CHINESE LITERATURE

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CHINESE LITERATURE

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CHANG TIEN-YI

The Magic Gourd

1

I'm going to tell you a story. But first let me introduce myself: I'm Wang Pao. This is going to be a true story about myself and my adventures with a magic gourd.

You may ask:

"What! A magic gourd? Like the ones in fairy tales?"

Yes, that's exactly the kind I mean.

I must make it clear, though, that I'm not a fairy or ogre or anything. I'm an ordinary person just like you. See, I'm a Young Pioneer. And, just like you, I enjoy listening to stories.

I knew about magic gourds from the time I was very small. My grandmother told me. Every time granny wanted me to do anything, she had to tell me a story. That was our rule.

"Come along, there's a good boy, and let granny wash your feet." She would run after me, beckoning.

"I won't. The water's too hot." I would try to escape.

The translation of this children's story is slightly abridged with the consent of the author, for further information about whom see the article, *Chang Tien-yi and His Young Readers* on p. 137 of this issue.

"It's not hot. It's been cooling for some time."

"It'll be too cold, then."

Granny would catch me and say the water was exactly right, neither too hot nor too cold. There was no getting out of washing.

I would have to give in. But only on one condition.

"All right, then. But you must tell me a story."

Then granny would tell a story about a magic gourd.

"Don't move, Pao!" After washing my feet, granny would suddenly want something else. "Let me cut your nails. . . ."

What! Cut my nails? Certainly not! I would start to run away, barefoot. But granny would catch hold of my arm. There was nothing I could do.

Still I would make the same condition:

"You must tell me a story, then."

Then granny would tell me another story about the magic gourd.

So, from the time I was very small until I was ten, granny used to tell me stories. Every single one was different. The first time, Chang San bumped into a fairy one day who gave him a magic gourd. The second time, Li Ssu went off on a long journey and swam to a dragon's palace where he found a magic gourd. Wang Wu got one because he was a good boy and let his grandmother change his clothes. Chao Liu found one by digging in the ground.

But whoever it was, once he had the magic gourd he was in luck, because all his wishes came true. Chang San thought: "I'd like some peaches," and at once a plate of juicy peaches was before him. Li Ssu wished for a big spotted dog and one just appeared out of nowhere — it rushed up wagging its tail and licked his hand.

What happened afterwards? Why, that goes without saying, they lived happily ever after.

These stories often made me think of myself.

Suppose I had a magic gourd? What should I wish for?

I used to think like that even when I was quite big. Sometimes I'd be sitting staring at a sum, not knowing

how to do it, and the figure "8" would remind me of the magic gourd — ah, if only I had that!

"That would save heaps of trouble."

When the boys in our form tried to see who could grow the best sunflower, mine came up long and thin with a miserable little flower, the worst of the lot.

"If I had a magic gourd," I thought, "I'd wish for the very best sunflower, the finest ever seen."

That was just a dream, though.

Still, I often used to think that way. I did that day when I quarrelled with the Science Group.

"Now if I had a magic gourd. . . ."

Well, I'd better start from the beginning.

2

It was a Sunday. At nine o'clock after breakfast I hurried to school, because at ten our Science Group was going to start making an electro-magnetic crane.

But that day everything went wrong: the others did nothing but pick quarrels with me. For instance, I was playing chess with Yao Chun and anybody could see I was winning. I'd even taken one of his castles. Then without any warning — I don't know how it happened — Yao Chun's knight nipped over and "check!" I was going to move my king to a place of safety when I saw a bishop covering that square.

"How did that bishop of yours get there?" I asked.

"It's been there all along."

"It hasn't! I'd have seen it if it had."

"Whose fault is it if you didn't?" A fine thing to say!

So we started squabbling. And the others who had been watching all took his side and said I was in the wrong. I pushed the chessboard away and refused to play.

And then, when we started making the crane, Su Ming-feng picked a quarrel with me.

Don't you know who Su Ming-feng is? He's our group leader. Not that there's anything so marvellous about

him — he can't beat me at pingpong. But he's always finding fault. While he was doing his own job, he kept looking round at the rest of us.

"The way you're winding's no good, Wang Pao. Keep the wire straight."

And presently:

"Wang Pao, that's not tight enough."

I ask you, friends! I was doing the most important job of the lot. That was electro-magnetic wire I was winding. Without it, the crane just couldn't pick things up.

I ask you, friends! Was that an easy job? I had to wind that No. 28 insulated wire on a wooden spool, making it tight and neat. This is the sort of thing a girl would be good at. The trouble is I'm not a girl.

But Su Ming-feng simply didn't see that. There I was, working so hard that my nose was beaded with sweat, yet he kept blaming me for this, that and the other.

I lost my temper.

"If what I'm doing doesn't suit you — do it yourself!"

"All right, I'll wind the wire. You can make the handle for the gearing."

The handle for the gearing — that was pretty important. You couldn't move the gearing or raise the jib till I'd finished that handle and fitted it on. The crane just wouldn't be a crane without it. So I was very glad to have this job. I was pleased to be making such a big contribution to the whole project.

But suddenly Su Ming-feng shouted:

"Not like that, Wang Pao! You've shaped it like the letter N. Those two corners have to be right angles."

When I put it right, though, he still wasn't satisfied.

"That won't do — you've made them obtuse."

"What's wrong now?"

"We can't use that: the handle wouldn't turn."

"How do you know it wouldn't?"

Someone else chipped in:

"That really doesn't look like a handle — it looks like someone on the edge of the swimming pool getting ready to dive in."

It did look rather like that. They all laughed. I threw it on the floor.

"Bah! All you can do is jeer at other people. I'm through. I'm quitting!"

I kicked the thing on the floor as I dashed out.

Su Ming-feng ran after me:

"Wang Pao! Wang Pao!"

"Leave me alone!"

"Wang Pao! What way is that to behave?"

"Ha, you're the one who behaves so well. I think you're wonderful! They'll soon be printing your picture in *Young Pioneers!*"

"Wang Pao, no one will approve of what you're doing."

"What do I care whether they approve or not?" I stamped off without looking back.

I was sure Su Ming-feng would catch me up and make me go back. But the others stopped him, telling him to let me go.

That made me angrier than ever.

"That's fine! Fine friends you are! . . . Never mind!"

I went home and sulked for a while. I wanted to go back to school and see how they were getting on, but . . . I'd have felt a fool. I told myself:

"Who cares about their old electro-magnetic crane? It's only a toy. What's so wonderful about it?"

Somehow that set me thinking of the magic gourd. And that reminded me of lots of things. I won't go into them now, as three whole days and nights wouldn't be enough. And what I ended up thinking about I can't say, because soon I fell asleep.

While I was asleep I heard someone call:

"Wang Pao, come on! We're going fishing!"

"Who is it?"

"Hurry up, can't you?"

I did seem to remember agreeing to go fishing with some of the fellows. See, I'd even got the bait ready there on the table. Grabbing my rod and a bucket I rushed out.

3

I left the town and went to the river bank. But not one of my form was there.

"Where have they gone? Why didn't they wait for me? What sort of friends do they call themselves!"

Then I said to myself:

"This is all right. If I were fishing with the others and they all caught lots of fish while I didn't catch one, that wouldn't be much fun. I'm better off on my own — I can practise my fishing."

I still didn't do too well, though. I sat alone on the bank under a willow. And all I had to keep me company was my bucket with a solitary snail inside it. The snail lay there on one side, putting its head out to look round as if it were anxious for some company too.

I don't know how long I sat there. But I wasn't going home with an empty bucket. I must catch one fish at least. I went on, growing crosser every minute.

"I'll show 'em!"

The sun would soon be setting. The river sparkled like gold. Plop! Big ripples spread in ever-widening circles till my line was dancing up and down.

"Who did that?" I shouted, angry because the fish were bound to be frightened away.

The answer was a cross between a frog's croak and a human voice:

"Ger-goo-loo, ger-goo-loo!"

"Eh?"

"Goo-loo, goo-loo." When you listened carefully, it sounded like "It's me! It's me."

"Who are you?"

"Ger-goo-loo, ger-goo-loo." This reply was repeated till I caught what it meant:

"Magic gourd . . . magic gourd. . . ."

Yes, it sounded more and more like that.

"What!" I threw down my rod and jumped to my feet. "The magic gourd? . . . Is that what you said?"

The answer was another croak, but I understood it.

"That's what I said."

"You mean you're the magic gourd of the story books?"

"That's right, that's right." It was speaking more clearly now.

I still couldn't quite believe it.

"Hey, excuse me! Are you really the magic gourd? M-a-g-i-c, magic. G-o-u-r-d, gourd. Can you hear me? Is that what you are?"

"I really am a magic gourd." The answer couldn't have been more distinct.

I scratched my head. I hopped. I pulled my nose. I pinched my cheek. Ouch! That hurt.

"Well, it doesn't seem to be a dream."

"It isn't a dream," said the voice, just like an echo.

I looked all round.

"Where are you, though?"

"Here, here."

"Eh? Where's 'here' exactly?"

"In the water."

Ha, I knew —

"Magic Gourd, do you still live in a dragon's palace?"

"Bah, who builds dragon palaces nowadays?" The voice really was coming from the river, very distinct now, though not much like the voice of one of us. "They used to build 'em. My grandfather lived in one once. . . ."

I couldn't help interrupting:

"Do you mean to say you have a grandfather?"

"Of course. If I hadn't had a grandfather, where would my father have come from? If I hadn't had a father, where would I have come from?"

That was it, I remembered now!

"So that magic gourd that granny told me Chang San — or was it Li Ssu — got, must have been your grandfather!"

"Goo-loo!" It made a sound between a cough and a sarcastic laugh.

"What Chang San and Li Ssu? Never heard of them. Who are they?"

I told it:

"That was a most amusing story. One day, Li Ssu ran out. . . ."

"Excuse me. I don't find it amusing."

A hazy shape was floating down the river as if blown off by the wind. Zigzag ripples wrinkled the water.

"Why are you going, Magic Gourd?"

"I've no time to listen to stories." The voice was fainter. I seemed to hear a sigh. "As a matter of fact, I was looking specially for you because I wanted to serve you. But you don't need me. . . ."

4

Well, listen to that! It had been looking for me specially! I was excited and worried at the same time. At all costs I must stop it.

"Come back! Come back, Magic Gourd!"

I stared hard at the river, waiting.

"Come back!"

Plop! That sounded like a fish jumping. No matter how hard I looked I could see nothing, for a purple mist had risen over the river.

But the voice — just listen! — came back.

"What can I do for you?"

"What did you say just now? I don't need you? Who told you?"

"If you needed me, why waste time talking instead of getting me ashore at once?"

"I'll get you ashore right away!" I snatched up my fishing-rod and measured the distance with my eye. "Can you catch on to the hook?"

"Goo-loo."

My line grew taut and the float slowly sank. I whipped up my rod and the thing I had hooked bounced on to the bank before I could see what it was.

It was really a gourd, a wet gourd. A greenish-yellow gourd not too big to fit into your pocket. In a satchel, you'd hardly notice it.

I picked it up. It was very light. When I shook it ever so slightly, something inside went "Goo-loo, goo-loo!" I listened carefully and heard it say:

"Thank you, thank you!"

I wondered:

"Can this be the famous magic gourd? The magic gourd that makes wishes come true? Does the wonderful magic gourd look like this?"

With a sound between a croak and a rattle it answered (it knew all that I was thinking):

"Don't worry. Don't judge by appearances — I look like any other gourd, but every gourd has something different inside. I'm a gourd that can really make you happy. I had a hard time finding you. You must be my master. I want to carry out your orders and make your wishes come true."

My word! That was friendly, if you like. But I had to get one thing clear.

"Why look for me specially? Why do you want me to be your master?"

"Because you're someone special. You're a fine young fellow. . . ."

"How?" I cut in. "Fine in what way? What's fine about me?"

It said I was fine in every way. I agreed, but I wanted it to go into details.

"How can I put it into words?" it said.

"Why not?"

"You're too good, too good, too good for words." It gave another "Goo-loo" of admiration. Then it went on earnestly: "Please believe me. I understand you so thoroughly."

"That's right."

"And you'll like me too."

"Quite true."

"I know you want something of my kind to serve you. That's why I came."

"You mean, you mean —" I was so surprised and excited, I could hardly breathe. "You mean — I can — have anything I want?"

"Of course. I promise, to the best of my ability."

Oh, just listen to it!

What should I do? Holding this magic gourd which frankly admitted it was a magic gourd, both my hands trembled. . . . It was a treasure, no question about that. Well, I must try it out. But I couldn't think of anything I wanted.

"What shall I ask for?" I looked right and left till my eye fell on the bucket. "I want — I want — some fish!"

Keeping quite still, I stared into the bucket, stared till my eyes started aching.

But all I could see was half a bucket of water, absolutely unruffled. At the bottom lay the snail, exactly as before.

One minute passed. It was still the same.

Three minutes passed. Four minutes, five minutes passed. Still nothing moved.

"I want fish!" I shouted again. "Give me fish! Did you hear? Fish!"

A creaking noise made me jump. . . . I looked up. It was nothing but the wind in the willows. I looked back at the bucket — still quiet and half full of water.

I wondered if my eyes were playing me tricks.

I squatted down and peered carefully at my bucket. The only thing in it was that old snail, which had lazily poked its head half way out of its shell.

"Bah, you were lying! You're not a magic gourd!"

I dropped the gourd and kicked it as hard as I could. It rolled several yards away.

I took my rod, picked up my bucket and started home in a temper.

5

The gourd rolled after me, complaining as it went. It sounded annoyed and upset.

I paid no attention, just went on my way.

The gourd called:

"Wang Pao! Wang Pao!"

Did you hear that? It knew my name!

I'm funny that way: I'm always pleased when people know my name. In fact I've practically made up my mind to be a writer when I grow up, for this reason.

So how could I go on ignoring this magic gourd? Besides —

"If it knows who I am and understands me, how can it be a fake?"

So I turned round. I couldn't help feeling pleased but I didn't let that show.

"What is it?"

This time the answer sounded something between a sigh and a cough:

"My, how impatient you are!"

"Ha, now you're accusing me of being impatient. It's your fault — your fault for not being clever enough."

The gourd shook indignantly and protested:

"Oh, no, no, no! Let me explain. If you really want to be my master and let me be your slave, I shall certainly

do everything you say and give you whatever you want. But our relationship hasn't been settled yet."

"How can it be settled?"

"There's one condition."

"Go on."

The magic gourd said:

"When you get me, you must keep it absolutely secret."

"Oh, is that all?" I relaxed. "I thought it was going to be something ever so hard. Why didn't you say that before? Keep it secret, eh? We love keeping secrets. I don't mind telling you, whenever our Pioneer group was going to give an entertainment we never let anyone know. Even my grandmother, who asks so many questions, never gets it out of me."

But the magic gourd cut in:

"That won't do. You mustn't even let the boys in your team know about me."

"What, is it so secret?"

"Yes. You're the only master I have in the world and the only one in the world who can know my secret."

Then it explained that if I let anything out and someone else knew that I had a magic gourd, it wouldn't be able to do any more for me.

So that was that.

Friends, try to put yourselves in my place. Should I have agreed or not? If you'd been Wang Pao, what would you have done?

I had no time to think it over carefully, because the magic gourd was pressing me:

"Tell me if you can do that or not? If you can, I'll be yours. If not, I'll leave you now."

It shook a couple of times as if about to roll into the river.

"Hey, what's the hurry!" I called. "Who says I can't keep a secret?"

I could do it. I could keep this magic gourd secret. I wouldn't tell the boys in my team, I wouldn't tell the form master or instructor, I wouldn't tell them at home.

Everything else my friends could know, but not this — this would be a secret between me and the magic gourd.

"That's right! That's right!" went on the magic gourd. "That's the way to look at it."

My, it knew just what I was thinking! How clever it was!

So it was settled. This magic gourd was mine.

From now on, I became a different boy. I could do whatever I wanted.

"Why, that means I can do any kind of work. I can be a big help to everybody."

Just think, wasn't that marvellous! If I wanted an electro-magnetic crane, one would appear at once. A model aeroplane? Easy! Hey presto! If I wanted an essay for an examination, there would be one ready for me.

Anyone who wanted to compete with me had only to say the word. Planting trees or fishing. . . .

I heard a sudden splash from my bucket. I hurried over to have a look — the bucket was full of fish.

"Hallo, they've really come."

The water was up to the top now. There were fish of every description swimming there. Some of them I recognized and some I didn't. There were some lively little bream darting to and fro. A very dignified carp seemed to be strolling up and down paying no attention to anyone.

What pleased me most were the really marvellous goldfish. Two of them had white spots as if they were sprinkled with pearls. Another two seemed to have red embroidered balls for eyes which flickered as they swam. Looking carefully, I saw a few black goldfish streaked with gold, with extra big tails, who swayed from side to side as if they were dancing.

The gourd — it really and truly was a magic gourd — swayed twice as if it were dancing too.

"Is this all right, Wang Pao?"

"I should say so! Marvellous!"

Before I could finish it gave another "Goo-loo" and jumped into my hand. There it swayed to and fro like a jack-in-the-box and seemed to be nodding to me.

"From now on I am yours. I swear to look after your interests and do my best for you in every way. Believe me, I shall give you complete satisfaction. I am your faithful servant who will bring you happiness. You are my master, and serving you I can use all my gifts. The two of us mustn't be parted, don't you agree?"

Just listen to it!

I was so happy I didn't know what to do. I held the magic gourd tight, meaning to put it in my pocket. But suddenly — goo-loo! — it disappeared.

I exclaimed with a start:

"Where has it gone to?"

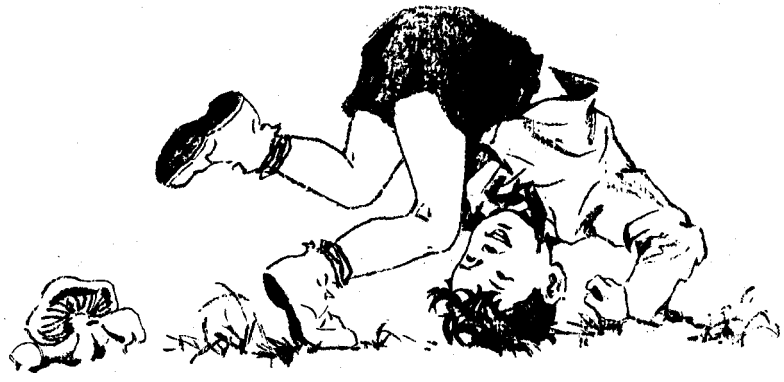
A croak sounded from my pocket:

"Ger-goo-loo, ger-goo-loo. I'm here. I'm here."

"How did that happen, treasure?" I took a deep breath of relief.

"You don't have to give orders. I know what to do."

Oh, this was really too wonderful! I rolled over on the ground, I was so happy. Then I rolled over again. I longed to run and tell granny, mother and father that I had found happiness and could do anything I wanted. I longed to tell the boys in my form, our instructor and form master that I could do anything they wanted in future and was quite sure to succeed. I'd be a hero or model worker for certain. This was no exaggeration. I was a hundred per cent positive. . . .



But I couldn't breathe a word of this to anyone. I had to keep the secret. Yet I was so happy, I didn't know how to contain myself.

There was nothing for it but to sing at the top of my voice. I must have looked a fool, I seemed to have turned into a baby again. Luckily no one saw me as I rolled over twice more.

Still this wasn't enough. I straightened up, put my head on the ground and turned a big somersault.

6

By degrees it grow dark. A thin crescent moon rose and hung all alone in the sky. If you stared hard, faint and far in the distance you could see one or two stars. By the time you'd counted them, a few more had appeared.

Yet down on earth I seemed to be all alone, without a friend in the world, only the magic gourd in my pocket.

I must go back at once. I wanted to find some friends or classmates. I don't know why, but I felt a great longing to meet someone I knew — even one of the boys I had quarrelled with — I could talk to him and squabble with him and let him see how happy I was.

I got quickly up, picked up my bucket and started off. But my hand was limp. Funnily enough, the sight of the fish in the bucket made me think of the smoked fish in the grocer's shop. That reminded me of salted eggs, pancakes and sugared walnuts, some of the things I liked best. . . .

I was thinking like this when a greasy paper bag appeared suddenly on the ground. I opened it and found smoked fish inside! . . . In the flash of an eye three more paper bags appeared, with all the things I had been wishing for.

I was quite taken aback. The fact was, I hadn't had time to get used to my new good luck.

The magic gourd called from my pocket:

"Help yourself!"

I put down my bucket and with a trembling hand helped myself to a salted egg. Then I realized how hungry I was. That's why I rather gobbled the food, forgetting my manners.

As a matter of fact, I've a good imagination and one thing easily makes me think of another. So I found myself suddenly holding a handful of peanuts. The next minute, two apples had rolled up to my feet. While I was picking them up, without warning two toffee apples sprang up from the grass, shining and splendid.

I hastily warned myself:

"That's enough! Don't think of anything else! It would be wasteful."

The magic gourd told me:

"Never mind! There's lots more where these come from."

7

Suddenly I heard someone coming.

Turning round I shouted, "Cheng Hsiao-teng!"

Besides being one of my best friends, Cheng is the best fisherman in our form. Nobody can catch more fish than he. Each time he casts he gets a fish — each single time. If the fish are too cunning to take his bait he knows how to wear them out — he'll wait there for hours and hours without losing patience.

A lot of our form learnt fishing from him, including me. But I had never done too well. In fact, somehow or other, the whole fish world seemed to have a grudge against me. Of course, I knew the theory of angling. I could have given a talk on the subject. But once I had the rod in my hand, I couldn't help getting excited.

I was ever so pleased to see Cheng Hsiao-teng.

"I was looking for you, Hsiao-teng! Was it you who went to my house to fetch me today?"

"No." Cheng took my hand. "Why, weren't you with the Science Group today?"

"Oh, yes. . . . But afterwards. . . . Why. . . ."

"Hullo, have you been fishing?" He suddenly saw the bucket I was carrying. "Who else went?"

"Nobody else! I didn't see a soul."

"You went fishing all by yourself?"

"Yes."

"Did you catch all these, then?"

I couldn't say No, so I just nodded. My cheeks were burning, though.

"My word, what a catch!" Cheng sang out in his excitement. "You're awfully good, Wang Pao. You really are. All of a sudden you've turned into an expert. How did it happen? Have you been practising quietly on your own, you rascal?"

