Sparrows

popular and is now the national anthem of the People's Republic of China.

*Fate of a College Graduate* showed the unemployment with which students were faced after graduation in pre-liberation China. The film was a clarion call to young people who were trying to see the world through rosy glasses. But beset by difficulties as the film world was and under the censor's watchful scissors, no film could point out a clear path for the people to follow. It did, however, stimulate the people to think and to think seriously.

*The River Flows East in Spring* described an intellectual who betrayed the people, only to find himself rejected by the upper class to which he had aspired.

In their technique these films handled rather complicated stories well; direction was of a high standard.

There were undeniable defects, however. Some were tear-jerkers, some too soggy with sentiment, some failed to present the root cause of evil and suffering in the old society. But they did something of merit: They succeeded in exposing the corruption that was eating through the old society and inspired audiences with hope for the future, at the same time that they stirred them into action against foreign aggression and Kuomintang reaction.

## ANCIENT CHINESE SCULPTURE

The sculptural art of China dates from remote antiquity. We have found stone sculptures and terracotta figures more than three thousand years old, made in the Shang dynasty, and bronze sculptures more than two thousand years old cast in the Late Chou dynasty and Warring States Period. Ancient records of that period also refer to the custom of erecting stone statues of men and horses before tombs.

Judging by existing material, however, the Han dynasty is the first important period in the history of Chinese sculpture. Though Early Han sculptures still show some of the characteristics of primitive art, they are already sufficiently realistic to give an accurate portrayal of many subjects—including men. Some of the best-known works of the Early Han dynasty (B.C.206-A.D.24) are the stone animals before the tomb in Hsinping County, Shensi, of General Huo Chu-ping who led expeditions against the Huns in the time of Emperor Wu. Most outstanding among these are the crouching tiger, recumbent horse and ox, and the monster resembling a dragon. The conception is strong and bold, the execution simple and incisive; but we still find traces of the stylization which characterized earlier art. The sculptor has again and again struck a happy balance between the striving for massive, monumental form, and the treatment of the details on his sculptured surface. He has created powerful, dynamic statues which portray these different animals to the life. The crouching tiger—glaring, tense and wary—seems just about to spring, and forms a striking contrast to the placid, recumbent ox. The horse, also, is true to life as it bends its forelegs and thrusts its neck to one side in the act of standing up, and the artist has made skilful use of the natural contour of the rock to bring out its vigour and strength. To show the fierceness of the monster, he has chosen to depict the ravenous beast devouring a goat. These monuments are typical of the realistic mode of expression of the sculpture of this period. They exemplify the sculptors' deep understanding of life and keen powers of observation.

The terracotta figurines found in Early Han tombs possess the same qualities as these stone sculptures, while their choice of theme is even more realistic. Full of vitality though simply made, they give us a good picture of the life of the time.

The high quality of Early Han sculpture is undoubtedly the outcome of a fine native tradition enriched by foreign influences. And the trend towards realism marks a great advance in the history of Chinese sculpture, paving the way for a genuinely realist sculptural art in the years to come.

The Later Han dynasty (25-219) was a great age for Chinese sculpture. This is apparent above all from the great increase in bas-reliefs, those sculptured decorations so closely linked with daily life. From examples known to us, we can see that there was a great development of this art at that time in the prosperous districts of Honan, Shensi, Shantung and Szechuan. Most of this work was done in the vaults of tombs or on the arches before them. In China such bas-relief work is called "stone pictures." A combination of sculpture and painting, using the technique of our traditional line drawings, it is a distinctively Chinese form of art. The technique and designs obviously grew out of those used in the bronze vessels of the Shang and Chou dynasties, especially of the hunting scenes and animal forms of the Later Chou dynasty.

The Northern and Southern Dynasties (386-581) saw a further advance in Chinese sculpture. With the improvement in handicraft techniques, the rise of new schools of philosophy, and the intermingling of different cultures following the migration of races, art also made great strides. Buddhist sculpture flourished particularly. The only other type of sculpture which has come down to us from this period is that represented by the stone horse of the northern kingdom of Hsia (407-431) excavated in the province of Shensi. This is reminiscent of the statues before General Huo Chu-ping's tomb. Its simplicity and vigour recall the horse

trampling down a Hunnish warrior, but its realistic execution makes a break with the conventions which were followed by the sculptors of the Early Han dynasty.