"It's nothing." My face was growing hotter and hotter. "It doesn't amount to anything. . . ."

I must confess, friends, that this was really bragging and telling a fib.

Had I never done anything of the kind before? Well, not quite. If I think hard, I believe there had been times, especially when I was very small. But that was because I didn't understand and so I bragged without thinking. It wasn't like this time when I did it with my eyes open. That's why I felt so uncomfortable.

Cheng Hsiao-teng carried my bucket to the street lamp. There he cried out in amazement.

"Why, these are goldfish! . . . How do there come to be goldfish here, Wang Pao? Did you catch these?"

All I could do was nod. He asked:

"Where? In our usual place?"

I could think of nothing to do but nod again.

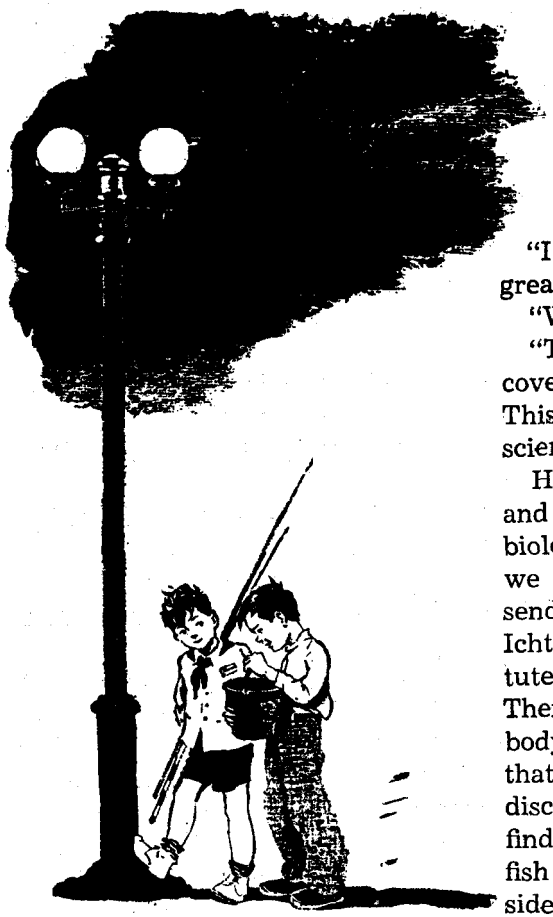
"How extraordinary!" He looked at me. "I didn't know you could catch goldfish in the river."

"Huh?"

"Why, haven't you seen what fish you've got here?"

"No, I haven't." This was dreadful. "Each time I caught one, I dropped it in the bucket. I didn't know there were some fish we could catch and some we couldn't. Besides, it was dark. . . ."

He was shouting in his excitement:



"I tell you, this is a great discovery!"

"What?"

"This is a great discovery, Wang Pao! This has value for scientific research."

He urged me to go and tell Mr. Li, our biology teacher. Then we might be able to send these fish to the Ichthyological Institute for them to study. Then maybe everybody would realize that this was a new discovery. Imagine finding such lovely fish in the stream outside our town — they might not be goldfish at all but a new sort of fish, without any name.

"They can be called 'Wang Pao fish.' "

"Stop talking nonsense!" I was going hot and cold by turns now.

"But it's true, Wang Pao. It's true."

"But I. . . . As a matter of fact. . . ." I wanted to say: "I was just joking." But that wouldn't do.

If I had met anyone else in my form, he would have been easier to deal with. But Cheng — why, he knows me far too well, and knows that I'm a modest chap who

never boasts. He believed every word I was saying, he believed that this had scientific value. . . . That made things very difficult.

Luckily just then some people passed and one of them greeted me.

"Hullo, Wang Pao! . . . Been out playing?"

"Uh."

"Not bad at all." He looked from the bucket to us, and gave a supercilious sort of laugh. "How is your grandmother?"

"Uh."

He seemed about to ask something else, but instead he looked at me with a peculiar smile and said: "So long!" I had the feeling that he winked as he left, but I couldn't swear to it.

We watched him walk away, and after a time Hsiao-teng asked:

"Who's that? I seem to have seen him somewhere."

"Don't you know him?" I seized at this chance to change the subject. "He's Yang Shuan-erh."

I told him that Yang Shuan-erh was the nephew of Uncle Yang, our school porter. His family had lived in the same street as ours, that was how he knew us.

"He used to run wild and often played truant from school. And granny told me he had light fingers — do you know what that means, Hsiao-teng?"

Before Hsiao-teng could answer, I made haste to tell him:

"Someone with light fingers is a thief. I didn't know at first, but later on. . . ." While speaking I casually picked up my bucket and started sauntering off. "Hey, aren't you listening?"

I told him all I knew about Yang Shuan-erh: how his father had beaten him, how his uncle had scolded him, how he had been expelled from school and sent to a reformatory. I made him listen to the whole story from beginning to end.

"Did he turn over a new leaf?" asked Hsiao-teng.

"I don't know. Perhaps . . . he may have. . . ." I wanted to discuss this possibility, but couldn't think what to say.

Cheng Hsiao-teng suggested:

"Why don't we look into this. . . ."

"Fine!"

"Let's go home. . . ."

"Fine!"

"My sister will be at home now, and she's sure to know what fish these are. . . ."

"What's that!" I stopped dead.

But Cheng Hsiao-teng had already taken my bucket and was steering me along with the other hand.

8

I put the best face on things I could as I went to his house. Sure enough, his sister was in.

I won't try to hide from you that I was rather afraid of his sister at that time. Our nickname for her was "Elder Sister," and she didn't seem to mind us calling her that — in fact she rather liked it. Though she was in her third year in junior middle school, and only two years above us, she seemed much older than we were.

She listened calmly to Hsiao-teng's account of what had happened, exactly like a teacher. He gave her a careful summary — he always got full marks for narratives in composition class — and told her that I had learned how to fish and had just had a wonderful catch. The most extraordinary thing was that today I had discovered a "Wang Pao fish. . . ."

"What sort of fish?" Elder Sister could hardly believe her ears.

"Oh, that's the name we've given it. . . ."

"You did, not I," I put in. "They're just goldfish, ordinary goldfish."

"Not necessarily."

"I'm sure they are."

"I doubt it. . . ."

"Really they are!"

"All right." Hsiao-teng had to concede that point. "Even if they're goldfish, this is still an important find."

He said he had decided to fish with me next Sunday at the same place, and asked Elder Sister if she'd care to go too — on condition that she kept it a secret.

Elder Sister was still puzzled.

"Is this true or something from a fairy story?"

"Of course it's true."

"Are you really so silly or are you just pretending?"

"Hey!" Hsiao-teng glared at her. "What do you mean?"

"Don't you know what kind of fish a goldfish is?"

"What kind of fish is it?"

Elder Sister told him that goldfish are domesticated carp. In the river you find carp only, never goldfish — goldfish are always kept in tubs or ponds, where they're bred for ornament.

At this point she looked at me.

I felt I ought to say something, but what? I couldn't make up my mind whether to side with her or against her.

Hsiao-teng's stand was absolutely clear, though. I admired him for it. He said:

"Won't you admit the possibility that the carp in the river might change? . . . They might go on changing till they turned into goldfish. . . ."

"That's impossible, because. . . ."

"Why is it impossible?"

"It just couldn't happen that way, because. . . ."

"Why couldn't it happen that way?"

Just listen to them! Sister and brother were going at it hammer and tongs. I couldn't get a word in edgewise. If I said anything I'd have to take one side or the other, and I couldn't decide which.

In my opinion, Hsiao-teng was in the wrong. How could he decide offhand that this was possible? He was jumping to conclusions.

But though I knew quite well that Elder Sister was right, I couldn't say I agreed with her. That would be arguing against myself.

So I just stood there without joining in, only begging them:

"Do stop. There's no need to quarrel. . . ."

They were too busy arguing to listen to me. Hsiao-teng kept using my name:

"Didn't Wang Pao catch them? Do you imagine Wang Pao invented this? . . . So you think Wang Pao made the whole thing up for fun?"

I raised my voice:

"Hey, there's nothing to quarrel about! Do stop it now. For my sake."

Hsiao-teng turned to stare at me as if I were a stranger. "What's that you say?"

Before I could answer he went on indignantly:

"A nice chap you are! . . . How did this quarrel start? Over what? For whom? Just tell me that!" He glared at me and waited for me to answer, but I said nothing. "You're behaving as if this had nothing to do with you. Why don't you speak up for yourself instead of acting as umpire."

Help! Now even Cheng Hsiao-teng was annoyed with me. The fact is I've never been the peace-making type. When others are having a scrap, I always take one side or the other. My voice is so loud that I can shout other people down. So whenever there's an argument my friends always try to get me on their side to crush the other side. That's how I got into the habit of arguing.

But today it was no use. Today my position was too peculiar. My throat was dry too. I glanced in the mirror and saw that my head was steaming.

". . . Wang Pao. . . . Let Wang Pao speak for himself. . . ." I pulled myself together, hearing Elder Sister challenge me.

I stood up, as if to answer a question in class. The next minute I sat down again, because I realized there was no need to stand. I looked at the bucket of fish.

"I . . . all I was thinking about at the time was fishing. . . ." I told her exactly what I had told her brother. "I may have caught some carp or some other fish, but I

don't know whether they changed or not. . . . Later on, I saw. . . ."

"Ha, this is as clear as daylight," cried Hsiao-teng. "I tell you what must have happened. Wang Pao caught some carp, but when he put them into his bucket, they changed."

Elder Sister still did not agree: "I remember an article about that in *Science Pictorial.*"

I jumped up and said cheerfully:

"Oh, *Science Pictorial!* That's right. It's got articles about everything, it's a splendid magazine. Do you want to see it, Elder Sister? I can lend it you."

"You have it?"

"Yes!" I could hardly answer fast enough. "We have it in our form. . . . Oh, no. It's like this: I had a set, and then I gave it to our form library. It's a bound set of last year's copies with my chop on it."

I agreed to borrow this for Elder Sister the next day.

"Tomorrow — oh, tomorrow I'm playing in the chess tournament. . . ." I thought hard. "Never mind. After the tournament I'll give the magazines to Hsiao-teng to bring you."

9

The next day, the first free moment I had, I went to our Library Group. I told them I wanted to borrow *Science Pictorial* — the bound volume I had presented myself. I made it clear it was not for me (I had already read it), but for someone else.

But unluckily the book was out. It had been taken by Hsiao Mien-sheng, who would be returning it that afternoon. But even then I couldn't have it, because there were five others on the list for it. That meant I would have to wait five weeks for my turn!

"My, what am I going to do?" I felt desperate. "Who's down to have it next? Maybe I can arrange with him to let me have it first."

They checked and found it was Su Ming-feng.

"Why should Su Ming-feng want to borrow this!" I was angry.

After all, who donated *Science Pictorial*, I ask you? Yet today when I wanted to borrow it, I couldn't. It was being lent to Su Ming-feng.

What was I going to say to Elder Sister?

What a nuisance! I had not foreseen this at all. Actually, though, this sort of thing was always happening. For good books, especially, you had to wait ever so long. Though our form library was one of the best, we hadn't many books as valuable as this *Science Pictorial*.

But that afternoon a dreadful thing happened to this valuable book.

This is how it was —

When the library opened, Hsiao Mien-sheng returned the book. There was quite a crowd there and somehow or other no one noticed where *Science Pictorial* was put. When they looked they couldn't find it.

I didn't know at first. I was busy discussing the chess tournament with Cheng Hsiao-teng, working out who was likely to win. Suddenly I heard shouting from the corner with the book shelves.

"I know Mien-sheng returned it. I gave him back his borrower's slip, I remember quite distinctly."

"Where's your borrower's slip, Mien-sheng?"

"I haven't got it." Mien-sheng turned out all his pockets. "It's not here. Can it be that I didn't return the book? I'll go and look."

"What an idiot you are, Mien-sheng! Didn't I give you your slip back just now? You tore it up — I saw you."

The others crowded round. Hsiao-teng and I hurried over too. Everybody started searching. I was annoyed.

"How can such a big book have disappeared?"

"Yes." Mien-sheng was going carefully through his satchel. "This is my fault. If we can't find it, I'll buy another copy."

"No, this is our responsibility. Our Library Group will replace it."

"It's all very well to talk about replacing it!" I couldn't help shouting. "Just try and buy another set! Those magazines sold out ages ago, they're not sitting waiting for you."

"Don't make such a noise. Help look."

We made a thorough search but the book had gone. I looked specially hard, because I knew just how good that pictorial was. I even got on the floor and felt under the bookcase, making my hands and sleeves dusty. It wasn't there. I was frantic. But the chess tournament was due to start. I had to get up and dust myself off.

"I've no more time to waste here. But I do think you're the limit. I really do!"

I picked up my satchel and started out. . . .

Hey . . . steady on! Why did my satchel seem so much bulkier than usual. It seemed to have swollen. I felt it —

"Aiya!"

Obviously there was a big, fat book inside. I knew what it was without looking. I called to Hsiao-teng: "Go on ahead, I'm coming." I rushed out of the class-room, away from the others.

"Here!" I patted the magic gourd in my pocket. "What's the idea? How did this *Science Pictorial* get into my satchel? Is this your doing?"

"Yes."

"Who told you to do that?"

"You did."

"I did not!" I couldn't keep my temper. "When did I say that? Did I give you any orders?"

"You didn't say anything, but that was what you were wishing."

"Nonsense!" I was angrier than ever. "When did I wish it? When did I think such a thing?"

"When you couldn't borrow the book you were annoyed and thought: 'Pah, I donated this book and yet I can't borrow it.' — That's what happened. If the book is really yours, why should you let other people decide what to do with it?"

"Well, you are the limit! I just felt the least little bit impatient, that's all. How could I want to get the book back!"

"If you hadn't given it to them, you could lend it to people you like and not lend it to people you don't like. . . ."

I interrupted:

"You're making me look a fool!"

The magic gourd quivered indignantly in my pocket.

"That's not fair, Wang Pao! I just did what you wanted. How can you accuse me of making a fool of you?"

"Shut up, can't you?" I cried. "Put that book back!"

I felt my satchel. . . . It was still swollen.

"Well? Didn't you hear me? I order you to return it to the Library Group!"

"I can't."

"What, can't you do a little thing like that? How did you get it, then?"

"I can get things. I can't return them."

"Why not?"

"All I can do is bring in, not take away."

10

The magic gourd was really helpless. No matter how cross I was or how I scolded it, it was no use.

What could I do? I couldn't keep that book in my satchel. Then all the others would have no chance to read it and would waste a lot of time looking. And if they couldn't find it today, one of them would really buy another copy.

"That would be the limit!"

I should have to clear this business up myself. I must think of a way to return the book. I could wait till no one was looking, tiptoe outside our class-room and quietly put the book on the first window sill — that's where returned books were put. Then I could run in and call their attention to it: "Have you looked on the window?" They would open the window and find it.

This was a wonderful plan. But I must hurry. I only had five minutes. I ran for all I was worth. . . .

"Wang Pao!" Hsiao-teng was calling me.

I hastily turned a corner. I could hear him running towards me.

"Where are you going? Hurry up! The chess tournament is just going to start."

I ducked into a clump of yellow roses until he had run past. Then I hunched my shoulders to squeeze my way out, scratching my hands on the thorns. I was just moving on when Hsiao-teng came back. We seemed to be playing a game of hide-and-seek.

"What are you doing here?" he asked me.

"Nothing." I hastily added: "But I've something to do."

"What?"

"Eh? . . . Well, I can't tell you now. . . ."

"Come on!" He put an arm round my shoulders and dragged me off. "They're all waiting for you. They sent me to find you."

"Look here, Hsiao-teng. . . . All right, I'll come. I must go to our class-room first."

"What for?"

"To — to leave my satchel. . . ."

He reached out for it.

"I'll take your satchel for you."

"No, no!" I grabbed it with both hands and clutched it to my stomach. I held on tight. "Oh, ouch!"

I must have looked rather peculiar, for Hsiao-teng was frightened. He stared at me and seemed thoroughly taken aback.

"What is it?" he asked gently.

I shook my head.

"Stomach ache?"

This time I — nodded.

He was worried. He wanted to help me and insisted on taking my satchel. I bent double and clasped my stomach.

"Oh my, oh my!"

"Can't you walk?"

"Oh my!"

"I'll go and fetch Dr. Sun."

"No, don't!"

Hsiao-teng looked round for someone to help, but there was no one in sight. But Cheng Hsiao-teng is a very stubborn fellow. When he says he'll fetch a doctor he fetches a doctor and it's no use trying to stop him. Telling me to wait, he hurried off to the clinic. . . . Things were getting more and more complicated.

I stared after him. Now what?

"Don't go, Hsiao-teng! . . . Stay with me . . . oh my!"

He came back to my side and watched me anxiously. He dared not go and I dared not move. I crouched there, holding my satchel to my stomach.

This wouldn't do. I thought:

"How long can the two of us stay like this?"

I said:

"I'd like some water . . . hot water. . . ."

"I'll get you some."

That got rid of Hsiao-teng. As he turned the corner, I sprang up to get rid of that wretched book.

"I'll just drop it anywhere for the time being. I can put it back later."

I rushed round the corner, got the pictorial out and threw it on a pile of cinders by the kitchen. Then I heaved a sigh of relief.

"That's better. Now I'm not afraid."

I walked calmly off. Now Hsiao-teng couldn't stop me. I'd tell him: "Let's go, I'm better." I might even tease him: "What? Who had a stomach ache?"

"Wang Pao!" someone behind was calling.

I looked back and had a shock. It was Dr. Sun, our school doctor. I stood there and stuttered:

"Please sir, I'm — all right. Nothing wrong. It was just Cheng Hsiao-teng. He got worked up. . . ."

"What are you talking about? Who got worked up? What happened?"

"Why, didn't Cheng Hsiao-teng go to the clinic to fetch you?"

"Oh." The doctor understood. "I must have missed him. I wasn't there. . . . Is someone unwell?"

"No, no. There's nothing the matter with me. . . ."

He was looking at me closely.

"I think there is something the matter."

"Eh?"

"I'd say carelessness is the matter with you." He nodded slowly. "Isn't your name Wang Pao?"

"Yes."

"That's right, then." He held out one hand which had been behind his back. In it was *Science Pictorial*.

I fell back a step as he took a step towards me.

"Were you looking for it?"

"I . . . uh, yes."

What could I do? I had to take it in both hands and stuff it into my satchel.

What could I do but look grateful?

"Thank you." I bowed.

Dr. Sun nodded and walked away. I watched his retreating back. He turned round to smile at me. I had to bow again.

I was thinking crossly:

"What a busybody you are! — As soon as you saw my chop on this you had to come and find me."

I was in the most extraordinary position — afraid to meet any good people. They would worry about me and try to help me, just adding to all my troubles.

That's what Hsiao-teng was doing. There he was with a mug of hot water, looking very serious. I hastily went back to my first position, squatting beside the rose bush, hugging my satchel to my stomach.

The two of us were up a blind alley again.

"I must think of another way to get rid of him," I thought as I sipped the scalding water. It burned my mouth and I wondered if there would be blisters on my tongue. "What excuse can I find this time?"

Before I could hit on a solution, along came some more of my friends — Hsiao-teng must have called them. One was Su Ming-feng. He said he had just come from the clinic, but Dr. Sun had gone out to see a patient. He would look for him again presently.

"Don't!" I waved a hand in protest, then snatched at my satchel. "Dr. Sun was here just now. . . ."

I nearly said, "He saw me," but I didn't.

Then Yao Chun came panting up with a hot-water bottle — goodness know where that had come from. He wanted me to hold it to my stomach.

"I don't want it! I don't want it!" I shouted.

"You must keep warm!" Yao Chun pulled at my hands. "Here, let me have your satchel."

"Oh, no! No! . . . I never use hot-water bottles."

"Why not?" asked Yao Chun.

Do you know who Yao Chun is? He's one of our Science Group. He's the most inquisitive boy in the whole class. He's always asking questions. You have to give a chap like that a reasonable answer, or he'll keep after you till you lose all patience.

So I told him that I preferred keeping the satchel because it could stop the ache.

"How can that be?" demanded Yao Chun.

"I don't know . . . oh my! . . . I may have a different constitution from the rest of you."

"That's not possible." Yao Chun looked at me hard. "What sort of constitution can be cured with a satchel?"

"All right," I said quickly. "I'll be all right in no time. You'd all better go."

But they didn't like to leave me. Not one would go. I was desperate. I begged them:

"Do let me stay here by myself. Go and do something else."

They wouldn't listen. They were too sorry for me and wanted to help me. How could I get rid of them? I had no idea.

"It's all the fault of that wretched magic gourd. What a nuisance it is!"

11

How long we were stuck there, I can't say. It seemed to me ages. But there came a moment — I don't know what time exactly when I felt my satchel twitch as if it wanted to slip out of my hands. I broke into a cold sweat and gripped it tighter. But the satchel twitched again.

Presently I realized that my satchel had changed. I felt it with one hand.

"Whew!" I took a deep breath.

The satchel was much flatter. Without looking, I knew that the troublesome book has somehow disappeared.

"I'm all right now," I straightened up and told my friends. "There's nothing wrong with me."

They were all rather surprised, especially Yao Chun, and urged me to go to the clinic for a thorough check-up. But at least the worst was over.

The thing that bothered me most was that I had held up the chess tournament. The boy who had played in my place had only won one game. If I'd been playing, I'm sure I'd have won more.

"Don't be so sure of that." Yao Chun jerked his head. "You play well, but you're careless."

I didn't agree.

"Who says? When necessary I'm very careful."

"The trouble is you never think it's necessary. That's why I beat you. . . ."

"Now, don't brag! Have a game and see."

"Come on."

"You'll be sorry for it."

"Oh no, I won't."

Yao Chun may be small, but he's not afraid of anything. Though he wasn't up to my standard and we'd quarrelled over chess before, he still dared take me on.

Some others crowded round us to watch, talking and laughing. I told myself:

"Now then, be careful. Don't start a squabble. This isn't a proper match but it's pretty much the same. They want to see how good you are."

This time I really took care. Calmly and slowly I set out the pieces. I looked at the whole board carefully each time to decide on the best move to make. That's the way everyone should play.

Yao Chun wasn't up to me, as everyone knew. Even he himself admitted that. But he had a peculiar habit — I can't think why — he kept using his knight all the time. That knight of his was hopping all over the place. It stopped my bishop from going where I wanted and even made things hot for one of my rooks. As if a rook could really be afraid of a knight.

"I must take that knight of his," I decided. I'll find some way to take him by surprise.

That wasn't easy, though. Suppose I did this? Then this. . . .

"If he moves there — he's bound to — I shall. . . ."

I had nearly worked out a plan when I felt something in my mouth. I didn't see it, but it flew in from outside, nearly knocking my front teeth out. It would have slipped down my throat, but just in time I blocked the way with my tongue.

Suddenly Yao Chun shouted:

"Hey, where's my knight? Where's my knight gone?"

I knew what must have happened.

The others began to exclaim. Some said there had been no knight there, others said there had. They searched all round the board and on the floor.

I wanted to spit the thing out when they weren't looking. But I had no chance because Hsiao-teng was staring at me.

"Did you take it, Wang Pao?" he asked.

"H'm." I answered through my nose.

"What? Did you take it?"

"H'm. H'm." I grunted again and shook my head.

"What's the matter now? Aren't you feeling well again?"

At that the whole lot of them started looking at me. I broke into a sweat. I waved my hands, but they didn't understand — I didn't understand myself.

"What's happened to Wang Pao's mouth?" one of them asked.

At that point, for some reason — maybe when you perspire you catch cold easily — my nose began to tingle and I felt like sneezing.

"Hey, that won't do," I told myself. "Not on any account. Hold it, whatever happens!"

But it was no use. . . .

I rubbed my nose to warm it, but it tickled worse than ever.

"Ah-ah-ah! . . ."

It was coming. I jumped up and rushed away, taking out my handkerchief to cover my mouth.

Then something happened. In the middle of one long sneeze I suddenly realized that my mouth was empty — the knight had disappeared. That gave me such a turn that I couldn't finish sneezing.

"Has it dropped out?" I asked myself. "If only it has."

I hadn't heard it fall. And there was no sign of it in my handkerchief. I felt up my sleeves. Nothing there.

"What a nuisance!" I shivered. "I must have swallowed it. When I opened my mouth to sneeze and my tongue stopped blocking the way, it must have slipped down."

A big chess-man like that! . . . It might get stuck somewhere inside me. That would be awkward. It wouldn't be easy to digest, I knew.

Even if it did go down . . . if it took the liberty of going into my digestive tract, before long it would be in my intestines, going on and on like a pawn, that would be no fun either. You can't imagine how odd that knight had tasted — it couldn't be a healthy thing to eat.

I got more depressed the more I thought about it.

"It's all the magic gourd's fault."

12

I went straight home. I might really need a medical check-up this time.

Granny was out. I found the key and opened the door. I went to my room but stopped — quite bewildered — in the doorway.

"What's this? Have I come to the wrong room?"

It didn't look like my room. There were pots of flowers on the window-ledges and floor, row after row of every sort and description — I couldn't have told you their names. Some were hanging, some were climbing, some had blossoms in a cluster of leaves. I could tell at a glance that all of them were quite expensive plants. My old pots of chrysanthemum and dwarf bamboo looked quite shabby and lost among them.

My eyes were drawn to my desk. There stood a pretty little vase next to the bowl of goldfish. Who knows what dynasty it belonged to or where it was made? Set neatly round the vase were four fried cakes looking like yellow jade, still piping hot. Further to one side stood a model crane, a genuine, super, electro-magnetic crane. Beyond that lay a stainless steel penknife with five gadgets. Behind it I saw a round-eyed pottery doll, watching me with a smile. On her right there was a lump of damp clay which must have weighed at least two catties.

"What in the name of goodness is this?" I stood in the doorway looking round the room. "Is this a department store or what?"

"I simply carried out your wishes," said the magic gourd.

"When did I ask you for these things?"

"You wished for them."

"Did I?" I wondered. I couldn't remember doing that.

Maybe the thought had crossed my mind: "This is a fine thing," or "That looks fun." Nothing more than that.

Maybe I even hadn't thought of that consciously. Maybe I hadn't even liked the things, but simply noticed them. . . .

I'd had no idea the magic gourd was so conscientious.

I opened a drawer and found *Science Pictorial.* On top of it lay a single chess-man.

"So the knight has been here all this time! Did you move these things here?"

The magic gourd told me smugly:

"This way we can keep our secret, and you've got your book back and a knight."

"Thank you so much!" I said sarcastically. "Tell me: can you play chess?"

"Not really, no."

"If you can't, please don't try to help me. What did you mean by stuffing that big, dirty knight into my mouth?"

"Didn't you want to take it?"

"Take it, yes. But did you ever see any chess player taking a piece in his mouth? Pah!"

"I did this for you, to help you win the game."

"What fun is there in playing chess like that? You must let me play myself and think out my own moves. . . ."

"Why bother? I can see to all these things for you. Why should you trouble your head over them?"

Hear that? I simply couldn't make it see reason. It couldn't understand these things.

That meant that if ever I played chess I mustn't think of taking my opponent's pieces or of checking him — if such a thought crossed my mind, my friend's king would disappear. Then there would be a squabble and we couldn't play.

I couldn't play chess, but what about cards? No, that was no good either. Once, the cards had no sooner been dealt than someone cried:

"I'm two short!"

"I've lost two cards too. Two kings!"

I found I had four extra cards, the highest in the pack. . . .

I had to throw my cards down and go away.

After that — why, it became practically impossible for me with my special share of good fortune to play anything with my friends.

13

That was only the beginning, as you can imagine, of big changes in my life.

Before, I'd spent a lot of time every day studying arithmetic. But now it didn't take a second. . . . As soon as I opened my book, picked up my pencil and slowly started to sharpen it, before I could even start thinking, a piece of paper would appear on the table with the neatly copied problems and their answers.

"Ha!" The first time this happened I jumped to my feet. "I never expected this."

I don't know how you'd have felt. I was half pleased, half worried — the fact is, I was afraid I must be dreaming.

"But I still have to draw a map. . . ."

No sooner said than a map was there before me, much better than any I could have drawn myself. There was

no need to add or alter a single line. All I had to do was write my name on it. I said:

"My, this is fine! At this rate, I shall save lots of time every day."

I'd always been in such a rush that I hardly had time for meals. Now I could save even the time for meals because I was never hungry. I was always eating different kinds of cakes, biscuits and sweets — all supposed to be things I had wished for. I'm not really greedy, you know, but since all those things were there why should I waste them?

So I didn't need to sit down properly at table, and I hiccuped nearly all day long. Still, mother hadn't come home yet and father was out most of the time, so that left only granny and she couldn't order me about. I would just call:

"Start without me, granny. I'm not hungry."

Then I could do whatever I wanted.

"Come on, let me have some planks of wood." I knew what I wanted to make when I gave this order.

It goes without saying, before the words were out of my mouth a pile of planks appeared.

I drew the design in pencil on the wood and picked up my saw. But in a flash, before the saw touched the wood, the thing was finished. In my hands was a perfect model aeroplane.

I threw down the saw and sighed ever so faintly.

"So quick!"

It's true, that was what I had wanted to make. I tried the plane out and it glided very well indeed. It could stay up in the air for two or three minutes.

But for some reason or other, I wasn't too excited over this ready-made model. I left it lying on the ground and couldn't be bothered to pick it up.

"Now what shall I do?" I wondered.

My eyes fell on the lump of clay on the table which had already struck me as fun for modelling. But as soon as I picked it up it turned into the figure of a child. I clicked my tongue.

"Oh, Magic Gourd, you're getting sharper and sharper, it seems to me."

The magic gourd answered automatically:

"I'm doing my best to serve you."

Scratching my head, I stood up and walked round the room. I sighed.

"All right. Well, what shall I do now?"

It was still very early. I looked round again. I decided all the flowers needed watering. At once they were moist, even the leaves looked newly drenched.

"Goodness, how quick you are!" I sat down on the bed.

"Don't mention it." Though the magic gourd sounded so modest, I knew it was pleased with itself.

I remembered something that had happened when I was small. I liked to be doing things: If I heard a knock, I would hurry to open the door. If my father came home, I would hurry to fetch his slippers, and so on. If anyone stopped me, I would fly into a temper. Once I carried a kettle of water to the stove, but granny took it away from me for fear of an accident. Then I cried for hours and hours.

I felt a little like that now — though of course I wouldn't dream of crying. It was very irritating all the same.

"Listen, Magic Gourd!" I said firmly. "In future, leave me some things to do myself. There's no need for you to butt in every time."

"What things?"

"Things that are fun."

"Do you mind speaking more plainly? What sort of things? What do you call fun?"

"Gracious, don't you even know that!" I was rather impatient. "Fun is fun. For instance, playing chess or making something — understand? Suppose you want to do something which isn't easy, but you think up a way round the difficulties and struggle along yourself — once it's done you feel pretty good. The harder the job is, the better you feel."

"Oh, I understand." The magic gourd grunted several times. "No wonder some boys are so interested in arithmetic — that's because it's hard. You have to think up a way round the difficulties and struggle along yourself. Then there's geography. . . ."

I made haste to cut it short:

"I wasn't talking of things like that! I'm not all that interested, actually, in those subjects."

"Why not?"

"I don't care if I don't do too well. . . ."

"Why not?"

"Never mind! Anyway. . . ."

"That makes it very hard for me," it complained. "Just think! You enjoy struggling with some difficulties yourself but others you don't find interesting. Some things you want done for you or produced for you. Some you want to make for yourself, but if you lose patience while you're making them you do me the honour of calling on me again. . . . You're so complicated, while my brain is so simple, I get confused. . . ."

I had no answer ready for that and it went on:

"There are only two alternatives. Take your choice. One is to be like everybody else. Then you must think of ways to do things yourself and work hard, not expecting any help from me. In that case, you can simply throw me away. . . ."

"That's not my idea at all!"

"No, I guessed it wasn't." The magic gourd sounded very confident. "In that case, there's another way, and that is to settle down quietly as my master. Leave every-

thing to me — just decide what you want and it will be done without any effort on your part."

I thought for a time before asking:

"But what about you — won't that be too tiring for you? If you use up all your energy on these little things, how will you do big things for me later on?"

"Goo-loo!" That was an unpleasant sound between a laugh and a cough. It said:

"Energy isn't like a fire-cracker which is finished when you let it off. I'm not one of those feeble creatures in a fairy tale that can grant you three or four wishes only, no more. I'm different. I'm a real treasure. I've plenty of strength. It doesn't matter how much work you give me."

"That's not what you said before! You told me that you would be growing old, and said I ought to make good use of you now. . . ."

It interrupted me calmly:

"Yes, it's just because I may grow old that I want to make the best use of the present. I want you to keep me as busy as possible. While I'm still young I should be working, toughening myself. Strength increases the more you use it. Abilities increase the more you use them. The last few days — since I joined you — I've made quite a bit of progress."

"You've made progress?" I was amazed.

"To tell the truth, when I first came to work for you I was a little clumsy, and my brain wasn't so clear. When I'd done more I got the knack of it. Now I find it easier to guess what's in your mind."

14

All was quiet in my room, quieter than it had ever been before.

Suddenly I remembered something I might as well do now while I had the chance. I took the *Science Pictorial* out of my drawer, hastily wrapped it up and wrote Hsiao Mien-sheng's address on it. But at once I changed my

mind, deciding it would be better to send it straight back to the Library Group.

I changed the paper wrapping several times. For fear my friends would recognize my writing, I rewrote the address several times too. Then I ran out quietly to post it.

I was whistling — I enjoy whistling, but as I never keep in tune I practise like anything — and striding round the corner.

"Steady on!" I stopped abruptly. "Is this home already? You've more time than you can use waiting for you at home. It'll be no fun going back."

I headed a different way and strolled down the street.

Swinging my arms, I looked at this and at that. I don't know how long I had been wandering about when I started to feel rather bored. It was still quite early. Had all the clocks on earth stopped?

The streets were lively enough. There were crowds of people in laughing, chattering groups.

"Where are they off to?" I wondered as I watched them walk cheerfully past. "Are they all going to call on friends? They all have somewhere to go at any rate."

I couldn't help sighing, for tiredness or some other reason. I like being with my classmates or friends, and usually find someone to go with me if it's just to do shopping. I decided to look for one of my friends.

That same instant I saw Cheng Hsiao-teng in the distance, coming towards me. There were other people with him, including Elder Sister. I wanted to rush to them, call them and grab their hands. But the thought passed through my mnid:

"Where are they going? To look for me?"

Very likely.

They must be. Hsiao-teng and Yao Chun who'd been to my room, must have spread the news of all the flowers I'd grown and the splendid electro-magnetic crane I'd made, to say nothing of the wonderful sculpture of a boy and all the other amazing achievements to my credit. When the others heard this they would be bound to cry:

"Really? No wonder he left the Science Group to make things on his own!"

"Yes, that's it," I told myself. "Come and have a look. You're very welcome."

"Well, let's go and have a chat with him, how about it? Let's ask him how he grew the flowers and made those things."

"Oh, no," I answered. "I'm not at home. I've had to go out. Goodbye." I dived into a lane. Very soon I turned north. As I walked I looked round, afraid of meeting some other friend like Yao Chun.

But then I stopped short at the sight of three people in front. At the first glance I recognized them: Yao Chun, Hsiao Mien-sheng and our brigade instructor. . . .

I beat a hasty retreat.

I tell you frankly, friends, this business of having whatever you thought of happen — this special good fortune for a special fellow like me — could sometimes be most inconvenient. For now I had to be on my guard all the time, wherever I was. I looked round cautiously and tried to keep a grip on myself:

"Now, don't go on thinking of your friends!"

I wandered round and round like this for some time. There was no danger of going hungry, because my hands were always filling with good things to eat. Or I could go into any restaurant I liked, because I naturally always had money to pay the bill. It was really very convenient.

But as I was eating, I came back to the old problem:

"Is this real or not?"

Were these dumplings genuine or something conjured up by the magic gourd?

I shivered. It was rather frightening you know. This sort of eating was the same as not eating.

How long could this go on?

"I must eat! I must!" I cried as if in protest. "I must have an apple too. H'm. In a minute I shall drink some almond tea."

I picked up an apple and took a big bite out of it, then munched it carefully. Ah, it was sweet, fragrant and crisp. Could this be a make-believe apple? . . . Nonsense.

Really, I had better stop thinking this way. It would give me indigestion if I went on wondering whether everything in the world was imaginary, was make-believe or not. . . .

After eating two apples I stood there for a while, to find out if what I had eaten was real or not. I felt quite sure it was. Hiccuping, I walked lazily on.

"What time is it now?" I wondered.

Suddenly I heard hearty laughter behind me. I turned and saw two children hand in hand. Probably one was telling a story and had got to the most interesting part. I smiled too, but they paid no attention to me. They walked on talking all the time. I had only my shadow to keep me company.

"Oh, I wish I had someone with me, I really do!" I sighed again. "But who can I find?"

I hung my head thoughtfully and bumped head-on into someone, sending my package of sugared walnuts flying to the ground. A paper bag of crab-apples fell too.

"Oh, it's Wang Pao! . . . Sorry!"

"Who is it?" I looked up crossly. "Oh, Yang Shuan-erh!"

15

That's right, it was Yang Shuan-erh. You remember, he was a

nephew of Uncle Yang and granny said he had light fingers but later he tried to turn over a new leaf.

I had never expected to run into him. Still I was rather pleased. This was better than being all alone. And he wouldn't make things awkward for me.

Yang Shuan-erh acted very politely: he helped me pick up the things I had dropped, apologizing as he did so. I felt quite embarrassed. He wrapped my sweets up and asked:

"Where are you going?"

I told him nowhere in particular. He was very pleased.

"Good. I'll stroll around with you. You're not busy, are you?"

Of course I was pleased. So we walked on together. He was a head taller than I, but he craned his neck down very respectfully. He asked after my grandmother and said what a good person she was. He admired my whole family and said all my form were good fellows, especially me.

"Oh?" I couldn't believe this.

"It's true. I'm not trying to make up to you. . . ."

"Will you have some crab-apples?"

We became quite friendly. As he was sucking sweets he kept saying what a good sort I was.

I asked:

"How do you know?"

"Of course I know." He looked at me. "You're good in every way. And I know you're very clever."

"Very clever in what way?" I was surprised. "How am I clever?"

"Oh, I understand."

As we were speaking we walked into a big shop. I said:

"You don't understand a thing."

"I do!"

"Tell me, then."

"Oh, no!" He winked at me.

We threaded our way through the crowd and wandered around some time before going out.

As you will well believe, in that shop were things which appealed not only to Yang Shuan-erh but to Wang Pao too. Such as a pair of binoculars. . . .

Binoculars! . . . A pair suddenly appeared in my hands.

I tried to stuff them into my pocket, but they wouldn't fit in. I stole a glance at Yang Shuan-erh. He was smiling slyly — smiling with envy and respect.

"Good for you!" He raised one thumb. "You're really hot stuff!"

"What?"

"Don't think you can take me in." He was whispering. "I spotted at once that you had a turn for this, but I didn't realize just how good you were."

I flushed up to my ears.

"Don't talk nonsense!"

I wanted to leave him, but Yang Shuan-erh clutched my arm.

"Don't worry, Wang Pao. You needn't be afraid; honestly. . . ."

"What do you know about honesty?"

"Listen, Wang Pao!" Yang Shuan-erh looked quite upset. "I'll tell you what I really think. . . . Let's go over there. I want to talk to you seriously."

"You can tell me here." I stood still. "Go on."

After looking round, Yang Shuan-erh whispered:

"Do you know why I've run away?"

I shook my head.

Yang Shuan-erh told me that he was playing truant from school — nobody knew this, not even his family. He said:

"I came out specially to find you."

"To find me!" I shivered. "Why?"

Then he told me frankly what his position was. He said he had been studying properly until — two days before — he started envying my way of life. Now he didn't want to stay in that school any more. He felt it was too boring. He became quite excited and raised his voice a little:

"Why should I be such a fool! I'd only done a little — you know what — once or twice, yet everyone raised a rum-

pus and said Yang Shuan-erh was light-fingered. My father wanted to drive me out. My uncle gave me a good dressing down. Everyone told me I must turn over a new leaf and make a completely fresh start. But look at you!"

"What about me?"

"Ha! You've got so many things but you haven't had any trouble. All the neighbours think you're a good boy. Your grandmother is always singing your praises and saying what a good student you are. Yet the fact is you're many, many times worse than me. You go in for big stuff and much more of it. . . ."

I couldn't stand this any longer. I broke in:

"What are you talking about? Big things, indeed!"

I marched away.

"Hey, what's the matter!" He hurried after me and took my arm. "Don't pretend to be a fool, Wang Pao. You think I don't know what your game is? I tell you frankly, ever since we met on Sunday evening I saw what you were up to."

"What did you see?" I had quite a shock. My right hand strayed to my pocket. Yang Shuan-erh grinned at me:

"Don't think everybody else is a fool, Wang Pao. I may not be up to your standard, but I have filched one or two things in my time. Where did you get the goldfish in your pail? You pulled the wool over your school friends' eyes, but you couldn't take me in! Ever since then I've been asking questions about you."

It was news to me that Yang Shuan-erh had noticed my achievements. He had heard of the new things that kept appearing in my room. I had lost count how many there were, but he had kept as careful track of them as if he were my care-taker. Torn between envy and admiration, he had decided to make friends with me, to become my accomplice.

"If you're willing, the two of us" — he pointed at his chest and then at mine — "we'll become sworn brothers. Never mind if we weren't born on the same day of the same month of the same year — we'll die together!"

I was hesitating, not quite understanding, when Yang Shuan-erh went on:

"I want to take you as my elder brother. I may be a couple of years older than you, but judging by skill you're way ahead of me. You're my senior, I'm your younger brother. I'll do whatever you say. . . ."

"What?" I could not grasp what he was driving at. "What's that you say?"

16

We walked and walked. Finally I told him I was going to the cinema with Cheng Hsiao-teng. Now I should soon be rid of him. Yang Shuan-erh wanted to fix a time to see me again.

"Shall I call for you tomorrow?"

"No. Tomorrow we shall probably have an arithmetic test."

"An arithmetic test! What does that matter? If you. . . ."

"Look there!" I interrupted him to walk over to a bookstall without an attendant. He had to stop talking and follow me.

I had merely wanted to change the subject, but when I saw the books I couldn't help feeling interested. The one that appealed to me most was a book about the adventure of a cowherd in the woods.

Just then a small boy popped up behind me, looked at the bookstall and called:

"Hullo, it's gone!"

"What?" Someone called out, and up popped a small girl. "Let me see, let me see — isn't this it?"

They took a picture book from the stall. The boy got out his money and was going to put it into the money-box when the girl stopped him.

"Have you counted it?"

"It's all right. Look. It's two cents extra. Mother hasn't any change, so she told me to give two cents extra."

The girl counted the money, then put it in the box. The two of them made sure that it had gone in before skipping off.

We turned to leave too. I followed them with my eyes as I sauntered along. I had not taken many steps when a brand-new book was in my hand — the one that had just attracted my attention.

My face burned and I looked at Yang Shuan-erh. He happened to be watching me, and his expression surprised me: it was a mixture of contempt and pity.

"That's nothing to be proud of, Wang Pao."

I was flabbergasted. I stood stock still, saying nothing.

"Let's get a move on." Yang Shuan-erh nudged my elbow. "Don't wait there till you're caught."

"This book — it's not from there. It's mine. . . ."

He simply curled his lips in a supercilious smile. A little later he said:

"I know you look down on me. But however low I may be, however clumsy, I wouldn't do a thing like this. That stall had no attendant. You're on your honour. What sort of boy are you to do such a thing? Even in our profession we have our standards. Suppose you took the whole lot, what would that make you, I ask you?"

I wanted to jump into the air, to bellow with rage, to fight with him. But I couldn't. I wanted to throw the book away, but I didn't. I simply quickened my pace. I hurried along till we were opposite the cinema.

Yang Shuan-erh was still holding my arm.

"Another thing. . . . Wang Pao, I know you after today."

He looked at me. I looked at him. He went on:

"Oh, yes, you're sitting pretty, you have money and a good name — but you must think of me. What about me, eh? What about my food tomorrow?"