Buddhist sculpture, introduced from India, soon merged with Chinese traditional art and adopted a Chinese form. The sculpture of the earlier part of the Northern Dynasties is still rather severe in line and holds more strictly to the old conventions, while that of the later period is more suave and mellow—closer to actual life. This is particularly remarkable in the facial expressions, gestures and drapery. The Northern Chou style is characterized by vigour, great power and daring new conceptions. The Northern Chi sculpture is different again. It has the stateliness of earlier periods, combined with the delicacy of East Wei art, resulting in a more polished form. The



Sui Dynasty Bodhisattva Figure

elegant drapery which clings to the body reveals the figure's muscular strength, and invests all the lines with a rhythmic beauty. These characteristics stand out clearly if we compare the Northern Chou Buddhist sculptures from Maichi Mountain or those excavated at Sian with the later Northern Chi sculptures of Tienlung or Hsiangtang Mountain. The Northern Chi figures from Tienlung Mountain had a particularly great influence on the later Tang dynasty sculpture in that district.

The sculptors of the Northern Dynasties produced much work in high relief, dealing with a richer variety of subjects than before.

The stone figures of the Southern Dynasties at the imperial tombs of the Chi and Liang dynasties near Nanking have distinctive characteristics. These monsters with raised heads, protruding tongues and wings on their backs have much in common with the fierce animal forms of the Han dynasty, but the subtle proportions of these statues and their lifelike execution are an advance on the Han dynasty and impress by their magnificence and realism. The greater skill in depicting the animals' nature and movements is particularly noteworthy.

During the Sui and Tang dynasties Chinese sculpture reached even greater heights. The Sui dynasty (589-617) was a short one, but since the country was united after many wars, and the rulers favoured Buddhism, Buddhist sculpture flourished. According to historical records, during the reign of Emperor Wen alone more than one million Buddhist statues were made. From the relics left to us we can see that the sculpture of this period inherited the complexity and polish of Northern Chi sculpture and developed these qualities further to evolve more delicate forms. The Bodhisattvas decked with garlands and pendants are more elaborate in their details than any previous stone figures and the treatment of these intricate details is often superb.

The Tang dynasty (618-906) was a splendid age for Chinese civilization. Since the Tang empire was expanding, Chinese and foreign cultures met and merged, and there were greatly increased contacts with India and Persia. Thus to enrich its own excellent traditions, Chinese art absorbed much new nourishment from abroad. In sculpture this appears in a new style, more massive and robust. The Buddhist images of the Tang dynasty





One of Emperor Tai Tsung's Six Famous Horses in Relief

rarely show the attributes of asceticism; their makers seem to revel in life and the act of artistic creation. Their images of Buddha and his Bodhisattvas are rich in thoroughly human qualities, and strike us as benign and approachable.

Much carving was done in caves during the Tang dynasty. The huge stone figures in front of the imperial tombs were another glorious achievement of this period. For the Tang rulers after a lifetime of pleasure were eager to retain their pomp and glory after death, so they spared no effort to make their tombs magnificent. These sepulchral sculptures are masterpieces of art. Their realism, superb technique and sculptural breadth are worthy of study.

Some of the finest work at the Tang emperors' tombs are Emperor Tai Tsung's six famous horses in relief, and the superb stone tiger at the tomb of the first emperor of Tang. A monumental work, it employs a new technique to give the impression of volume, of mass on a bas-relief surface. It depicts a fierce yet wary beast of prey, with beauty and power in its sinews.

If, again, we compare the lion at the tomb of Empress Wu Tse-tien's mother with the stone beasts of the Late Han dynasty and the Southern Dynasties, it is clear that

it continues the same tradition; but the mythical winged beast has changed into a real lion.

The terracotta figures found in Tang tombs are also outstanding works of art. A great many of these were made in the two Tang capitals, Changan and Loyang. The figures of women deserve particular notice, and these are of two types: the plump and sleek represent noble ladies, while the

smaller, more slender women are dancers and maids. The various musicians and dancers have a grace and charm that comes from a lively sensibility and deep understanding of life.

The Tang sculptors make bold use of artistic exaggeration or generalization. Some of their images of gods are outstandingly awe-inspiring or benign. The musculature of tomb beasts or warriors in the temples are sometimes greatly exaggerated, even while the artist preserves the general effect of truth to life.

The sculpture of the Sung dynasty (960-1279) falls far short of that of Tang. A few cave sculptures only have been



Stone Tiger at the Tomb of the First Emperor of Tang

preserved in Sinkiang, Kansu and Szechuan; but from the Bodhisattvas there we can see that the level of craftsmanship is lower than during the previous dynasty. The sculptors, however, retain the power of creating astonishingly realistic facial expressions.