He stopped and looked at me hard. Then he tapped my chest.

"What about it, elder brother?"

I stepped back a pace.

"What d'you mean by 'What about it?' What do you want?"

"Don't you understand?" He made a gesture. "I want your help."

"What do you want?"

"Not much, only two yuan."

I was really angry.

"Two yuan indeed! What sort of behaviour is this!"

But I couldn't just ignore him. Suppose he really went hungry? I felt in my pocket, muttering under my breath to the magic gourd, and produced a bank-note.

"Five yuan?" He took it. "Sure you're not making a mistake?"

"There's no mistake."

"Thanks. You're a good friend." He patted my arm. "Goodbye."

I was just going to cross the street when he turned back.

"You're not annoyed about just now, are you? I spoke too hastily. Don't be offended. But I advise you not to do that again in a place where there's no attendant."

Did you ever hear such a thing! As if he were so honest! But I didn't argue. He added something else, which I didn't catch, and waved goodbye.

I heaved a sigh of relief. But before I could run on he was back again.

"There's another thing, Wang Pao."

He held my arm as we crossed the road, telling me softly that if I had any work I could count on him. He would certainly help.

I knew he was trying to be friendly again. He saw me all the way to the cinema entrance. I had to thank him for that. As I hadn't really intended to see a film, I had no ticket. Now there was nothing else for it. I had to put a bold face on it and march in.

"Well, it's all right," I said to myself. "I can't go home now anyway. Magic Gourd! Give me a ticket!"

17

I went into the cinema-hall with Yang Shuan-erh's voice still sounding in my ear. Having shaken my head violently to stop it, I heard the buzzing of voices in the cinema.

After I had found my seat I thought:

"I wonder what the film is?"

A few people in the row behind were discussing the story and I listened with interest, though I didn't know the title of the film. I turned and noticed a group of people coming in, with one in the middle who looked like Elder Sister.

"What a coincidence! . . ."

I felt rather nervous for some reason or other. I quickly looked away and lowered my head over my books as if I were preparing for an examination.

"Hullo, Wang Pao!" someone called quite close to me.

I turned and stood up, either from shock or from politeness.

"Elder Sister!"

She had noticed me.

In fact, her seat was the one next to mine. I looked in a puzzled way at her. And she looked in a puzzled way at me.

"Is your seat here, too?" she asked. "What number is it?"

"Yes. Look." I showed her my ticket and checked it with the number on the back of the seat.

"How odd! You're the eighth in the twelfth row too. They've issued two of the same."

"Two of the same?"

"Hsiao-teng's got the same number."

"What! Hsiao-teng. . . ." I looked anxiously round for him.

"He's coming presently. He's got his ticket with him. But how did this happen? . . ."

I clapped my hands:

"Oh, I understand."

"What do you understand?"

"It's nothing!" I turned and hurried out. I butted my way through the crowd coming in and squeezed to the door. People stared indignantly, but I paid no attention.

When I had got a stub from the attendant, I pushed through the incoming stream into the lobby.

"Hsiao-teng!"

Cheng Hsiao-teng was there searching wildly through his pockets.

"Hullo, Wang Pao! Are you seeing this film too?"

"Here you are. This is your ticket."

"What on earth? What happened? . . ."

"Hurry up, don't waste time talking. It's just beginning."

I pushed him to the door, and though he tried to keep hold of me he couldn't.

I went out, mopping my perspiring face. Now I had time to see what film was showing. It was called *The Monkey King*.

Unfortunately all the seats were sold.

"It must be a good film," I thought.

"But mind, I never said I wanted to see it," I announced quickly to myself. "I don't want to see it. I want to take a walk. I'll walk slowly home."

The street was still very busy. The shops hadn't closed but had all sorts of tempting things displayed on their bright counters to attract passers-by.

But I dared not look, for fear of complicating my life even more and finding my hands full of boxes or packages.

"Ah, I'm not free any more."

The magic gourd asked from my pocket:

"What are you afraid of? What you can't eat you can carry, and what you can't carry I'll send home for you."

That was all right as far as it went. But what did I want with all those things?

Of course, there were some that I liked the look of. But as soon as I felt any liking, the thing would appear in my hand or be put in my room. They turned up so easily, so many of them, that I couldn't eat or use them all and they stopped being any fun.

I asked myself:

"What else can I ask for during the rest of my life?"

I couldn't answer.

Now, curious to say, my possessions had become like my time — unnecessary. I had so many I didn't know what to do with them. I was like a man who has overeaten; the sight of food turned my stomach.

So with my head up, looking neither to right nor to left, I walked along. Though I couldn't help imagining certain

shop windows or having thoughts in passing about certain things, I believed:

"By and large, I've managed. . . ."

"Ger-goo-loo!"

I paid no attention, just walked on in silence. I had no intention of talking to the magic gourd, because that was no use. I had better just be on my guard against it.

"Why should you be on your guard against me?" it asked.

"I'm not discussing anything with you."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not. The trouble with you is, you're too — you have all the wrong ideas."

"What wrong ideas?" When I didn't answer, it answered itself: "There's nothing wrong with me."

It meant that it always carried out my wishes, but since I refused to admit this it was very hurt. It said:

"The fact is you did have those ideas — they may not have been too clear in your mind but I understood what you wanted. I know from what you're thinking what you want. Those seeds would grow into trees."

"I dare say. Is that why you always deliver full-grown trees?"

"Yes, I want you to have your wish at once — the big trees."

I thought: "That's not right. Seeds are seeds, trees are trees — they're not the same. Why should it always thrust big trees on me? Sometimes these things. . . ."

I said:

"That's right. I may admire or like a thing, but that doesn't mean I want to own one myself — that's not my aim."

The magic gourd just repeated its precious formula:

"If you like a thing, it must be yours. That's your aim, surely — otherwise why like it?"

After a bit it went on:

"I'm only doing these for your sake."

Just listen! After all this talk it was back where it had started.

I wouldn't argue. I wouldn't criticize it any more. You know, although it kept slipping up, its general intentions were good. Why should I scold it?

"Even if I criticize it, it won't change. If it did, why, it would stop being a magic gourd."

But I couldn't help thinking of all my recent troubles. Yes, indeed! I must think over my experience.

"I won't carry this magic gourd in my pocket always." This was the conclusion I reached. "Sometimes I'll leave it at home so that it won't be in my way. For instance, tomorrow. . . ."

Tomorrow? Tomorrow we might have an arithmetic test.

"Well, the day after tomorrow," I said to myself. "But what about geography? Will we have a test?"

Steady on. Wait for a few days.

At least the problem was solved. Swinging my arms I strode more cheerfully home.

Yes, friends. After this, there shouldn't be any great inconvenience attached to my special good fortune. After this, whenever I wanted anything I would take the magic gourd along. When I didn't want anything, I would ask it to stay at home and rest, to save up energy. Then I could play chess or cards as usual with my friends. I could join in everything in a normal way.

I thought:

"If I don't carry it, I can make things for myself. I can mould clay or do carpentry. A glider . . . that's an idea. If I leave the Science Group I can join the Aeronautics Group. . . ."

I was cheerfully making plans as I walked to my room. I opened the door and was reaching for the light when I bumped into something and toppled to the ground. Crash! It sounded as if something heavy had fallen too. I was caught on something sharp and tangled up.

"What's the trouble now?"

With difficulty I freed my arms, then my legs. I scrambled up and put on the light. Then I exclaimed:

"Heavens, what's this!"

18

I saw a brand-new bicycle — a Tientsin model — on the ground. That was what had tripped me up. I tried to go over to it, but my way was blocked by a big cabinet as high as a stool, on which was written: "Five Valve Radio and Record Player." This was made in Shanghai.

This wasn't strange at all. Ever since I had the magic gourd, new things had been raining down on me, if not placed in my hand then put in my room. From them I understood what I had been thinking. But this was the first time anything so large and heavy had appeared.

Was this because the magic gourd was growing more and more powerful, or because I was growing more and more ambitious? Perhaps both had something to do with it.

I was flabbergasted. First I felt merely shocked surprise. Then I was pleased. Then I realized this was going to complicate matters.

"The things are good things," I could not but admit. "But what am I going to do with them in this room? What if granny sees them? . . ."

I was thoughtfully scratching my head when in came granny.

"What happened, Pao? Did you fall?"

"Nothing. Go on with your work."

But I could not stop her.

"Oh! Where did that bicycle come from?" Granny stood in the doorway. "And what's that? That — oh, where did these things come from, Pao?"

"Eh?"

"Whose are they? Did your friends buy them?"

"Yes."

"Who bought them? Why should they bring them here?"

"What do you think?"

Just then father came home. Naturally father was surprised too. And when granny told him that my school friends had left them here, he started cross-examining me. Whose was this? Whose was that? What were their names? And so on and so forth.

What was I to do, friends? I had to pretend the bicycle belonged to Cheng Hsiao-teng and the radio to our Young Pioneers branch. My face grew hotter and hotter as I answered father's questions. My throat grew drier and drier. I wanted to shout:

"Don't ask me any more questions, father! If you do, I shall have to take the magic gourd's side against you!"

But the more tongue-tied I looked, the more I stammered, the more questions father asked.

"Why should he leave his new bicycle here?"

"I — I — he wants me to learn to ride."

"And this radio?"

Another long string of questions. Next he asked about the vase and the pottery doll. Last of all he asked where the electro-magnetic crane came from.

After father had heard my answers, he said:

"So? Your schoolmates have asked you to look after these things? Why should you look after so many?"

Granny put in:

"You mustn't think he's just a child. His friends have great confidence in him."

"But he's involved in too much." Father looked round. "These flowers — take them back to school tomorrow before you spoil them all."

"Yes, father."

Father looked round the room again, seemed about to speak but apparently thought better of it. He turned back and looked hard at me for some time.

"Now, Pao," said father gently. He hesitated. "You've not been telling me the truth, have you?"

"Father!" I protested. But I could say no more. I bit my lip and fought to keep back the tears.

Granny came to my rescue:

"Pao may be mischievous, but he never lies."

I don't know why, but that made it even worse. I started sobbing.

19

The next morning I went to school as usual. I mixed with my classmates as usual, which made me both pleased and anxious. I simply went a little later than usual, just in time for class, so that they wouldn't bother me with a lot of questions. When the first lesson ended I slipped out of the class-room.

"Wang Pao!" Cheng Hsiao-teng was calling. "What did you lose yesterday?"

I gave a start and didn't know what to say.

"How careless you are!" he said. "Have you forgotten what you bought yesterday? You left them in the cinema. . . ."

At once I remembered I had dropped my binoculars and that new book in the cinema. Hsiao-teng had brought them to me, at Elder Sister's request.

"Here you are." He felt in his satchel. "Hullo!" He began to search more frantically, finally emptying all the contents out. "What's happened? They've disappeared!"

He started hunting everywhere till I was completely on edge.

"Never mind. It doesn't matter."

"Of course it does."

He told me to help him look.

Just then — as they say, troubles never come singly — some boys in the corner of the room started an argument too. I listened and heard that something else had happened in the Library Group.

Hsiao Mien-sheng told me that the group had received a parcel containing the bound volume of *Science Pictorial,* and didn't know who had picked it up and posted it.

"Don't you think it's odd?"

"What!" I gave a start. "That's — my, who?"

"But just now — just after class when we looked, it had disappeared again. What do you. . . ."

"Really! . . ." I nearly leapt out of my place.

Everybody was busy getting out books and exclaiming: "Funny!"

Luckily before long it was time for the next class. This was a test, as we had guessed. So nobody except me paid any more attention to these queer disappearances. I knew that when anything peculiar happened, it was bound to be the work of my magic gourd.

"What a nuisance it is! Really too. . . ."

I thought it too meddlesome but I didn't say so, because if it stopped meddling with things. . . .

"I still have to do the test," I thought anxiously. "This is when I need the answers to the questions. Did you hear? I want the answers."

I stared at the blank sheet of paper on my desk.

Gradually some greyish dots appeared on the paper and moved slowly from place to place. But when I stared hard the paper was still blank.

"What's happening?" I blinked. "Why don't they come? Is it angry?"

The class-room was very quiet. You could hear the boys and girls breathing, and the squeak of pencils on paper. I didn't know whether Mr. Liu — he's our form master as well as our maths teacher — was still at his desk or walking up and down by the windows. I dared not look up to see.

"Mr. Liu may be looking at me!" I broke out into a sweat. I licked my pencil from time to time and pretended to be writing.

I waited like this for a long time. Still nothing happened. Once, a faint figure seemed to appear on the paper, but when I looked it moved off. I was seeing things again!

What could I do?

"Can it suddenly have lost its magic?"

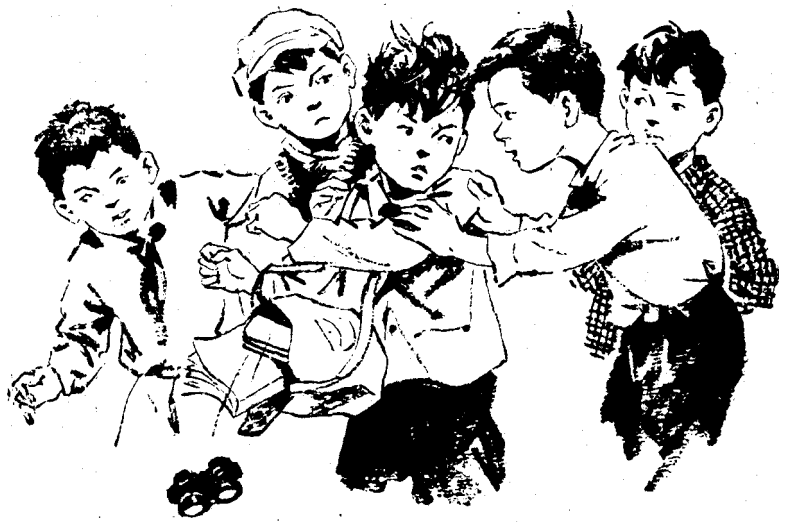
The very idea horrified me. I held my breath and waited for its answer.

All I could hear was my heart going pit-a-pat. I thought. . . .

I had no time to think. I must give my mind to the sums.

"First sum. . . ." I started reading it seriously.

Do you want me to copy the questions out for you, friends? If I do, it'll be like having an arithmetic lesson, and that would be educational, eh?



It seems to me, friends, if you really can have some difficult sums explained in a story with the working method and so on, that would be fine! Then we wouldn't need to go to school, or study, we could just read stories!

Don't you agree? All right, we can discuss it again later. I'll go on with my story.

I was talking about the arithmetic test.

It really was rather worrying. I'd never imagined that anyone with a magic gourd could be in such a fix. The fact is, I'd always disliked arithmetic. I'd never found sums easy, but always awkward and tiresome. And the last few days I hadn't done any homework — that wasn't my fault, I'd simply been too busy.

Today, without warning, I had to answer the questions myself!

"Magic Gourd! Magic Gourd!" I was thinking. "Ah!"

I heard a rustling of paper. Someone had left his desk and handed in his paper. He was followed very soon by others.

"Three," I counted. "Oh, there's another."

I was feeling desperate when in a flash everything changed. The blank sheet of paper before me, which had

seemed so white and empty, was covered with pencilling — the answers to these sums.

"Ha!" I gave another start. I could have jumped for joy.

My magic gourd hadn't broken down! It could still work magic, still do what I wanted. All was well.

I hastily wrote on my name and handed in the paper.

20

As I was handing in my paper, a funny thing happened. Su Ming-feng, whose desk was just in front of mine, discovered that his paper which he had just finished had disappeared.

Everyone thought it most odd.

And at that very moment, Mr. Liu noticed the paper I was handing in. He was surprised. He said my writing was quite different from usual, and looked more like Su Ming-feng's. He examined it carefully. Actually, all that care was quite unnecessary. You could see it at a glance.

Have you ever seen Su Ming-feng's writing, friends? My! It's hard to say how he manages to write such weird shapes. You think you're seeing them back to front, but you're not. They all slope to the right in an extraordinary way.

If I'd only troubled to look, I would never have handed that paper in. But I hadn't stopped to think.

"Is this your paper?" Mr. Liu asked me. "Why isn't it your usual writing?"

How could I answer that? I just kept quiet.

Mr. Liu told Su Ming-feng to write a line or two of his paper out again.

"You write a line, too, Wang Pao."

I knew all he wanted was to compare our writing. But this was actually testing my arithmetic! I had to try to work out that sum again, and licked the point of my pencil several times.

"Have you forgotten what you've just done?" asked Mr. Liu over my shoulder.

I jumped with fright. He was standing there watching me.

"All right," said Mr. Liu to Su Ming-feng, who had already finished two lines.

By this time most of the others had handed in their papers. Though they had left the class-room, they didn't go off to play but stood in groups by the window, talking and looking in.

I knew —

"Today it's too bad, too bad! My! This is awful!"

Sure enough.

They were saying Wang Pao had done something quite incredible — taken someone else's paper and handed it in as his own. But how had he got hold of it? Had Su Ming-feng been asleep?

"I just don't know," said Su Ming-feng. "I'd just finished and was going to write on my name, when suddenly. . . ."

"How peculiar! What does Wang Pao say?"

(What could Wang Pao say? How did I know?)

"Another thing I don't understand is how Wang Pao could be such a fool as to try to pass off someone else's paper as his? It was bound to be discovered."

"What could Wang Pao have been thinking of?"

(What was I thinking of? How did I know?)

Even Mr. Liu was puzzled. He said to me:

"Wang Pao, I want you to explain what happened."

"I — I can't."

"Why not?"

"I — I really can't. It's too extraordinary. . . ."

"It certainly is extraordinary. That's why I want an explanation."

"But I can't just now. I'm feeling dizzy. . . ."

"When will be a better time, then? This afternoon? What about that?"

Mr. Liu kept insisting. All right, the afternoon then.

But after the class, the others swarmed round to ask what was the matter with me.

Cheng Hsiao-teng put both his arms round my shoulders.

"Why don't you say something?"

I tidied the things in my satchel and kept quiet. I knew they were looking at me, but I couldn't hold up my head.

"Wang Pao, Wang Pao!" Yao Chun shook me. "What's up with you? Eh?"

I shook his hands off.

"Don't!"

I moved so suddenly that something fell out of my satchel with a thud.

"Hullo! So you've got the *Science Pictorial*!" Hsiao Mien-sheng shouted. "I said it couldn't just have disappeared!"

With a clatter, something bright fell on the chair.

"Binoculars!" someone cried.

Hsiao-teng was astounded.

"Did you take them back yourself, then? Why didn't you tell me?"

I didn't even look at the things that had fallen. I didn't pick them up. I went through my satchel again and again, wiping my sticky forehead. It occurred to me to use a

handkerchief. When I got it out a five yuan note fell out of my pocket.

"Hullo, where did this come from?" I was surprised myself. "This must be the note I gave Yang Shuan-erh yesterday evening."

The others were still crowding round me.

"Wang Pao, we want to clear this business up."

"Wang Pao, do you mean to say you. . . ."

I hurried away.

"Wang Pao! Wang Pao!" they shouted after me.

I didn't look back. I walked faster and faster till I was running.

21

I ran as fast as I could to get away from my friends.

"But what shall I do? Go back to the class-room?" I trembled at the idea.

There was nowhere I could be comfortable, neither inside the class-room nor outside. Whatever door I passed, there was someone there staring at me, pointing and gesturing as if to say:

"Look at Wang Pao! What mischief is he up to now?"

When I went to the playing-field, three big boys from the senior middle school came walking towards me. Darting east to avoid them, I ran into the rose bush and was covered with petals. Two magpies on a roof opposite started chattering:

"Haha! What's this? What's this?"

I walked off in a huff. There seemed nowhere to go. Soon I found myself walking out of the school gate. It was out of the question to stop there, so I left the town and went to the bank where we fished, where I had discovered the magic gourd. There I stopped.

I pulled the magic gourd out of my pocket, and flung it hard on the ground.

"A fine piece of work you've done!"

"Oh, not really!" it said modestly. "Actually — ahem, it doesn't amount to much. I just did my duty. Thank you for the compliment. . . ."

"What! You call that a compliment?"

"Didn't you say I'd done fine?"

I gave a scornful laugh.

"I was being sarcastic, understand? That was no compliment."

"Oh!" The magic gourd shook twice. "Then let me advise you, next time you want to be sarcastic, let me know beforehand. Otherwise we may get into trouble. And if you're only joking, make that clear too. That's the way to avoid unpleasantness."

"Why should I bother?"

"You must. Otherwise your intentions won't be clear and I shan't know what to do."

"Pah, why should talking to you be so complicated? When I talk to my friends, I never. . . ."

The magic gourd interrupted:

"Of course! Of course! You're all human beings with human brains who talk a human language. Naturally you understand each other at once. But for me you must make a special effort."

"Why? What's special about you?"

"My head's empty. I have to live on other people's brains. So you must fix things properly and tell me what's a joke and what's serious, what I should feel about everything."

"Who wants you to feel!" I gave another scornful laugh. "What did you feel today, may I ask, when all those awful things happened, making it impossible for me to stay at school?"

"What should I feel? If you'll tell me the rules for feeling, I'll try to keep them. All you have to do is say the word."

"Listen!" I squatted down to settle scores properly with it. "Why did you make me lose face like that today? Why were you such a fool in the arithmetic test? What did you think you were doing? Tell me the truth."

"Those were your orders, weren't they? You wanted the answers to those questions. . . ."

"I didn't want you to take someone else's paper."

"But that's the only way I could serve you," the magic gourd answered calmly. "I've never studied arithmetic, I couldn't do your sums for you, so I had to take someone else's. I'd heard that Su Ming-feng was good at arithmetic, and he was sitting nearby. So I waited quietly and patiently till he had finished, and before he could write on his name. . . ."

"Do you know what behaviour like that is called?" I shouted.

"No. I've never studied." It obviously didn't care. "Anyway, I have to get all these things, examination papers, maps and all the rest from other people. . . ."

I jumped up.

"What! You mean to tell me all these things — the whole lot — were taken from other people?"

"Of course. What did you expect?"

This was like a thunderbolt. I was flabbergasted. Through my mind flashed a model aeroplane, an electro-magnetic crane, a clay statue of a child — the whole lot had been made by other people!

The magic gourd interrupted:

"Yes, that's the way it is. I'm not a worker or a peasant, you know, nor yet an artist or gardener — I'm just a magic gourd. Of course I can't make anything. All I can do is get you things that other people have made."

"Well, what about the sweets and fruit you produced for me? What about those goldfish? And the radio, the bicycle, the binoculars?"

"They all came from somewhere else."

"The money? All that money I spent yesterday?"

"That too."

"Gracious!" I sat down heavily. "But you've. . . ."

I didn't know how to go on.

22

Friends! Try to imagine the shock I had. All I had known was that I had the special good fortune to get whatever I wanted; I had never looked into the question of where these things came from. That was the magic gourd's business. I'd thought with its magic it could conjure things up.

But that wasn't the case at all.

"This . . . this will never do!"

It was all too strange and too unreasonable.

The magic gourd said:

"Aren't these things good enough? I can get better ones for you."

"Get away!" I kicked it seven or eight feet away. The more I thought, the angrier I grew. I chased after the gourd and pointed at it in fury.

"You! You!"

I was too angry to speak. What I wanted to say was that it should have told me if it wasn't clever enough to conjure things up. Why should it go and. . . ."

"Oh, I didn't think it was necessary to tell you." The magic gourd seemed to realize it was in the wrong. "I was sure you knew where the things came from."

"How could I know what you were up to!"

"Didn't you really?" It seemed rather surprised.

I ignored it and it went on:

"It's very simple actually. It's like this. . . ."

It gave me a little talk.

Well, it was the limit! Do you know what it said? Things that a child of three knows. It talked to me as if I were still in kindergarten, telling me that all our food and clothes don't just drop down from the sky but have to be made. It gave examples. Apples are planted by farmers, understand? Radios and bicycles are made by the workers, see? A book has to be written by someone and printed by someone, understand? As for arithmetic sums, they had to be worked out by other students' brains — I'd already seen that, hadn't I? And so it went on.

"Yes, everything's made by someone," it repeated patiently, as if I were too stupid to understand. "If you won't make them, somebody else must do it for you."

I couldn't go on ignoring it any longer.

"Stop talking rubbish. Is this your idea of a joke?"

"How can you say that! I just wanted to clear up a misunderstanding." It suddenly started trembling. "You see, if you don't work but you want certain things, the only way is to take what other people have already made. What's strange about that?"

I ground my teeth and shouted:

"That's stealing! That's stealing!"

I suddenly remembered Yang Shuan-erh who had said how clever I was. . . .

"Mr. Liu must be shocked to find Wang Pao stealing another boy's paper." The memory of this brought another lump to my throat. "And what will my classmates say? What will they think of me?"

Tears welled into my eyes. I couldn't stop them.

"What can I do? I've been stealing."

The worst of it was that some of the things were public property. Some quite obviously came from state shops. The dozen or so flowers must have come from some gardening co-operative. Then there were all those sweets and cakes — nothing was left of them.

"Was that money from the people's bank?"

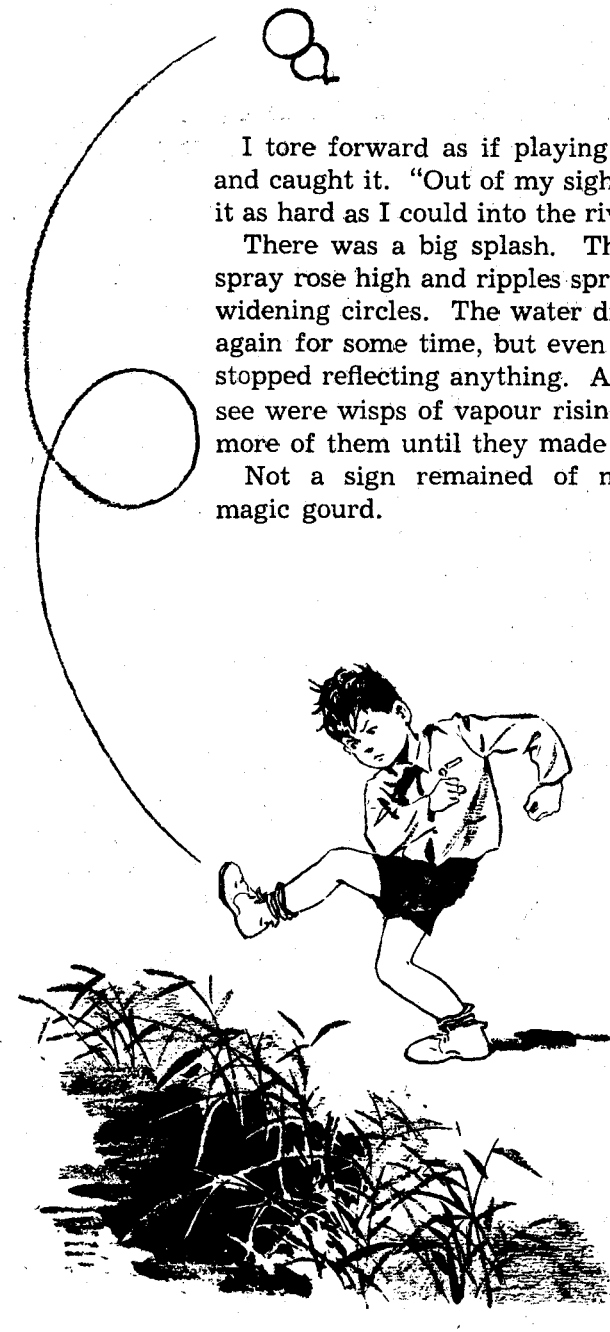
I wanted to clear up every point, but I couldn't. The magic gourd had forgotten. It asked:

"What does that matter?"

This was more than I could stand. I jumped up and kicked the magic gourd again. While it was still exclaiming "Ger-goo-loo, ger-goo-loo!" I ran and kicked it again. It whizzed to the bank, whirled round and nearly fell into the river.

"Hey! . . ." While it was protesting, I rushed over and gave it another kick. It bounced not into the river but higher up the bank.

"So you're trying to run away, eh?"



I tore forward as if playing basket-ball and caught it. "Out of my sight!" I threw it as hard as I could into the river.

There was a big splash. The glittering spray rose high and ripples spread in ever-widening circles. The water did not settle again for some time, but even then it had stopped reflecting anything. All you could see were wisps of vapour rising, more and more of them until they made a thick fog.

Not a sign remained of my precious magic gourd.

23

After staring for a while, I walked slowly along the bank. I stood for a little under the willow where I had sat angling that day. It was here that I had heard "Ger-goo-loo!" and fished the magic gourd out of the water.

Only two yards away, I had rolled over twice and turned a somersault.

"How childish!" My face burned at the memory.

After squatting here for a little, I walked on. I squatted down again, then walked on a few more steps. My brain seemed in a whirl. I was growing more and more confused. But the sun was already overhead.

There was a not unpleasant smell coming from the river, which reminded me of broth. Mixed with the scent of the grass by the path, it was enough to make your mouth water. Near the weeds, I remembered, was where I had eaten last time. Yes, there among the grass, two toffee apples had sprung up. And further along this slope — hullo! — two apples had rolled up.

"I'd no idea where they came from. But I was fool enough to eat them. If only I'd. . . ."

All of a sudden, my mouth started watering and I had to swallow several times. I couldn't stop.

All of a sudden, I found several things in my hand: little paper bags — I dropped them in my surprise. The contents fell out: pancakes, sugared walnuts, smoked fish. . . .

There was fruit too, and toffee apples, in exactly the same places as before.

This was a tremendous shock. I stared at these delicious things on the ground for a good five or six minutes.

"Why are these here again? Haven't I thrown the magic gourd away?"

Maybe because I'd once had a magic gourd, some of its magic had stuck to me. If not, how could I manage this myself?

I thought: If I really had this magic power and no magic gourd to make trouble for me, I should surely be in a much better position.

"But where do these sugared walnuts come from?" The paper bag had no shop name on it.

I paced up and down, wondering whether to eat the things or not. As a matter of fact, they looked pretty good to me. . . .

"Ger-goo-loo, ger-goo-loo!"

I leapt with surprise and rubbed my eyes. I looked all round. I couldn't make out where the voice had come from. There was nothing to be seen in the river: the mist had vanished and the water was clear, without a ripple.

"Maybe I was mistaken. . . ."

"Please help yourself. Ger-goo-loo. Help yourself."

I gave another start. I looked right and left.

"Who's that? You!"

"It's me. It's me."

"Where are you hiding?"

"Here, here." It sounded like the crickets I had kept in my pocket when I was small.

"What's the meaning of this?"

"You can't do without me, I know."

"Who says?"

"You wanted me to come."

"What!" I shouted. "I wanted you? Nonsense!"

I snatched the magic gourd out of my pocket and threw it again with all my might into the river. But it seemed to meet a strong gust of wind, for it described a semi-circle in the air and fell back on the path. With one bounce it was back beside me. I slapped it away, but it hopped back to my feet. It said:

"You can't get rid of me, you know. So I don't care where you throw me."

Well! No matter where I kicked or threw it, the wretched thing would still come back to me. It would follow me all the time. Unless I hacked it to pieces with a knife. . . .

This thought no sooner crossed my mind than a heavy chopper appeared in my hand.

"All right. I don't care where you come from. I'll use you."

Bang! I hit out at the magic gourd.

You must remember, friends, that I was in such a rage, I didn't stop to think of the consequences. Of course it wasn't afraid of any chopper, a magic gourd which could speak, which could tell what you were thinking, which could bring you things belonging to other people and which couldn't be thrown away. That should have been obvious. . . . Normally, I wouldn't have dreamed of it.

But I didn't give the matter any thought. I hit out hard.

My chopper cut the magic gourd into two, and that gave me rather a shock. I jumped back two paces to be on my guard against any magic change.

I waited and waited. But nothing happened. No sparks flew, there was no explosion, no earthquake.

All around was as quiet as ever. Only from some tree a yellow oriole was trilling, and the boughs of the willow rustled lazily.

I waited for quite a time before tiptoeing over to have a look, the way you look at a firework that hasn't gone off.

"Ha, it's empty!"

There was nothing in the gourd. I didn't even see any seeds. They may have dropped out, or it may never have had any.

I raised the chopper and hacked it into four pieces. With the back of the chopper I smashed these up. Then I put the chopper down.

"Let's see if you follow me now!"

Before I had finished speaking the fragments jumped up. They whirled round with a sort of rattle and joined together again into a gourd exactly the same as before, without so much as a crack. Even the colour was fresh, a greenish yellow.

I could say nothing. It was the first to speak.

"You can't get rid of a magic gourd like me so easily."

The cheek of it!

"Ha, so strong are you?"

"Pooh! If you chop me up, I come together again as good as new, in fact stronger than before."

"Well, then. . . ." I thought for a while. "I'll burn you!"

"All right, try!" The magic gourd agreed. "Here are some matches." A box of matches appeared in my hand. "Here's firewood." A pile of firewood appeared on the ground, with some waste paper.

Of course, this made me much less keen to burn it. But the magic gourd was eager to help.

"Would you like some petrol too?"

"What for?" As I hesitated, I found myself holding a small bottle of petrol. "All right, we'll see just how clever you are!"

I lit a fire. When it was burning I threw the magic gourd into it. Soon the flames were rising high and I heard crackling as if the gourd were damp.

I wondered if it had changed, but I couldn't see it. I went nearer and bent down to look. Suddenly smoke belched into my face.

"Ah, the air inside the gourd must have expanded and burst it!"

But the same moment something hopped to my feet. Like a football player, I hastily kicked it away. Then I felt something hot, like a compress, on my chest. When I put my hand there, a voice rang out:

"Ah, I'm so devoted to you, dear Wang Pao. . . ."

"So your're back, eh?"

Just see! The thing couldn't be burned. It said:

"By burning me you just make me love you more. I can't bear to leave you."

24

What would you have done, friends? I felt absolutely helpless. I sat on the ground with my elbows on my knees, my chin on my hands. I watched the fire die down and circles of faint smoke rise in the air. I didn't move. At last even the smoke disappeared.

"How can I go back to school?" I was wondering. I had a choking feeling.

An excited voice sounded from my pocket:

"Why should you go back to school? It's not convenient at school. Why should you go back and get into all that trouble?"

I answered angrily:

"Nonsense! Don't I have to study?"

"Why does a boy have to study? Tell me that." The magic gourd sounded very reasonable. "To learn some skill, so as to earn money later. But with me you can have as much money as you want."

"Pah! Do I think of nothing but money?"

"What else?"

I ignored it. I knew I couldn't make it understand. The idea! I wanted to make a big contribution to our country and do something really splendid — but all it could think about was money!

"I understand what you're feeling," the magic gourd answered. "You want to make a big contribution, to become famous. Then your name will be known and your picture will appear in the papers — isn't that it? That's easy. I can manage that for you at once. . . . Leave it to me!"

"Leave what to you?" My heart started pounding. "Don't tell me my picture's in some newspaper?"

It wasn't. I hadn't seen a single paper.

But look on the ground! What a dazzling sight! The grass was covered with medals and banners, too many to count.

I picked one up — an award for an invention. With it was a blue print: sketches of a machine which I didn't understand.

"What's this?"

"That's proof. Proof that you invented this thing."

"Who asked you?"

I picked up another medal by my foot, a first prize for a young artist. I looked at a banner beside it, inscribed:

"Champion in the two hundred metre breaststroke."

I was bending forward to pick up some more when I caught sight of a cluster of medals on my chest, all different shapes, sizes and colours. I didn't know what they were for, or by whom they had been issued. I didn't know who their original owners were.

It was impossible to count them all. On my chest alone there hung several rows. . . .

"Is that enough?" asked the magic gourd. "If not, I can easily get some more."

I didn't know how to answer. My face was hot, I felt an awful fool. But I did rather wish I had a mirror to see how I looked.

The magic gourd said:

"Now you're great. Any reporter who sees you is bound to take your photograph. The Young Pioneers will certainly want you to spend a day with them. There'll be people calling on you all the time, asking you to make speeches. . . ."

I yawned. "How could I make a speech?"

As I was thinking, I heard footsteps approaching.

"Bother!" I threw myself flat on the ground, pretending to be asleep. I had pulled all the medals and banners under me.

The magic gourd was muttering eagerly:

"Your life is going to be splendid and magnificent. You won't have to go to school any more. You needn't pay any more attention to those teachers and students. They'd only trouble you. How comfortable you'll be on your own! You'll have me for everything. I'll make all your wishes come true."

I paid no attention, listening hard to those footsteps. Someone seemed to have walked straight to the main road without passing here. The steps died away.

The magic gourd didn't stop talking. It urged me to leave all the people I knew, to enjoy my good fortune with an easy mind instead of tripping up at every turn.

It said I could have whatever I wanted. I needn't depend on others for anything. I needn't bother about other people or pay any attention to them.

It added:

"Just think, what use are other people to you? None at all. But they can be a nuisance. If they find out our secret we shall be in trouble. If they know that all your things come from them, they'll hate you."

After a bit it went on:

"It's true, some people loved you or were your friends, but now all that has changed. Now I don't know what they think of you. Your best way is to pay no attention to them, but have a fine time on your own."

I said nothing. I was afraid passers-by might hear. The magic gourd's voice was so small that I was the only one who could catch what it said. It was always muttering like this. Though I was used to it and didn't find it so odd now, it really wasn't like a proper person talking. And I couldn't understand some terms it used.

I thought back over all the happenings of the last few days. I said to myself:

"What, must I spend my whole life like this?"

If you'd been in my place, friends, what would you have done? If I depended on this magic gourd, I would have to do as it said: spend my whole life with this precious thing, without school, home or friends. Of course, the magic gourd could get money for me, or food, toys, anything I wanted. But. . . .

"But what should I do all day?" That was the question. "I wouldn't need to do anything or learn anything. A few days of this had already bored me stiff. A lifetime like that! There would be no point in living."

Another thing — I'd have to spend my whole life skulking like a thief, afraid of meeting anyone I knew! If I met someone I knew I'd be ashamed and have to tell lies, because the magic gourd was the only one in the world to whom I could tell the truth.

"What does that matter?" The magic gourd gave its opinion. "Just keep out of the way of all the people you know. We'll do much better mixing with people we don't know."

"Better, indeed! Suppose some stranger saw my medals and wanted to make friends with me? What about that?"

I sat up with a clanking sound. I started unpinning the medals on my chest.

"Wear them! Wear them!" the magic gourd urged me.

"Certainly not!"

It took me a long time to unpin them all. Then I got up to go.

"Don't forget the cakes," said the magic gourd. "Have something to eat."

"Certainly not!"

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I walked a few paces, then I stopped again.

For some reason or other, I started crying like a child. I couldn't help myself.

I didn't know where to go. When I thought of our school, our class-room, I seemed to have been away a long, long time. I like Mr. Liu very much — and though he's so strict with me I know he likes me too. I could see all sorts of people in my mind's eye: Cheng Hsiao-teng, Su Ming-feng, Yao Chun, Hsiao Mien-sheng and many, many others. How I wished I could be with them, talking to them.

I seemed to wake up suddenly. I looked round.

"I can't stay here for ever!"

I wiped my eyes and went on. I must go somewhere, but where?

"I'll go home first."

Tears were running down my cheeks again.

"Does father suspect anything?" I wondered. "If father knew where all those things have come from. . . ."

My steps lagged till I was hardly moving at all.

When I was small, whenever something upset me, I would run to mother and everything would be all right. But now —

"Mother isn't home yet."

Then I thought:

"It's a good thing she isn't. If mother were at home and knew what had happened at school. . . ."

I felt terrible. Mother would be coming back tomorrow or the day after. But who knew what I would be doing then?

I thought of granny too. Granny had never been angry with me, but I was always losing my temper with her. I sighed.

"I know sometimes I do behave badly."

I thought as I walked along. I thought of all the people at home and all the people at school.

Funnily enough, it wasn't till today that I realized how good they were to me. (I don't think I'd ever thought about it before.) But today — at that moment — they seemed far, far away.

To tell the truth, I wished I could do as I had when I was small — go home and cry till I'd had my cry out, and let granny comfort me.

"Go on quickly! Never mind."

I walked faster. I entered the town and went down the main street. I hung my head and strode along faster and faster. But without warning someone caught hold of my arm.

I had no time to think. Without stopping to see who it was, I tugged away.

"Hey, Wang Pao!" I was caught again. "Where are you running?"

"Oh, it's you, Yang Shuan-erh!" I heaved a sigh of relief. "What are you doing here?"

Yang Shuan-erh told me hoarsely:

"Don't make such a noise! Tell me, are you going home?"

"Eh?"

"Come on, come with me!"

"What?"

"You mustn't go home," he whispered. "There's been a tremendous row there over you. Some boys from your school went there to find you but you weren't in. They telephoned to your father, and was he angry! They are trying to find out where you got all those things in your room, and they suspect you're in league with me. Your grandmother's in such a state she's crying like anything."

"Rubbish! I don't believe it."

"I came to tell you because we're friends. Believe it or not as you please."

"How did you find out?"

"You needn't ask."

After peering round he told me that he had been twice to my house and the second time he had heard shouting.

"I . . . I'll tell you the truth, I meant to steal some of your things. . . . I'm at my wit's end, Wang Pao. I don't know how that five yuan you gave me yesterday disappeared. I really couldn't help myself. . . . Next time I won't dare. You can count on me."

"What?"

"Now then, don't make fun of me. You know very well."

I found out that he had been to steal that vase, but later — how he didn't know — it had disappeared. Then he had gone back to my house and found it on my table exactly as before.

"I deserve to die, Wang Pao. I said to myself: It serves you right for trying to cheat the master. He's let you off lightly, a king of thieves like him. . . ."

"That's enough." I cut him short impatiently. "Is my grandmother at home now or not?"

Suddenly he jumped as if he had been stung.

"I must go, they're waiting for me at home." He gabbled and hurried off and was soon out of sight.

As I wondered what to do, the magic gourd in my pocket cried out joyfully. It had never been in such high spirits before.

"This is fine, this is fine! You're completely free now!"

"Bah!" I walked on.

"Where are you going, Wang Pao?" the magic gourd asked.

I paid no attention.

The magic gourd made another suggestion:

"From now on, they can't do anything about you. Nobody can stop you. If you feel bored, you can get Yang Shuan-erh to keep you company. He can be your servant too. . . ."

I walked as fast and noisily as I could to drown what it was saying.

26

By this time, as I discovered later on, everybody at school was trying to guess what had happened to Wang Pao.

When they discussed all the odd things I had done, they were afraid I might be out of my mind — there was no other explanation.

"But where has he gone? Why can't we find him anywhere?"

My classmates decided not to rest after lunch but to go out in different directions to look for me.

My father went to school too. Then they started wondering where all those strange things in my room had come from. Could Wang Pao have stolen them? Or had Yang Shuan-erh stolen them and hidden them there?

My friends said:

"Wang Pao would never do a thing like that."

"Well, then, is this a sort of disease?"

They were guessing like this when someone outside shouted:

"Here he comes!"

Then Hsiao Mien-sheng ran to the staff-room and reported:

"Here's Wang Pao!"

Yes, Wang Pao had come back.

I had come back to school. I went to the dean of studies — luckily Mr. Liu was there too and so was my father — and in front of them all took the secret magic gourd from my pocket.

"There! This was at the bottom of everything!"

"What's this? What are you talking about?"