In the Yuan dynasty (1280-1368), when China was conquered by the Mongols, sculpture received a setback, and few good works have come down to us from this period. The stone reliefs at Chuyung Pass, which are relatively well-known, are simple decorative designs. Recently a Taoist grotto was discovered at Lungshan near Taiyuan, and the images cut from the stone there are in fairly good condition. The style is clearly derived from that of the Sui and Tang dynasty Buddhist sculpture, but the earlier spirit is lacking. Owing to the progress made in some handicraft manufactures at that time, however, the figurines and minor works of sculpture during this period have certain merits. For instance, the Yuan

dynasty figurines excavated from tombs in the north-west in recent years depict the national character very well, and show the adventurous spirit of the Mongols. Then the numerous realistic porcelain figures of sheep, rabbits, camels, shepherds on horseback and so forth, are excellent examples of folk art.

Handicrafts reached a high stage of development in the Ming dynasty (1369-1643). The world-famed porcelain manufacture of this time surpassed even that of the Sung dynasty and Ming porcelain sculptures are better than those of stone. Much intricate bas-relief work was done on walls, mostly lifelike backgrounds of palaces, hills and woods, or birds and beasts. From a distance these bas-reliefs look like the decorative designs on carved lacquerware. A closer examination reveals a wealth of realistic detail and meticulous finish.

Chinese sculpture made little headway in the Ching dynasty (1644-1911), merely preserving the traditional forms. Thus



Yuan Dynasty  
Terracotta Figures

the lions carved in the Ching dynasty at the gate of the Forbidden City are feeble, spiritless creatures compared with the mighty lions of the Tang dynasty. In conveying form, posture and expression, the Ching dynasty sculptors followed the ancient ways as closely as they could, but in being faithful they often renounced vitality, originality and progress.

In the nearly four thousand years from the ancient Shang and Chou dynasties to the Ming and Ching dynasties, Chinese sculpture was constantly enriched by inspiration from abroad, and produced a

great variety of works of art, very near and dear to the people. After the Tang and Sung dynasties, sculpture in stone declined, but terracotta sculpture developed. In the later dynasties the terracotta sculpture also declined, but the sculptural handicrafts—carved lacquerware, bamboo, wood and ivory carving—made further progress.

(Slightly abridged text of "The Traditional Characteristics of Ancient Chinese Sculpture" by Wang Tse-yun, published in New Construction, No. 10, 1955)

# NEW PUBLICATIONS

**Complete Works of Kuo Mo-jo.** With explanatory notes. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking.

The *Complete Works* is a collection of Kuo Mo-jo's poems, dramas, novels, autobiographical and other prose writings, essays on literature and art, and academic research works, over some forty years. To date, four volumes are out. Volume I contains "The Goddess," "The Starry Night," "The Vase," "The Vanguard," "Recovery" and other miscellaneous poems written before the Anti-Japanese War. Volume II contains "The Battle Hymn," "The Cicada," "Ode to New China," "Cerastium," "A Modern Version of Chu Yuan's Poems" and other poems written between 1945 and 1957. Volume III contains five plays: "Cho Wen-chun," "Wang Chao-chun," "The Cherry Blossoms," "Chu Yuan," "The Tiger Tally" and appendices. Volume IV contains three plays: "Kao Chien-li," "The Peacock's Blood," "Nan Kuan Tsao" and appendices. The fifth volume, which contains all his stories from "The Shepherd's Lament" to "The Underground Laughter," will appear soon. Volume VI is now under preparation.

Translations from foreign works by Kuo Mo-jo and his writings on archaeology will not be included in the *Complete Works*, but will be brought out separately. The contents of the *Complete Works* are based on the first and best editions, and for the most part have been checked and revised by the author himself. All the volumes will be out within a year or two.

**Selected Poems of Lu Yu.** With explanatory notes. Selected by Yu Kuoen and Li I. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking.

Lu Yu (1125-1210) was a famous Chinese poet of the Southern Sung Period (1127-1279). His poems reflect the struggle being waged by the Chinese people against the Tartar invaders of the time, and he attacks the rulers of those days for coming to terms with and surrendering to the enemy. Many of Lu Yu's poems are beautiful descriptions of rural scenes, landscapes, and peasant life.

Lu Yu was the most prolific Chinese poet, leaving about 9,300 poems. This selection contains 260 poems, in chrono-

logical order, with notes to each and explanatory background to many.