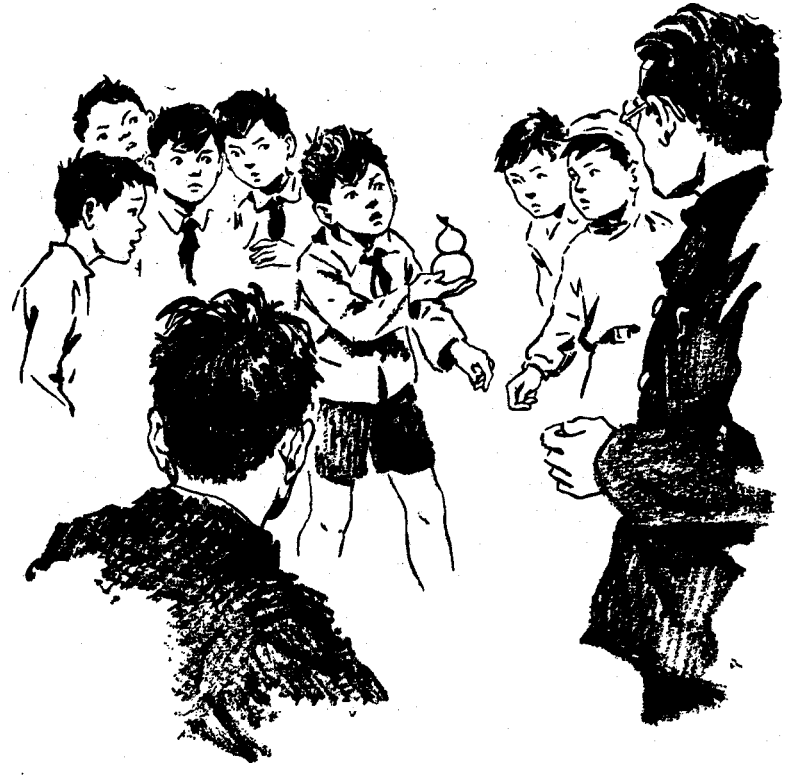
"It's this . . . this . . . . You see, I. . . ."

"You're quite out of breath." Mr. Liu made me sit down and poured me a cup of water. "Have a drink before you tell us."

When I had caught my breath I started my story:

"It was a Sunday. . . ."

I told them the whole thing, exactly as it happened, just as I've told you only in greater detail.



27

I felt as good after telling them my secret as if I'd put down a heavy load.

As for the things the magic gourd had fetched — all those things in my room — they had been brought to school. There were lots of them and plenty more had been added today. Most striking were the medals and banners hung all over the wall — the magic gourd had picked them up and put them in my room.

They weren't easy to deal with: we must find a way to return them to their owners.

Then there were other things: the money I had spent and the sweets and stuff I had eaten. I made out a list, intending to pay back the owners.

"But who are the owners? How can we tell where they came from?"

That was a problem. Some schoolmates proposed putting a notice in the paper, but how should we word it? Others suggested visiting all the shops and co-operatives in turn.

"Will you check whether you've lost anything? If you have, come and see me."

That wouldn't do either.

We couldn't decide what exactly to do.

This was the trouble the magic gourd had left for me.

There was another thing — not so serious but a nuisance all the same. That was that my friends were so interested in the story of the magic gourd that they kept asking all sorts of questions. Especially Yao Chun. Whenever he had a moment to spare he would come and discuss the magic gourd with me. How could it speak? How could it know what I was thinking? Why should it steal other people's property — what was its motive? Supposing that bicycle had hit the telegraph wires when it was moved out of the shop? . . . And so on and so forth.

The boys passed this greenish-yellow gourd from hand to hand, looking at it closely to see what magic there was about it. But they could discover nothing. When they

shook it, it made no sound. Of course, it couldn't produce things any more.

And then there were the goldfish — my classmates wanted to get them to speak and asked them this and that, but they didn't answer. They were just ordinary goldfish.

All these tests failed. Strange! It seemed as if all these things had never happened!

Apart from these problems, I worried about Yang Shuan-erh — I didn't know what had become of him. I felt partly responsible for his running away from school the way he did.

"Isn't that Yang Shuan-erh?" I suddenly heard Uncle Yang say. "Catch him, quick!"

"Where? Where?"

As I started running — I don't know how, I can't remember exactly — I found my eyes wide open. . . .

"Hullo, what's this?"

Do you know what? I found myself lying in bed.

That's right. I was at home in my own bed. I heard granny say:

"Look at you! Sleeping all this time."

"What about Yang Shuan-erh?" I asked.

Granny didn't know what I meant.

"What about Yang Shuan-erh?" she repeated.

"Where is he?"

"Where is he? Isn't he studying like a good boy at school?"

"You mean he hasn't run away?"

Granny laughed.

"You're still dreaming. Wake up."

So that's how it was. I scratched my head. "When did I fall asleep?"

"You've been sleeping ever since you came back from school."

"Oh!" I exclaimed and gave a yawn.

So, friends, that was it.

And after?

After, of course, everything was quite clear. I got up, washed my face and went to find Yao Chun. I went with

Yao Chun to call on Su Ming-feng and the three of us went to Cheng Hsiao-teng's house to play.

That's what we're like in our school. We may squabble, but once it's over nobody bears any grudge. My grandmother laughs at us:

"Boys will be boys!"

28

Maybe you're disappointed after reading to here?

"What! After all that talk it was only a dream!"

Sorry, that's just how it happened.

Maybe you will say:

"The thing is it never happened — that's really too dull for words. We were listening quite seriously. Bah, only a dream! You are the limit!"

All right, all right.

But I learned my lesson. I said:

"Wang Pao, don't ever have that sort of dream again. If you must dream, dream something different."

Translated by Gladys Yang
Illustrations by Chang Luan

Lake in Early Summer by Hsu Shih-ming

→

The artist was born forty-six years ago in Soochow, Kiangsu, a province with many lakes and waterways. He paints his immediate surroundings in a style reminiscent of classical landscape painters. This picture is one of his latest works.

LU CHUN-CHAO

The S. S. International Friendship

1

It was an autumn night in Gdynia in 1953. The bay was wrapped in a thin mist and the chill wind from the Baltic seemed to eat into your bones. Not so long ago the sandy beach here had been crowded with merry holiday-makers. Now they were gone. Tonight only I, a Chinese seaman, strolled along the cobble-stone road that skirted the coast. As I gazed at the beacon outside the port and the ships returning from the sea, the murmuring of the sea beat on my ear drums and my thoughts rose and fell like the billowing waves. The next day I was to start work on the Polish ocean liner the S. S. International Friendship.

Since the Polish government began training our sailors to man ocean-going vessels, I had worked on various kinds of ships, and Polish craft were not unfamiliar to me. But when I stepped aboard the S. S. International Friendship, a ship as tall as a ten-storey building, my heart thumped with excitement. As I knocked at the captain's door, I couldn't help feeling tense. How is he going to receive me? Is he proud and difficult to know? What kind of a

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Lu Chun-chao is a seaman by profession. He writes mostly about the sea.

man is he? Will he think it a bother to have a Chinese pilot on his ship? . . .

The door opened. I was nearly carried into the room by a pair of strong arms — the arms of old Captain Maciejewski! I stared at him a little astonished. How kind he looked with his silvery hair, his weather-beaten face, his frank laughter.

Without waiting for me to introduce myself, the old captain took off my cap and ruffled my hair. "Ah, black hair," he cried happily. "What a fine young man!" He waved his fist like a victor and said to himself, "So they gave me a Chinese pilot at last!"

Twisting his moustache, he smiled happily, beaming at me in a warm and very friendly manner. The distance between us dwindled to nothing in these few seconds.

"My name is Hai Ning," I told him when we were seated.

"Heine! What an interesting name!" he said, pronouncing my name in his own way.

There were peals of laughter outside. I discovered that sailors kept passing the door and thrusting their heads in to scrutinize me curiously. Then the door was blocked by a tall sailor. The old captain called to him in high spirits, "Don't stand in the doorway, Eurek. Come in and meet our Chinese friend."

Eurek entered. He was a head taller than I, and big and husky, but his golden hair gave him a childlike appearance. His only defect was that he limped a little on the right foot.

"Eurek, our Chinese pilot has come. You will be working under his command," said the captain in a fatherly tone. "Oh, Heine," he said, turning to me. "This is the able seaman, Eurek, a brave sailor and a brave guerrilla fighter who has recently escaped from Greece. He was wounded in the right foot in a battle against the reactionaries, but this does not prevent him from being a good sailor."

A Greek! I was surprised to find a Greek sailor on a Polish ship. Eurek walked up to me, stretched out a big hand which gripped mine in a bone-crushing grasp and shook hands warmly.

After supper, the old captain took us ashore. I thought we must be going to his home. But I was wrong. Instead, he led us to a four-storey apartment on a street facing the sea. As he pressed the door bell, he called, "Is my old friend Lewandowski in? I've brought you company."

A white-haired old man about the same age as our captain opened the door. The old captain began his introduction eagerly, even before the door was closed behind us.

"Listen, my old friend, listen. We now have seamen from three different countries on our ship. Truly, it deserves the name S. S. International Friendship! Come here, dear friend, let me introduce you. This is Heine, our Chinese pilot. Black hair, black eyes. This must be the first time you've ever met a Chinese!

"And this is our Greek sailor, Eurek. Look at him. How tall he is and how thick his arms are. He is a rare piece of material. If he hadn't become a seaman I would have protested on behalf of the sea! Embrace him, this sailor from Greece. Oh, by the way, Eurek, let me remind you again to be a little gentler with your handshake otherwise you'll break my old friend's bones."

The old captain said all this in practically one breath. And before our host had had time to pour out some coffee, before we had quite settled ourselves on the sofas, he hurried us out of the house again. Taking us by the arm he hustled us along the street from one friend's house to another, repeating the same warm introductions.

This went on for three days until we had visited all of his friends. In these three days I discovered him to be a charming old man with a very warm heart. To tell the truth, I liked him the moment I set eyes on him. I wanted to know all about him and made use of every opportunity to inquire. "Why does he always take us visiting?" I asked Eurek. "Isn't his home here in Gdynia?"

"You've only gone on one round of visits with him. I've been on three. He considers it a great honour to have foreign seamen working on his ship," Eurek told me. "He has no home. The Second World War left him a lone old man. As a rule, when the ship makes port, he doesn't go

ashore much. He usually strolls along the deck patting this one on the head and asking whether his wife is good to him, patting that one on the shoulder and inquiring how much taller his child has grown. The ship is his home and the sailors his kin. We all call him Captain Grandpa behind his back."

2

Our ship was loaded and was ready to set out again. According to the rule of the sea, a Chinese flag was hoisted on the foremast. This meant we were bound for China.

Everything was ready but still the old captain did not give orders to put out to sea. "We're waiting for a guest," he told me.

Before dark, an ambulance drew up at the wharf. A doctor helped a dark old man out of the car; in the old man's arms was a little cat. The captain hurried down the gangplank to welcome the old man on board.

We set sail. Soon we passed the seawall and the outline of the bay gradually disappeared in the dusk. . . . Although I was busy at work as we steamed out of the Baltic, my thoughts reverted often to the mysterious guest. Of what nationality was he and where was he going? Why was it that he had no luggage but only a cat?

My curiosity increased. As soon as I was off duty I went to peek into his porthole. I found him looking at me with an expression of suspicion and uneasiness. He still held the cat in his arms as if it were his inseparable companion. The old captain suddenly appeared beside me.

"Don't disturb him," he said, waving me away. "Let him stay in his cabin quietly."

This made me more curious than ever, and I peeked at the old man frequently. Only when we had sailed into the foggy English Channel did the captain solve the riddle. He called me to him and said, "All right. I'll let you visit him today. Maybe you can be of some help to him." As we were walking to the old man's cabin, he suddenly asked, "Have you ever crossed the Bay of Bengal, Heine?"

"Sure," I answered in surprise. "You have to cross it to get from China to Poland."

The captain's face brightened when he mentioned the Bay of Bengal. "That was where we rescued the old man and his cat," he said proudly, gripping my hand. "He was in a junk on his way back to Penang and was blown off his course by a tropical gale. You are a seaman so I needn't tell you that tropical gales can stir up an entire ocean. Think of it, a little junk not much bigger than a life-boat, adrift on the seething waves for eighteen days. You don't have to experience it. Just imagining it is enough to make your hair stand on end. He, a sixty-year-old man, gave his last mouthful of food to the cat while he himself starved for six whole days. Yet when we found him he was able to climb up the line we threw him without the help of the sailors. In my sixty-four years I have never seen a seaman with such tenacity and toughness."

Then the old captain sighed heavily and continued, "But this old man has a very odd disposition. In the month he's been with us he's always eyeing us with suspicion. He shuts himself up in the cabin and won't come out for a stroll on deck with us. And he eats only the food taken in by Eurek. It might have something to do with the fact that Eurek broke a finger when we were rescuing him. I noticed that he was getting thinner and thinner and was afraid that he might not be able to get home alive. So I sent him to a sanatorium as soon as we reached Poland. But he's not much better. Since we speak different languages and can only talk through gestures, it's hard to communicate with him. He's from Malaya."

From Malaya! My heart jumped. I could never forget Malaya. I rushed into the old man's cabin. The captain called in a friendly voice: "Ali, Ali, come and meet our Chinese friend. You are both from Asia."

"Ali," I cried in surprise. It was a name very dear to me. I studied the face of the man before me as I repeated the name silently. Ah, he looked familiar. Could he be the Ali who was so closely linked with my life? I was reminded of a bitter experience in my youth.

In 1942, I was working as a sailor on a British ship. She was sunk by a Japanese submarine in the Bay of Bengal. Together with my mates I was captured and put in a concentration camp in Penang. We did hard labour all day long but were given only one rice ball a day. We were so hungry we even ate the raw snails we found on the ground. Before long, all the snails round camp were eaten up. One night, during a tropical gale, I escaped by climbing on the shoulders of my companions and jumping over the wall, in spite of a stream of bullets fired at me by the guards. I ran to a thatched hut by the sea. The owner of the hut, a Malayan, sheltered me at the risk of his own life.

He was a kind old man named Ali. A seaman himself, he couldn't go to sea because of the war. Thereafter I stayed with Ali. With a curved cutlass at my waist, I climbed palm trees with him to gather coconuts; or we went to the plantation to gather betel-nuts. Sometimes we went fishing in a canoe in the Strait of Malacca. One day we made coconut cakes stuffed with fish. I told Ali that many of my friends were still in the concentration camp and said I would take some of the cakes to them, otherwise they would soon die of hunger. Ali volunteered to go with me. We pretended to be passers-by and strolled outside the camp. No sooner had we thrown the cakes to my friends than a pack of dogs dashed out barking fiercely. Ali couldn't run as fast as I and one of the dogs bit him on his heel. . . .

I would never forget the troubles and hardships I had experienced during the war, and I would always remember kind-hearted Ali.

Looking at this Ali, I tried hard to find traces in him of the Ali who had saved my life. Yes, there was some resemblance. But this man's hair was all white, and he seemed much smaller than the Ali I had known. He had less teeth, too. . . . Then I hit upon the idea of examining his heel. I didn't bother to wonder whether he'd think me very rude but stooped down and pulled off his shoe. . . . Ah, it was he! There was no mistake. There were the scars on his heel.

I was so happy that I cried out in **Malayan**, "Ah, Ali, Ali, it is you! Don't you know me? I am **Hai** Ning. We cut coconuts and gathered betel-nuts together and we fished in a canoe!"

Ali was startled. He stared at me a long time. Then he rushed over and took my hands, shaking them and calling simultaneously, "Hai Ning? Are you really Hai Ning? At last I have met someone I know!"

He looked at me again with tear-dimmed eyes. But when his gaze fell on the gold braid of my pilot's uniform his hands dropped down slowly and he backed away from me. His face, bright and eager a moment ago, was again dark and downcast like the foggy sky over the English Channel. He held his cat tightly in his lap as if it was the only thing dear to him in a world of woe. . . .

What was the matter? Why should there be such coldness when two friends, who had been through thick and thin together, met again unexpectedly on the sea? Was it my pilot's uniform which had created this wide gap between us? Did he take me to be an important person, proud of my rank? No. My memory wasn't so short. Although I was now a full-fledged pilot, I hadn't forgotten the days when I ate raw snails, and I certainly remembered the tried and tested friendship between Ali and myself.

Excitedly, I walked over to him and drew him to sit down beside me on a sofa.

"Who would have dreamed that we'd meet again, Ali! How's your family? Don't worry, we'll take you home."

My last words touched a chord in his heart and he looked at me gratefully. But I could still see a tinge of suspicion in his eyes. As far as I could remember, Ali had always been an open-hearted old man, optimistic and cheerful even in the hardest days. He would frequently break into song, even in our little canoe that might capsize in the slightest squall. Now he seemed to have changed into another person, wrapped in layers of grief. Perhaps his narrow escape from death had affected his nerves, or maybe there were other reasons I didn't know of.

All this time while Ali and I were talking in Malayan, the old captain watched. Finally, he couldn't refrain from inquiring:

"You seem to be old friends, Heine. How do you happen to know each other? Ah, this is a small world! Who'd ever dream that you were friends."

"I was put into a concentration camp by the Japanese," I told him. "After I escaped from that hell, I lived with Ali for three years."

"Concentration camp!" The old captain jumped as if someone had hit him. He repeated the words "concentration camp" with loathing. Glaring, he turned to stare at the fog outside the porthole. His breathing came hard and fast. He was unable to speak for a long time.

3

Crossing the stormy Bay of Biscay, our ship followed the turbulent Atlantic current and entered the Strait of Gibraltar. Before us stood the white fortress on the rocks. The signal tower at the entrance of the Mediterranean wanted to know where we were bound. We replied:

"For China."

The flashing of our signals had hardly ended when a British warship glided up to us. A French warship too edged over from Tangier on our right. They seemed to have a special interest in the word, China. We were sandwiched between the two ships, though at times one went ahead and the other tailed behind us.

"Look, we've acquired an escort." Our captain stroked his beard with a humorous smile. "An ordinary ship like ours has gained status because we are bound for China."

After escorting us for a short distance, the two warships turned back. We felt rather lonesome.

Now as we steamed towards the Suez Canal, I noticed that the captain steered the ship a few points off course towards the Greek islands. It could not be due to the current since the current here was not particularly rapid nor

did it flow in the direction of Greece. I was sure there was another reason and could not help asking about it.

"The ship isn't sailing off its course," said the captain blinking and pointing to his breast comically. "It's my seaman's heart!"

I didn't understand.

"Let Eurek have a glimpse of his motherland," he whispered in my ear. "He hasn't seen her for a whole year."

Now I knew. Unable to say anything, I stared at the old captain.

It was an extraordinarily fine day and the sunset painted half the sky red. As soon as the curtain of night descended, the moon climbed into the sky to shine like a big lantern over the sea. A breeze ruffled the serene water, rippling it like blue satin. Now and then a school of fish stirred the satiny surface, making endlessly widening circles. The moon and the stars shed beams of light across the water straight to our ship. The sea was very quiet. The only sound was the lapping of the waves as our ship cut through the water. How could anyone sit in his cabin on a night like this?

When the wind is down and the sea is calm, thoughts of home always stir in the sailor's heart. One by one the crew came up on deck. They sat, stood or sprawled on the rough canvas spread over the hatches. I pulled Ali out of his cabin, and for once he came willingly. We found Eurek at the rail. One hand shading his eyes, he was peering anxiously to the port side.

A flock of sea gulls suddenly flew overhead.

"My island!" cried Eurek, "I see it! Ah, island of my home. . . ."

We could vaguely discern the silhouette of low hills in the moonlight. Crete. The island beacons beckoned to Eurek and to all roaming sailors, reminding them of their far-away homes. Against the dark shore-line, a U.S. naval vessel, red lights glowing and siren arrogantly hooting, glided into the harbour, while Eurek, one of those to whom the islands really belonged, but driven from his home and people, stood eating his heart out for his native land. Crete

moved slowly backwards until soon it had fallen astern. Eurek's eyes were still riveted on his beloved island. Suddenly he snatched the accordion out of his comrade's hands and began to play a melancholy tune. To the music he sang:

O sea gull, our faithful friend,
Why do you cry so without cease?
Do you bring news of trouble at home,
Or greetings from her, the lass I love.
O sea gull, will you take a message for the seaman?
Tell my mother, yonder, under the orange trees,
I shall one day return to her embrace,
My wounds all healed and cured.

This melancholy song drew our captain out too. He sat down quietly by Eurek. "Sing on, son," he said, stroking Eurek's head with a big hand. "Sing on, sailor boy, your homeland will hear you."

The song stopped with a choke. Sitting quietly by me, Ali's eyes were fixed on Eurek's broken finger. To my surprise he suddenly buried his face in his hands. Tears seeped out between his fingers.

Eurek's massive frame rocked rhythmically in the moonlight. Thoughts of home and motherland stirred this brave strong sailor to the depth of his soul. Ah, motherland! to us seamen you are a beacon shining in our hearts, day and night.

The sea gulls' cries, Eurek's song and Ali's tears made me long for my own country. A hundred thoughts crowded my mind; I remembered how before I left China in 1942 people said to me, "Hai Ning, you are an orphan whose home has been destroyed by a bomb of the Japanese imperialists. Going to sea is just right for you. There is nothing here to bind your heart. . . ." But they were wrong. My heart was not unattached. Though an orphan, I was tied to the motherland as if by a tangible cord. The further I went from her, the stronger and more durable this invisible cord became. It will never be broken, even when I leave this world.

When working on British ships and suffering discrimination and scorn, I did not forget my humiliated country; and I remembered my suffering motherland in those difficult days of the war when I had to fill my stomach with raw snails. With the rebirth of China, I too obtained a new life. She trained me to become a pilot on trans-oceanic ships. On rough waves and in turbulent seas, the thought of her always gave me strength. I knew my work was increasing her prestige and might. Travelling to dozens of countries, I saw that people were beginning to look at me with respect. More than anyone else, I noticed this startling change and appreciated its meaning.

A longing for my native land gripped me from time to time. By looking at my watch, I would tell whether it was sunrise over the East China Sea and when heavily laden junks could come up the Whampoo River with the tide. Thinking of China, a warmth coursed through my veins and flowers burst in my heart.

But I could not think only of my own happiness..I wanted to share Eurek and Ali's worries and trouble, too. I decided to do my best to make Ali happy again. Our ship was the S. S. International Friendship. I could not let this glorious name down.

4

We sailed on across the broad back of a vast sea, then steamed through the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. No sooner had we left the Africa continent than the Indian Ocean greeted us with a tempest.

A mighty seasonal wind roared, sweeping across the boundless ocean for the continent of Asia. The gale raged for a whole month, wreaking havoc on the unfathomable Indian Ocean. Rows of tall white-crested waves, rushing at us like thousands of pythons with gaping mouths, tossed our ten-thousand-ton weight into the air like a child's plaything. When we were hurled up on their crests, they seemed intent on breaking our keel, but the next moment, drop-

ping into a deep trough, you'd think they wanted to swallow us in one gulp.

The roaring of the waves and the howling of the wind are the seaman's call to arms. Like a powerful mainmast, our old captain stood firm on the bridge. A particularly strong wave knocked his pipe out of his mouth. He didn't even change colour, and his hawk-like gaze never wavered.

The storm seemed to restore his youth. His courageous expression made him look quite different. He showed not a trace of weakness in the face of the mountainous waves; in fact he looked every inch the conquerer.

As we battled against wind and waves, we received an urgent SOS from a British ship which had been blown off its course. She gave us an approximate position: longitude 60°30′ E. and lattitude 2° S. This was hundreds of knots from where we were; the storm there must have been even worse.

The old captain promptly gave orders to change our course and go to the rescue. As our ship heeled over in a sudden turn, the waves struck us sharply. From the bridge, dozens of feet above the sea, my hands nearly touched the water. I had never seen anything like this even during a typhoon, but the captain headed the ship around without the slightest hesitation.

After a whole night and another day's hard battle we found the drifting British ship.

"Please give us three hundred tons of fuel oil and two weeks' supply of food," was the message they flagged us.

"Three hundred tons of oil!" burst out the captain. "Embargo stuff! To throttle us, your British Empire will not sell us a single drop of oil!"

Yes, because of the embargo we always had to carry hundreds of extra tons of fuel oil instead of cargo. We knew well enough that a drop of oil was as precious as a drop of blood.

"But life is more important than oil!" The captain agreed to help the lost ship. It was dangerous to moor the two ships together because of the storm. We decided to tow the British ship to calmer seas and refuel it there. We tried

several times to get a cable across with a line-throwing pistol but the wind always deflected our aim. Finally the captain asked me to go across in a life-boat with three sailors and take the cable over.

A life-boat was lowered on to the tossing sea. Eurek and I were just sliding down the rope when suddenly I heard Ali shout, "Be careful, Hai Ning. Wait, let me come with you. I'll be your helmsman."

Ali gave me no chance to refuse because he had already slid down the rope. Hauling the cable, our boat rowed away from the ship. A strong wave brought us close up to the bow of the British ship and the line was heaved up to them. At this moment I heard Ali's startled cry. Turning round I saw a mountainous wave crashing down on us. Our rudder was smashed. As I rapped out the order for all hands to hold on to the cable, I noticed that Ali was still doggedly turning the broken rudder.

Then a terrific crash was heard as the life-boat was dashed against the steel side of the big ship. Luckily, Eurek, with amazing agility, had lifted Ali out of the boat. We were all hanging on to the cable now. Slowly, we felt ourselves lifted into the air. The waves rolled under our dangling feet and the wind ballooned our shirts. Along this cable bridge stretching between the two vessels, we slowly climbed back towards our ship. Over the howling of wind and waves I heard the captain's quivering voice, "Hold on! Careful now, hold on tightly."

At last we were safely back on board. Towing the British ship behind us, we reached a calmer sea and pumped them three hundred tons of oil. We also gave them enough food for a fortnight. When all was done, the captain sent me over with a note for their captain to sign. I noticed that the old captain had written in conclusion:

> . . . I remember clearly that fuel oil tops your government's embargo list. But whether your government relaxes the embargo or not, I want you to know that we are always ready to hold out a helping hand to brother seamen. Friend, I have a small request to

make. You have seen how our seamen risked their lives, hanging on to a cable over a stormy sea, in order to rescue you. As captain of your ship, you should let this incident on the Indian Ocean be known to our brothers, the British seamen. . . .

I returned to our ship. Smoke was coming out of the funnels of the British vessel again. She blew three blasts of the hooter as a salute of thanks and we responded with three in kind. As I gazed at the two tall masts on her stern, the words of her captain rang in my ears:

". . . Mr. Hai Ning, I am grateful to your captain and the crew. Please tell him for me that the people who signed the embargo list are those who stayed in air-raid shelters during the war. We British seamen did not sign the embargo; we do not recognize it!"

5

The next day at noon our ship was to cross the equator. It was a great event for the seamen. According to ancient sea-faring custom, we were to have a carnival. (We missed the chance to do this when we passed the equator last time, rushing to the rescue of the British ship.) Seamen who cross the equator for the first time must go through the baptism of the sea when the god of the sea inspects the novices. They cannot be considered genuine seamen until after this inspection.

Not sure whether he would agree, we asked the captain to assume the role of Neptune. He gladly consented. Ali was nominated for the role of one of the two generals since he was the oldest seaman among us. Another reason was that we wanted to draw him more closely into our big family of brothers. Eurek was to be the other general for no other reason than that he was big and massive. Some of the short, stout Polish sailors volunteered to act the part of witches while the lean and small ones vied to be the devils.

Bustling preparations went on in the club that evening. Sheets were dyed to make skirts and ropes cut up and frayed to make false hair for the witches. The generals' armour was made of card-board painted black and gold, while small oars served as their sabres.

The sea was calmer the next morning.

"Ho," said the captain, "I've ordered it that way!"

At noon, the hot sun made rainbow arcs in the foamy spray. The loudspeaker on the bridge trumpeted: "The S. S. International Friendship has crossed the equator at 64°32' E. at 11 hours 21 minutes on September 16, 1953. The carnival now begins, Comrades."

All hands came on deck. In a royal robe and with sword in hand our captain took his place on a wooden throne. From his quivering moustache, I could see he was finding it hard to keep a straight face. His two generals stood one on each side. Eurek, in painted armour, gripped the oar at his waist as if it really were a priceless sabre. Sweeping those round him with a militant glance, he looked the picture of a mighty warrior. But the other general's face was half covered by his huge helmet and he was nearly smothered in his too-big armour. By the side of the massive Eurek, Ali looked like a general from Lilliput. I couldn't help roaring with laughter. Just then two little devils came to drag me before the sea-god.

"We've brought Chinese seaman Hai Ning before your majesty," they announced and pressed me down. Then they smeared my face with black grease and waved the paint brush threateningly, ordering me to crawl through a canvas ventilator. All this time the witches were writhing and twisting in a weird dance and singing some queer tune they had made up. The witches and the devils teased me until I bent double with mirth though they trained a water hose on my back to urge me forward.

Suppressing bubbling laughter, I held my breath and crept forward until I had emerged from the other end. The two generals seized me, one by my legs the other by my arms. Before I had time to look up, Neptune barked out an order and I landed in the swimming pool. Coming to

the surface, I saw Ali laughing so heartily that tears were streaming from his eyes. It was impossible not to laugh amid such gaiety and joy.

Laughter rippled up and down the deck spreading ever wider to draw in all present. Old and young, officers and mate celebrated gaily round our captain — the sea-god.

That evening, we novices were issued diplomas by the sea-god in the brightly lit dining room. The captain signed his name, giving diplomas first to the generals by his side. Ali could not write his name but in his usual manner put his thumb in the ink pad and made a thumb print. Perhaps this was the first time in his life that he made his thumb print without feeling insulted. No wonder he could not stop smiling. I shook his hand warmly and also congratulated myself on becoming a tried seaman.

After the carnival our Ali was a changed man. To be more accurate, perhaps I should say Ali became his normal self again. He rose with the sun every morning, hung a sailor's knife at his waist and went on an inspection of the boat from stem to stern, touching everything. As soon as the bell for work rang, he went on deck with the other sailors, climbed the masts and painted the rusty parts. He worked with an agility and vigour that belied his sixty years. Always humming a little tune under his breath as he laboured, he seemed very happy now. We were all rather surprised by this sudden change.

Once when Ali climbed up very high, the captain rushed out after him. "Come down now, Ali," he ordered. "If you won't stay idle, come with me." He led the old man to the store-room, handed him a piece of canvas and said winningly, "Make me a sailor's sack, will you? I need one badly." Ali accepted the canvas eagerly, picked up needle and thread and began to sew. Soon he was humming a tune again.

Ali, Eurek and myself spent practically every evening on deck braving tropical squalls to search with our flashlights for flying fish washed on board. We fed them to our little cat. We each sang our favourite songs.

Then one day a small beacon appeared at the end of the horizon to inform us that we had reached the Bay of Bengal. Our songs ended. As day by day we neared Ali's home, our hearts constricted at the thought of the coming parting.

"Hai Ning," said Eurek hesitantly, coming up to my side, "let's go to the captain and ask him to let Ali stay with us. He has begun to like our ship and he is a very able sailor. He climbs up the mast like greased lightning and we all get on so well together. If we let him go home, the Malayan colonial government will arrest him as a Communist. They'll trump up some charge against him."

Eurek's last words made me shudder. I stared into the pitch black sea and pondered. Yes, ever since the Malayan colonial government adopted an emergency bill, thousands of innocent people had been shut up in concentration camps for no reason at all. Terror and suppression ruled the land. It was bad for Ali to go home in our ship. The name of our S. S. International Friendship alone was enough to frighten the colonialists. We knew by experience that as soon as we reached a capitalist port they would keep a sharp watch over us and tab our ship a communist "propaganda boat."

Because I was silent, Eurek pulled Ali and me into the captain's cabin. The captain, as usual, immediately poured us cups of green tea with sugar. To tell the truth, green tea with sugar tastes something awful but the old captain hospitably urged Ali to drink.

"This is the famous Lungching tea, Ali. Look at Heine's eyes, so black and bright. All the Chinese have bright black eyes because they drink green tea. If you are willing to stay on our ship, I'll treat you to green tea every day."

Eurek and I exchanged a delighted smile; so the captain had the same idea we had.

"Heine," he turned to me. "Please tell him that he'll not want for food or clothing here on board, we'll treat him just like the other sailors. I have seen enough tragedies caused by racial discrimination. I myself was once a victim. I was put into a German concentration camp during

World War II simply because they suspected that my ancestors had Jewish blood."

Agitated, the captain ripped open his shirt and showed us a burn scar on his breast. "Look," he said pointing to it. "Forty-five years ago, my mother tattooed an eagle on my breast with her own hands, the eagle of our Poland. She forbade me to tattoo a woman's figure or an anchor like other sailors because she didn't want me ever to forget my motherland or follow my father's footsteps: he led a vagabond's life in America. I travelled over sea and oceans for several years with this eagle. The Germans finally burnt it off with red hot iron. . . ." The captain stopped at the memory of the ordeals he went through, shaking with indignation.

Then he continued in a calmer voice, "I want to create an example on my ship. We have Poles, a Chinese, a Greek and a Malayan now. We will live together like brothers and sail to all corners of the earth so that people can see how we, although from different nations, live at peace together. . . ."

How alike was the fate of us seamen during the war. Now I understood why the old captain jumped so when I had mentioned concentration camp the other day. We were overjoyed by the captain's wish to keep Ali on board and I shook Ali's hand excitedly as I started to translate. But the old captain suddenly put a hand over my mouth.

"One moment, Heine," he said. "Ask him first who he has at home."

I replied for Ali. "He has his old wife, three sons and seven grandsons."

The captain's face fell. After a pause he told us he had changed his mind. "We mustn't keep him. Ali is an old man with a big family. His wife and children are looking forward to his return."

Eurek and I stood up simultaneously, protests on our lips, but the captain's decided wave of the hand stopped us from further arguments.

The wind seemed to be rising again as the waves smote the portholes. A framed photograph of the S. S. International Friendship began to sway on the wall with the pitching of the boat. The captain unhooked the photograph and placed it in Ali's hands.

"You'll be home in three days, Ali, don't forget us. Remember the name of our ship — the S. S. International Friendship — and write us a letter if you are in trouble. We will help you."

Ali stared long at the picture, too moved to say anything.

"How can I thank the captain enough for his kindness?" he asked me when we left together. "He delayed the ship to save my life, and the company lost thousands of dollars because the cargo couldn't be delivered on time. You know me, I have only a small coconut grove. How much is that worth? Even if I were to sell it, I still won't have enough to pay for the food I've consumed on board."

It is true that a poor sailor would never be able to repay this debt. This kindness and friendship at sea could not be repaid in money, anyhow. During a crisis, Ali risked his life to save me. Could that be paid for in money? To rescue that British boat, we supplied them three hundred tons of oil and nearly lost our lives in reaching them. This too could hardly be computed in cash. Today I was lucky enough to serve as pilot on a Polish boat to learn the technique of navigating the oceans; was it possible to repay this kindness in money? I meant to tell Ali all this and much more, but we heard the captain's sigh through the sound of the wind and the rain. He began to recite some lines of Mickiewicz:

> If you see a tiny little craft,
> Chased by the mighty strong waves,
> Do not torment your heart with worries,
> Don't hide your eyes with tears. . . .

Ali listened with a rapt expression and suddenly gripped my hand. "Are you a Communist, Hai Ning?" he asked, looking me straight in the eye. "We have Communists too, but they have been driven to the mountain forests. I cannot bear to let my son be a policeman for the British any more. I shall forbid him to arrest Communists. Hai

Ning, I have not treated you all in the right way. I feel ashamed before you, I used to think all white people and Communists are bad. I believed all the lies I read about the Communists."

It was only then that Ali told me, his old friend, what had been bothering him since he came on board. For months, he had been tormented by suspicion and fear aroused by the one word, "Communist." However, his suspicion finally turned to trust.

There was the captain's voice again, rising above the noise of the storm:

> No. I'd like to match my strength against
> wind and storm,
> I'll struggle to the end.

Our ship would sail into Malacca the next day. Ali was going home. Before him was the prospect not only of stormy seas, but the storms of life. But I was confident that my old friend Ali would straighten his back, match his strength against the storm and struggle to the end.

6

The Brueh beacon outside Sumatra blinked. Our ship cast anchor in Penang Harbour in the early morning mist. Penang is a big harbour in the Strait of Malacca. Trees are green there all year round and people called Penang the garden of the East. None of us, however, was in a mood to admire the beauty of our surroundings. We gathered round our friend Ali on the deck.

Ferries steamed past our boat busily, their sirens blasting, tightening our heart-strings. My eyes fell on the tall coconut grove on the beach. If you went further on you'd come to the place where the concentration camp used to be. Every tree and bush round there was branded deep in my memory. But I couldn't disembark at Penang, for the colonialists who had returned to take over the island after the war would not even let me go home with Ali for a friendly visit.

The crew embraced Ali in turn, folding strong arms round his thin shoulders. The same arms which rescued him from the sea now hugged him in farewell.

"Ali," said Eurek loudly, "if anyone dares to do you any harm, don't you be afraid. They will not find any mercy at the hands of us sailors!"

The old captain came down from the bridge in spotless white summer uniform, a navigation chart in his hands. He was ready to report to the local authorities about the S. S. International Friendship's part in rescuing Ali at sea. Ali shouldered the sailor's sack he had made on board, now full of presents given to him by the crew, and walked away, turning back every few steps to wave goodbye and to thank us in Malay, Polish and Chinese: *"Terima Kasih . . . Dziekuje . . . Hsieh hsieh. . . ."*

Together, the two old men went on board the launch. Ali turned round for a last look. His little cat clambered down from the spardeck, mewing plaintively.

"Go back," Ali waved and shouted. "Stay on board. They will love you and Hai Ning and Eurek will catch flying fish to feed you."

I caught the cat up in my arms. "Goodbye Ali," I shouted. "Give my love to your whole family. I wish you luck."

I saw tears glittering in Eurek's eyes. My heart too felt heavy. The little launch was already chugging off. I saw the captain and Ali in a hazy mist, as my eyes were moist.

"Dear, dear Captain Grandpa!" I mused. "I'm sure your wish will come true. Already we are sowing friendship and setting an example for others. The S. S. International Friendship will become known in Malaya because Ali will let his countrymen know of the friendship in our hearts. . . ."

Translated by Chin Sheng

FU CHOU

Night

Close, close the forest holds the moon,
Through lofty pines fall gleams of light;
Above the tree tops hang the stars
Like necklaces of jewels bright.

Soft, soft I hear the branches breathe
While tender shoots and grasses spring;
Pine needles in the stillness prick
The sleeping bats, who twitch a wing.

Fu Chou, now in his early thirties, is an editor of the poetry magazine *Stars* in Szechuan.

I hear the forest's heart-beats now,
Beneath its roots gay fountains rise;
The dew, like doves that will not sleep,
Has flickering bright emerald eyes.

I hear the woods stretch rustling arms,
Each tree strains up to reach the skies
To greet a new bright day ahead,
For soon the glorious sun must rise.

In all these echoes of our life
My breath, my voice have parts to play;
All, in the service of our land,
Grow fast to meet the coming day.

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi

Selections from the Classics

PU SUNG-LING

Two Tales of "Liao-chai"

The Cricket

During the reign of Hsuan Teh, cricket fights were popular at court and a levy of crickets was exacted every year. Now these insects were scarce in the province of Shensi, but the magistrate of Huaying — to get into the good books of the governor — presented a cricket which proved a remarkable fighter. So much so that his county was commanded to present crickets regularly and the magistrate ordered his bailiffs to produce them. Then young fellows in town began to keep good crickets and demand high prices for them, while the crafty bailiffs seized this chance to make money. Thus each cricket they collected was the ruin of several households.

Now in this town lived a scholar named Cheng Ming, who had failed repeatedly in the district examination. This slow-witted pedant was appointed beadle on the recommendation of the crooked bailiff and could not evade this service hard as he tried. In less than a year his small patrimony was exhausted. Then came another levy of crickets. Cheng dared not extort money from the country folk but neither could he pay the sum himself. At his wit's end, he longed to die.

"What good would dying do?" demanded his wife. "You had better go out and look for a cricket yourself. There is just one chance in ten thousand that you may catch one."

Cheng agreed. With a bamboo tube and wire cage he searched from dawn till dusk among ruins and waste land, peering under rocks and exploring crevices, leaving no stone unturned — but all in vain. The two or three crickets he caught were poor specimens which did not come up to standard. The magistrate set him a time limit and beat him when he failed, till in little more than ten days he had received some hundred strokes and his legs were so covered with sores that he could not continue his search. Tossing painfully on his bed, his one thought was to die.

Then to their village came a hump-backed diviner who could tell fortunes by consulting spirits. Cheng's wife, taking money went to ask his advice. She found his gate thronged with pink, blooming girls and white-haired old women. Entering, she saw a curtain before the inner room, with incense on a table in front of it. Those come to ask their fortune burned incense in a tripod and kowtowed. The diviner prayed beside them, staring into space, but though his lips moved no one knew what it was he said and all listened respectfully. Finally a slip of paper was tossed from the inner room with the answer to the question asked — an answer which invariably proved correct.

Cheng's wife put her money on the table, burned incense and kowtowed like the other women. Presently the curtain moved and a piece of paper fluttered to the ground. Instead of writing it had a painting of a building like a temple with a small hill behind covered with rocks of every shape and overgrown with thorns. A cricket was crouching there while beside it a toad was making ready to spring. She had no idea what this meant, but the cricket at least

"Liao-chai" is the title for a collection of 431 tales written by Pu Sung-ling (1640-1715). For an introduction to this book and its author see *Chinese Literature* No. 1, 1956.

had some connection with their problem. Accordingly she folded the paper and took it home to her husband.

Cheng wondered: "Is this supposed to show me where I should look for a cricket?"

On examining the picture closely, he recognized Great Buddha Monastery east of the village. So taking the paper with him, he struggled along with the help of a stick to the back of the monastery. There he found an old grave overgrown with brambles. Skirting this, he saw that the stones lying scattered around were exactly like the painting. He pricked up his ears and limped slowly through the brambles, but he might just as well have been looking for a needle or a grain of mustard-seed. Though he strained every nerve he found nothing. As he was groping around, a toad hopped into sight. Cheng gave a start and hurried after it. The toad slipped into the undergrowth and, following it, he saw a cricket at the root of a bramble. He snatched at it but the cricket leapt into a crevice in a rock and would not come out though he prodded it with a straw. Not till he poured water on it, did it emerge. It seemed a fine specimen and he picked it up. Seen close to, it had a large body and long tail, dark neck and golden wings, and he was a happy man as he carried it home in the cage to delight his household, who considered it more precious than the rarest jade. The cricket was kept in a pot and fed upon white crab's flesh and the yellow kernel of chestnuts, tended with loving care till such time as the magistrate should ask for it.

Now Cheng had a son of nine, who uncovered this pot on the sly while his father was out. At once the cricket jumped out and sprang about so nimbly that he could not catch it. Finally the boy grabbed it, but in doing so tore off a leg and crushed it so that the next moment it died. The frightened child ran crying to his mother. When she heard what had happened she turned as pale as death.

"You wicked boy!" she cried. "You'll catch it when your father comes home!"

Her son went off in tears. Soon Cheng came back and when he heard his wife's story he felt as if he had been

turned to ice. In a passion he searched for his son, who was nowhere to be found until at last they discovered his body in the well. Then anger turned to sorrow. Cheng cried out in anguish and longed to kill himself. Husband and wife sat with their faces to the wall in their thatched and smokeless cottage in silent despair. As the sun began to set he prepared to bury the boy, but upon touching the child found there was still breath in him. Overjoyed, he laid the small body on the couch, and towards the middle of the night the child came round. Cheng and his wife began to breathe again, but their son remained in a trance with drooping eyelids. The sight of the empty cricket cage brought back Cheng's grief, but he dared not scold the child now. He did not close his eyes all night, and as the sun rose in the east he was still lying in stark despair when a cricket chirped outside the door. He rose in amazement to look, and sure enough there was a cricket. He clutched at it, but it chirped and hopped away. He put his hands over it but to no avail: when he turned up his palms the cricket escaped again. So he chased it up and down till it disappeared round the corner of the wall, and while searching for it he discovered another cricket on the wall. But this was a little, dark red insect, not to be compared with the first. Deciding that it was too small to be worth catching, Cheng looked round again for the one he had lost. At once the small cricket hopped from the wall to his sleeve, and he saw it resembled a mole-cricket with speckled wings, a square head and long legs — it might be a good one. So he was glad to keep it.