**Selected Plays of Yang Han-sheng.** Revised by the author. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking.

This volume contains four plays dealing with modern Chinese history. The first two, *The Death of Li Hsiu-cheng* and *The Heavenly Kingdom*, are stories of the Taiping Revolution (1851-1864); the third, *The Outlaws*, is about the fight of the Szechuan people for the right to build a railway in that province on the eve of the 1911 Revolution, and the last, *Two-faced People*, depicts the national bourgeoisie during the Anti-Japanese War, who wavered for some time and then finally joined the struggle against the aggressors. *The Outlaws* was banned by the Kuomintang, both as far as publication was concerned and as a stage production, after its first appearance. The other plays were widely appreciated when they were played.

**Selections of Ho Chi-fang's Prose.** With a preface by the author. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking.

Ho Chi-fang, a poet and essayist, is at present the Vice Director of the Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The selection contains 24 of his best prose writings up to 1946.

**A Short Biography of Lu Hsun.** By Chu Cheng. Writers' Publishing House, Peking.

A brief sketch of Lu Hsun's life, analysing the significance of his writings during different periods. Through concrete facts a picture of Lu Hsun's fighting spirit and the role he played in the Chinese cultural revolution and in the political struggle of the Chinese people is authentically presented.

**A Catalogue of Chinese Stories.** By Sun Kai-ti. Writers' Publishing House, Peking.

This is a list of short and long Chinese stories written between 960-1911, classified according to the type of story and arranged in chronological order. Investigation into their origin and comparison between good and bad editions have been made. It is a guide to the study of Chinese stories.

**The Evolution of "Shui Hu Chuan."** By Yen Tun-yi. Writers' Publishing House, Peking.

A work which attempts to study and analyse systematically the coming into being of the well-known Chinese classic "Shui Hu Chuan" (translated into English by Pearl Buck under the title of *All Men Are Brothers*). Basing himself on historical records, the author of this work investigates and puts forward documentary proof, and analyses based on it, as to the authenticity of the heroic types in the book (the leaders of the armed peasant uprising of Liang Shan Po), and discusses the social causes which led to the revolt. Through legends, story-tellers' scripts, Sung dynasty portrait-paintings, and memoirs and dramas of the Yuan dynasty, the author traces the development and the coming into being of the novel. He also includes material, based on research, on the author himself, and compares the many editions of the book.

**Discussions on the "Hsi Yu Chi."** Edited and published by the Writers' Publishing House, Peking. A collection of eighteen articles arising out of recent research on this famous Chinese novel of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

**Discussions on the "Romance of the Three Kingdoms."** Edited and published by the Writers' Publishing House, Peking. A collection of twenty articles which discuss the famous Ming dynasty novel.

**Discussions on Li Yu's Lyrics.** Writers' Publishing House, Peking. A collection of twenty articles by authors holding diverse views about Li Yu, the famous emperor-poet of the Five Dynasties (907-960 A.D.). An excellent reference book for students of this poet.

**Selected Prose Works of Heinrich Heine** Translated by Shang Chang-sun and others. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. Translations of Heine's major representative prose. It includes: 1. Ideen—Das Buch *Le Grand*; 2. Brief von Helgoland; 3. Rückblick auf das Jahr 1789; 4. Preface to the First Volume of *Der Salon*; (The above four articles are political essays.) 5. Die Romantische Schule; 6. Der Rabbi von Bacherach; and 7. Vorwort zur französischen Ausgabe der *Lutezia*. The book includes two articles on Heine's life and works. It has been produced in response to the call of

\*Translated into English by Arthur Waley under the title of *Monkey*. (Allan and Unwin.)

the World Peace Council in 1956 in connection with the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Heine's death.

**Buch Der Lieden.** By Heinrich Heine. Translated by Chien Chun-chi. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. The famous lyrics of Heine's earlier years.

**Hellas, A Lyrical Drama.** By Shelley. Translated by Yang Hsi-ling. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai.

**Paradise Regained.** By John Milton. Translated by Chu Wei-chih. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai.

**Selection of Poems of France Presseren.** Translated by Chang Chi and Shui Chien-fu. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking. A translation, with annotations, of twenty-one poems of this great Slovene poet.

**Les Poetes de la Commune.** Edited by Jean Varloo. Translated by Chen Pao-chi. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking. The illustrations in this edition are taken from the picture album of the Paris Commune (Komuna Paryska) published by the Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej in 1954.

**Virgil's Eclogues.** Translated by Yang Hsien-yi. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking. With brief commentaries and notes attached to each eclogue.

**Novellettes.** By Alfred de Musset. Translated by Cheng Yu-ting. New Literature Publishing House, Shanghai. This collection was published to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Musset's death, and includes five of his short stories: Emmeline, Les Deux Maitresses, Frederic et Bernerette, Le Fils du Titien, and Margot.

**Jean Christophe.** By Romain Roland. Translated by Fu Lei. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking.

**Short Stories.** By K.A. Abbas. Translated by Feng Chin-hsin and Huang Yu-shih. Writers' Publishing House, Peking.

**Euripides' Tragedies, Vol. I.** Translated by Lo Nien-sheng and Chou Chi-ming. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking.

**Le Marriage de Figaro.** By Beaumarchais. Translated by Wu Ta-yuan. People's Literature Publishing House, Peking.

**Plays by Karel Čapek.** Translated by Wu Chi. Writers' Publishing House, Peking.



## WRITERS AND ARTISTS IN THIS NUMBER



**Lu Fei** was born in 1917 in a poor family at Wusih, Kiangsu. When the Anti-Japanese War began she joined the National Salvation Drama Group, which worked in villages. It was then that she started writing. 1955 saw a collection of her stories and sketches, *The*

*Splendour of Youth*, based on what she saw and experienced in Korea, as one of the Chinese People's Volunteers in Korea. Since then she has worked and lived amongst the peasants and lumbermen, writing sketches and essays which went to make up her second book, *After the Thaw*. At present she is working on another novel, *The First Spring*.



**Liu Sheng-ya** was born in Chungking, Szechuan, in 1915. He studied in Germany from 1935 to 1938 and before liberation was a professor in Wuhan University, Szechuan University and others. His novels include *Under the Swastika* and *Evening*

*Fog* and a long-short story, *Young Mother*. He is at present on the staff of the Chungking branch of the Union of Chinese Writers.



**Pi Yeh** is Cantonese born. His father was a dyer and his mother a laundress. He was "wanted" by the Kuomintang and came to Peking for refuge in 1934 where he attended university and began writing. During the Anti-Japanese War he joined the guerrillas in

the Taihang Mountains. He has written many reportages and novels: *The Wilderness in the North*, *By the Taihang Mountain Range*, *The Fruit of the Slaves*, *Flowerless Spring*, and the *Blue Sea*.

Since liberation he has worked in railway trade union organizations and has written a new novel, *The Steel Arteries*, based on his experience.



**Hsiao Ch'ien**, born in 1911, is an editor, journalist and writer. During the Second World War he covered the western front in Europe as a journalist. He has had several books published in London, including *Etching of a Tormented Age* and *The Spinners of Silk* (Allan and Unwin, London). His

eye-witness account of land reform in China, *How the Tillers Win Back Their Land* (published in English by the Foreign Languages Press), has been translated into ten languages. Hsiao Ch'ien has also done translation into Chinese of Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*, Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* and Jaroslav Hasek's *The Good Soldier Schweik*. He is at present an associate editor of *Wen Yi Pao* (Literary Gazette) and chief of the foreign literature section.



**Yuan Hsiao-tsen** is now 41. He hails from Kweichow and is a graduate of Yunnan University. He specializes in the Chinese traditional style of painting and follows the traditional folk art in his use of ink and theme, while at the same time bringing to it Western technique. His style is

unquestionably original. He also does some sculpture. He is now a member of the executive committee of the Chungking branch of the Union of Chinese Artists.

**Chung Ching-ping**, born in 1921, comes from Luchuan, Kwangsi. He graduated from the School of Arts in Kwangsi in 1947. He specializes in Chinese ink and water colour drawings from nature—

landscape, flowers and animal studies. He is now a member of the Canton branch of the Union of Chinese Artists and vice-chairman of the council of the Nanning Research Institute of Traditional Chinese Paintings.

An anonymous artist, whose painting *Buffalo Boy in the Autumn Forest* is printed in this number, was a twelfth to thirteenth century painter.

The Chinese countryside is before us. The young buffalo, strolling away from his guard, looks as though he, too, is enjoying the autumn colouring. The buffalo boy, bare-legged, is intent on his catch as he stands in the water. The

loving detail of the scene, the big red tree, already deeply-dyed by autumn, against the yellow-green of the central tree, the hillside in the background, giving a feeling of space, and the falling leaves all speak of the close relationship between the artist and his countryside.

Chinese painting reached, perhaps, its peak in the Sung dynasty, the link between the Southern Sung painters and the ordinary life of the country people is well expressed in this example. To the peasants, their water buffaloes are an integral and beloved part of their lives, and, like the little lad in the picture, their children have grown up with the buffalo as a member of their household.



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