Cheng meant to present this cricket to the *yamen,* but fearing that it might not do he decided first to give it a trial fight. Now a young fellow in that village had a cricket called Grab Blue which had beaten every other insect it fought, and its owner wanted such an exorbitant price for it that it had remained on his hands. This man called on Cheng and laughed to see his cricket, producing his own for comparison. At the sight of this large, handsome insect, Cheng felt even more diffident and dared not offer a fight. The young man, however, insisted on a match;

and since his poor cricket was useless in any case Cheng thought he might as well sacrifice it for a laugh. So the two combatants were put in one basin, where the small one crouched motionless as a stick of wood. The young man laughed heartily and prodded it with a pig's bristle, but still it made no move. At that he laughed louder and louder until at last the cricket was roused to fury. It hurled itself at its opponent, attacking savagely. In an instant it had leapt forward with bristling tail and seized the other by the neck. The horrified young man made haste to separate the two contestants, while the little cricket chirped proudly as if to announce its victory to its master. Cheng was glorying in this sight when a cock bore down on the cricket and pecked at it. Cheng gave a cry, rooted to the ground in horror; but luckily the cock missed the small cricket which leapt a foot or more away. The cock gave chase, the cricket was under its claws. Cheng, unable to intervene, stamped his foot and turned pale. But the next thing he knew the cock was flapping its wings and craning its neck — his cricket had fastened its teeth in the cock's comb. Amazed and exultant, he put the cricket back in its cage.

Later Cheng presented this cricket to the magistrate, who abused him angrily for producing one so small. Refusing to believe Cheng's account of the little creature's exploits, the magistrate pitted it against some other crickets and it defeated them all. He tried it with a cock, and again it turned out exactly as Cheng had said. Then the magistrate rewarded Cheng and presented this cricket to the governor, who put it in a golden cage and sent it joyfully to the emperor with a detailed report of its prowess.

In his palace the emperor tried the cricket with Butterfly, Praying Mantis, Yolita, Green Forehead and many other champions, but none was a match for it. And he prized it even more highly when he found that it would dance in time to music. In high good humour, he rewarded the governor with fine steeds and silk garments. And the governor, not forgetting where the cricket came from, within a short time commended the magistrate for

outstanding merit. The magistrate, pleased in his turn, exempted Cheng from his duties and ordered the local examiner to see that he passed the next examination.

A year later Cheng's son was restored to his senses. He said: "I dreamed I was a cricket, a quick, good fighter. Now I have woken up."

The governor also rewarded Cheng so handsomely that within a few years he owned vast estates, whole streets of houses and countless flocks and herds. When he went abroad, his furs and carriage were more splendid than a noble's.

The chronicler comments: The emperor may do a thing once and forget it afterwards, but those who carry out his orders make this a general rule. Then when officials are greedy for profit and their underlings are bullies, men are driven to sell their wives and children. This shows that since each step an emperor takes is fraught with consequence for his subjects it behoves him to be very careful. This man Cheng, first impoverished by rapacious officials, grew so rich thanks to a cricket that he went about in magnificent carriages and furs. He can never have dreamed of such good fortune when he was a beadle and was being beaten! Because Heaven wished to reward an honest man, the governor and magistrate also benefited from the cricket. It is true, as the ancients said: "When a man becomes immortal and soars to heaven, his chickens and dog attain immortality too."

The Rope Trick

When I was a boy I went to the provincial capital for the examination. This was just before the Spring Festival, and the custom was that on the eve of the festival all the tradesmen would go with pageantry and music to the finance commissioner's office. This was known as the Spring Pageant. I was there with a friend to watch the fun. The

crowd that day was enormous. In the court, four officials in scarlet were sitting facing each other on the east and the west sides — I was too young at the time to know their ranks. Amid the babel of voices and ear-splitting music, a juggler went up to the dais carrying a pole and leading a boy with long hair. He appeared to be speaking, but his words were lost in the uproar. I could, however, see the officials laugh. Then a soberly clad attendant ordered him in a loud voice to give a performance. The juggler asked what he should do. The officials consulted together and made the attendant inquire what he could do best.

He answered: "I can change the order of nature."

The attendant, having reported this to the officials, came down and ordered him to produce some peaches. The juggler agreed to try. Taking off his coat and laying it over his basket, he complained:

"These gentlemen are hardly reasonable. The ice has not melted yet — where can we find peaches? But if we don't try, the authorities will be angry. What's to be done?"

His son replied: "You said you'd do it, father. You can't back out now."

The juggler reflected gloomily for a while. Then he said: "I have thought this over carefully. With snow still thick on the ground, we certainly shan't find any peaches on earth. The Heavenly Mother's garden is the only place where plants flower all the year round. There may be peaches there. We shall have to rob heaven."

"But how can we climb up to heaven?" asked the boy.

"I have a way," said the man.

He opened his basket and took out a coil of rope, hundreds of feet in length. He grasped one end of this and threw it up, whereupon the rope stood straight up in the air as if suspended to something. It went higher and higher till it was lost in the clouds, and the whole coil was paid out.

"Here, lad!" he called. "I am old, and too heavy and clumsy to get up there. You'll have to go." He passed the rope to his son. "You can shin up this."

The boy's face fell as he took the rope. "What an old fool my father is!" he grumbled. "He expects me to climb all the way up to the sky on this thin rope. If it breaks halfway, every bone in my body will be broken!"

Still his father was adamant. "It was a mistake to agree but the harm's already done," he said. "I'll have to ask you to go, son. You mustn't complain. If you can steal a peach they're bound to give us a hundred pieces of silver, and with that I shall get you a good-looking wife."

Then the boy grasped the rope and swarmed up, like a spider running along a slender thread. In a few minutes he was out of sight in the clouds. By and by down fell a peach as big as a bowl. The delighted juggler presented it to the officials, who passed it from hand to hand unable to tell whether it was genuine or not. But suddenly the rope dropped to the ground and the juggler cried out in dismay:

"The rope has been cut up there! What will my son do now?"

Then something fell with a thud — it was the boy's head. Clasping it in both hands, the juggler wept.

"The keeper must have caught him stealing the peach. My poor son is no more!"

Then the boy's leg came down, and all the dismembered limbs one after the other! The wretched juggler picked them up and put them in the basket. He closed it, saying: "This was my only son. He travelled north and south with me. Obeying my orders, he came to this pitiful end. I shall take him away and bury him."

He went to the dais and knelt before the officials. "I killed my son for this peach," he cried. "Have pity on me and help me with his funeral. Then I shall be eternally grateful."

The horrified spectators showered him with coins which the juggler pocketed. Then he rapped the basket and cried: "Why don't you come out, boy, to thank the gentlemen?"

At once a lad with tousled hair lifted the lid of the basket and jumped out. As he kowtowed, we saw it was his son! This was so miraculous that I remember it to

this day. Later I heard that members of the White Lotus Sect* can do the same trick — perhaps this man was one of them?

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

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* A secret society which started in the 13th or 14th century. During the Ching dynasty it developed into a movement against the Ching government which spread to several provinces but was eventually crushed.

The Hermitage (114.9 cm. × 26.4 cm.) →
by Chien Hsuan

Chien Hsuan of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) is best known for his landscapes and figure painting. This picture of the life of the recluse is a reflection of the mental suffering of artists under the despotic regime of his time. Unable to rise in revolt they tended to withdraw from society. Depicting his observations of a particular scene, the artist traces the outline of hills and woods with such harmony that he creates a realm of peace and serenity which seems to take one right into the painting.

TIEN CHIEN

The Girl

Like gold above the grassland
The morning clouds are bright;
But she, the maiden who lives here,
Is up before it's light.
She takes an emerald pitcher,
She wears a crimson shawl,
And as she hurries to the spring,
"Skylark!" the neighbours call.

She stoops above the water,
As bright as leaping fire;
To kiss her face reflected there
The fountain gushes higher.
She takes a sip of water,
As merry as a lark;
Her laughter echoes all around
To wake the grassland — hark!

Tien Chien who has already attracted attention in the thirties, is one of the outstanding poets in China today.

She clambers up the derrick,
Her eyes with triumph shine,
And waves a friendly hand to greet
The Bayin Obo Mine;
To open up the grassland
Her fingers hold the key;
Now happiness is calling her
And happy she shall be.

High up upon the mountain
I see this girl so sweet,
With fleecy clouds above her head,
Rich ore beneath her feet;
Our country's mineral treasures
The whole wide world must prize,
And over this abundant wealth
Our human skylark flies.

Her coloured garments flutter
Along the steep ascent,
Like some bright rainbow of the steppe
Above her little tent;
The ore she holds is sparkling,
Her kettle sings good cheer;
True daughter of her motherland,
Her second home is here.

For milk she drinks spring water,
Pins flowers in her hair;
With ore and pot for company,
She roams in fancy there;
Alone she climbs the derrick,
Drills iron ore, hard-won;
Ah, high above the grasslands green,
This maiden is the sun!

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi

Writings of the Last Generation

WANG LU-YEN

On the Bridge

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

The roving boat equipped with up-to-date rice-hulling machines could be heard in the distance again.

Uncle I-hsin's grasp on the rope of his balance slackened. Countless black circles formed before his eyes, rolling nearer and nearer across the hills and valleys.

Swallowing back a groan, he breathed out deeply and pulled himself together.

"Forty-nine!" he shouted.

"That's not right!" cried a woodcutter from the hills with a grin, as he lifted the firewood higher. "The wood's still touching the ground."

"Get along with you! It's fuel we're weighing, not gold! Fifty-one . . . fifty-five . . . fifty-four . . . sixty! There's too much hard wood in this lot. How do you expect a

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Wang Lu-yen (1901-1940), born in Chenhai, Chekiang Province, attracted wide attention in the thirties with his stories, which were later collected and published in three volumes: *The Pumelo, Gold* and *Sad Childhood.* Writing in a simple and sympathetic style, he depicted the life of villagers and small townfolk with great insight. But owing to the limitations of his middle-class mentality, he could not see any prospect of a bright future. "We curse society," he wrote in his essay *Autumn Night,* "but are unable to revolt against the world as it is." He died in solitude and poverty under the reactionary Kuomintang regime.

housewife to burn that? How many mouths do you think she has to feed? Forty-eight!"

"You can open it up and look at it! See how big that pile at the bottom is?"

"I haven't got all day. If you don't agree, that's all right with me. Fifty-two. A bundle of soft wood is always less than thirty catties. How can two bundles weigh more than sixty? Fifty-three! Fifty!"

"Some bundles may be bigger?"

"Isn't that your job? You're used to tying bundles. I've followed this trade for pretty well twenty years. Fifty-one! Who are you trying to fool? Fifty!"

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

I-hsin felt his legs tremble. The rice-hulling boat had come back to South Bridge, at the end of Hsueh Family Village. Though he was standing on North Bridge, half a *li* away, he could already see the revolving black circles, smell the stifling paraffin fumes, and make out the large boat through the jumble of black rings. It was vibrating and slapping the water. The jetty swarmed with men and women, who were feeding crate after crate of paddy into the mouth-like peck measure among the black circles. It champed and chewed greedily before swallowing the grain. . . .

Uncle I-hsin sat down woodenly on the bridge, the balance propped against his chest.

He was in the rice business himself. . . . No, he was the owner of Chang Hsiang Store at the foot of this bridge, the first building in the street. He had kept this shop for twenty-three years. At fifteen he was an apprentice in Peichieh, at twenty he married, early in his twenty-fourth year his first daughter was born, and towards the end of that year he opened shop here. A year later his elder son was born — first a girl and then a boy, that was good luck — and his business had prospered steadily. At first he sold only groceries, with stationery as a side-line. Then he branched out to sell soya sauce, paraffin and wine. Later he went in for cigarettes and money-changing too, and finally he hired a couple of full-time assistants to hull

grain, and went into the rice trade. As if that were not enough, he became a middleman too. First he weighed goods for the pedlars in front of his shop on the village market-days — the days of the month which ended with five or nought. Later he acted as middleman for the hill people's cabbage, turnips, bamboo shoots, plums, apricots, peaches, melons, pumpkins, white gourds. . . . They rowed up boatload after boatload for him to weigh and sell to pedlars or other customers. Eventually they asked him to weigh and sell their firewood too.

He was seldom idle for a moment. Though business was good, he did everything single-handed, having no manager, accountant, assistant or apprentice. His only help was his wife. But she could neither read nor keep accounts, and her memory was poor. She simply wrapped up a few coppers' worth of white or brown sugar, and watched the shop for him. She could not sit too long in the shop either, as she had to cook, wash and mind the children. As for him, far from having any help, he helped others. He never refused a request from anyone. If there was a wedding or funeral in the village, or someone wanted to buy in vegetables, he was invariably asked to lend a hand because he made the best buys. Most letters that came to the village were addressed to his shop, and he always made time to deliver them, sometimes reading them to the recipient, or writing an answer and taking it back to his shop to give to whoever was next going to Peichieh to post.

He ate home-salted vegetables, wore cotton. And he neither smoked, gambled, nor drank to any extent — half a catty of wine would make him red in the face. As a young man he practised economy for the sake of his ancestors, in order to be pointed out as a filial son. He kept this up as he grew older so that his children might live in greater comfort. He set great store indeed by his good name, and would not lay himself open to any criticism. Just after the birth of his second son he won general respect by rebuilding his parents' tombs in style. "If I use up all my money, I can save some more," he

thought. And sure enough in a few more years he had prepared his own final resting place and repaired his elder brother's grave. Next he married off his sixteen-year-old daughter with even more of a flourish. By the time his elder son had served three years' apprenticeship in Shanghai and was making three dollars a month, he had built himself a fine new house in the village.

Still he did not retire to take his ease. He went on working as hard as ever, harder if anything. There were the village fairs, of course, on the days ending with a five or a nought. And on those ending with two, four, seven and nine — the market days in Hengshihchiao — he would stand on North Bridge and intercept a couple of boats of firewood.

"Can you find customers?" the woodcutters would ask.

"Sure! Hand your fuel over. I guarantee to get rid of the lot!"

Uncle I-hsin had his own sales methods, though there was no fair and very few passers-by. He knew just how much firewood each village household had left, and found time to settle the transaction with them.

"Take a boatload, Sister Ah-keng!" He stood up, smiling, when she came up the bridge.

"Half!"

"Such good fuel isn't easy to come by, sister. You'd better take a whole load! It's going specially cheap today, for five dollars twenty cents. You'll need it all in the long run, so why not buy a little more? Hey! Bring us that firewood, Chang-sheng!" By now he had picked up his balance.

"Fifty-one! Forty-nine! Fifty-three. . . ."

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

The rice-hulling boat could be heard in the village bay.

Something seemed to be blocking Uncle I-hsin's ears so that he could not hear clearly the figures he was shouting. Black circles blotted out the small numerals on the balance close at hand, swallowed up the firewood and the woodcutters, and even blurred Sister Ah-keng standing by his side.

"Business is good today!" Someone spoke loudly into his ear and then was gone. Uncle I-hsin pulled himself together. That had been Grandad Hsin-sheng.

"Please sit down!" He called out as if he were in his shop.

But Hsin-sheng passed on without a look behind.

Hsin-sheng's manner, like everyone else's, seemed to have changed. He was a good sort, who always made tactful remarks. But today he had sounded sarcastic and contemptuous.

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

The rice-hulling boat again.

It had arrived just as Uncle I-hsin was building his house. Before the builders set to work he had heard that Lin Chi-kang, owner of Yung Tai Rice Shop in Peichieh, was going to start running a rice-hulling boat. He knew that this would affect his rice business and mean a drop in his income. But as the news about his house had spread, he could not go back on his word. If he did he would lose face completely, and that might be bad for his credit.

"Is this machine-polished rice all right?" several customers sounded him out.

"There's something to be said for both sorts," he answered with an air of great confidence. And he moved the building date forward.

Though a huller would affect his trade, he did not believe it would put him out of business. Many of the villagers believed that machine-hulled rice gave you beri-beri. Besides, he was on good terms with most of them, and if his rice business were hard hit he had other sources of income. There was his grocery store. If one line failed, there was always the other. No, he was not afraid.

But it seemed that Lin Chi-kang knew he had put the date forward, for he sent out his boat at once. On the auspicious day chosen for erecting the framework of the new house, the boat came to Hsueh Family Village.

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

Every soul in the village was agog at the sound. They flocked to the water's edge to stare at this strange monster.

Despite all the fire-crackers Uncle I-hsin let off, very few villagers gathered round. The boat moored at the jetty near his new house, as if to intimidate him. As this was its first appearance, no one took grain to be husked. The boat polished what it had on board.

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

This clatter went on till noon, when suddenly word was sent out that the boat would husk a hundred catties of rice for each household — free and gratis — if it was brought before six that evening. This news spread like the wind, and caused a tremendous sensation. Load after load of paddy was carried to the boat. In less than an hour the road between the jetty and the bridge was blocked by sacks and crates.

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

Not for one second did the racket stop. Black circles chuffed round and round, reaching right out to Uncle I-hsin's house. The boat's arrival meant that this day, which should have been such a triumphant occasion, the day on which he achieved his final ambition, had turned to dust and ashes. All was black before his eyes as the motor chug-chug-chugged like the stroke of an axe. He was nearly fifty and had seen a good deal in his time. A piddling rice-hulling boat was nothing to him, especially as rice was not his sole means of livelihood. But how ominous that it should come on this day of all days, when he was setting up his pillars and beams! He nearly panicked and lost all hope, seeing himself a ruined man. That was a sleepless night for him. The boat kept up its clatter till dusk, and moored there during the night. At the crack of dawn it started chugging again. This went on for two and a half days before it finished polishing all the grain carried there before half past three on the first day. Some villagers took paddy, carried it home, and took it back again the next day, till finally it was hulled.

Uncle I-hsin kept hearing remarks which boded no good. One commented on the speed of this huller, another on its convenience. The boat was the talk of the village.

"Time will show," he said to himself.

He would watch developments calmly. Some things made a great stir to begin with, owing to their novelty, but as time went on folk saw them at their true value. He had known this to happen quite often.

After that the boat kept coming. It charged thirty-five cents for polishing a hundred catties of paddy, which Uncle I-hsin calculated was no cheaper than what he charged for hulling rice by hand. A workman, paid fifty cents a day, could hull two hundred catties. You had to offer him a catty of wine at thirteen cents, which brought costs up to sixty-three cents; but you coud give him coarse food, not like the meal a tailor demanded when he worked in someone's house. And as every household had plenty of vegetables, jelly fish or preserved sea-food, there was no need to buy these, while the rice did not add up to much. Sometimes the workman did not drink, in which case thirteen cents could be saved. There was no denying that machine-polished rice was whiter than that hulled by hand with a pestle. But country folk were not too particular, and if you wanted white rice you got less than one bushel for two hundred catties of paddy. Beside which, there was a good deal of breakage. The only advantages of the boat were that it saved time and trouble. But was that so important? Households used to hiring a man did not find it a nuisance, and speed did not matter either. No family waited till its rice was finished before hulling another lot.

Uncle I-hsin's view proved correct. The rice boat did very little business. The other villagers made the same calculation, and realized the relative advantages and disadvantages, while many of them continued to shake their heads over the man who had eaten machine rice while in Shanghai and Hankow on business, who had suffered from beriberi for many years, not recovering till he came home and ate unpolished rice.

When Uncle I-hsin made up his accounts at the end of the month he found that his business had fallen off very little. Only five of his former customers had stopped coming, and that meant little loss, as they ate only a few pecks every month. Most of the villagers hired men to

hull their rice at home. Those who bought small quantities of polished rice from him either had no hulling implements of their own, or could not afford to buy a hundred or two hundred catties of paddy at a time. And besides, he allowed them credit. The five households won over by the boat were not too poor but could not afford the hulling gear. The boat's best customers were those who had both grain and implements. But these had never dealt with him anyway.

Within two months, two of the five families started buying rice from Uncle I-hsin again, and the rice boat's visits became less frequent as it was doing less business than in the first month.

"It can't win away my customers!" thought Uncle I-hsin with secret satisfaction. He was not afraid of anything now. He simply found the boat an infernal nuisance, with its foul smell and its clatter. Particularly maddening was the way it had moored at the jetty on the day that the foundations of his house were laid, and tried to frighten him. But much as he disliked it, he said nothing against it. That would have seemed too petty-minded.

"Others will do the complaining," he thought. It was not his job the boat had taken, but that of the men who went from house to house hulling grain. Each two hundred catties of rice hulled by the boat meant one day's less work for them, one day's less food, and fifty cents less earnings.

"We shan't starve because of it!" He heard them growl angrily.

That was true, as he knew. Men who were strong enough to turn mills and wield heavy pestles could do other work. Besides, very few of them lived entirely by hulling rice.

These men figured it out, and said: "They'll never make it pay — that large boat with the huller and one workman, one accountant and one apprentice."

But the owner, Lin Chi-kang, had given thought to this. He had plenty of capital. In Peichieh he owned Yung Tai Rice Shop, Wan Yu Wood Shop, Hsing Chang Silk Shop, Lung Mao Soya Shop, and Tien Sheng Hsiang Grocery, to

say nothing of the money-changer's business he ran with a friend in the county town. He could afford initial losses for the sake of future profits. At the beginning of the third month, his boat suddenly lowered its price. Instead of thirty-five cents for a hundred catties, it now asked thirty cents.

This considerable reduction threw Hsueh Family Village into a ferment again. Households which generally hired men to do their hulling jumped at this chance, and took their grain to the jetty.

"I shan't be the loser," declared Uncle I-hsin calmly.

His rice accounts at the end of that month showed that only six customers had left him. He watched impassively as the boat's trade picked up and then slowly fell off again. There were already many complaints that the machine-hulled husks were too bitty to use as fuel, while the bran was too coarse to feed to hens and could only be sold as duck-feed for less than five coppers. It fetched merely three coppers per catty, in fact, and they had to sieve it first again and again. As the villagers liked big hulls and fine chaff, they would have liked to hire men to remove the husks and then get the boat to polish the rice. But for that they would not pay thirty cents a hundred catties. All they offered was fifteen.

This the boat would not accept, however. The accountant explained that unhusked and husked rice meant the same amount of work. A hundred catties of paddy produced only five pecks of machine-polished rice, but the same amount of husked rice produced nearly a hundred catties of polished rice. That was already to their advantage, and they could not ask the boat to halve its price. At the most it would come down to twenty-five cents. But to this the villagers did not agree. They chose to go on hulling rice at home.

So Uncle I-hsin saw the boat's trade fall off again.

"It's not a paying proposition," he remarked with secret satisfaction.

But if one method won't work, you can always try another. Lin hit on a new solution. As he owned Yung

Tai Rice Shop in Peichieh, rather than admit defeat he made the boat sell rice.

That was when the boat became a serious rival. It undercut Uncle I-hsin. As he had a fund of goodwill, went out of his way to help others, and could keep his own accounts, it had not crossed his mind that anyone could steal his customers; but now they were rushing to the boat to buy at the cheaper rate. The first and second grades were not important, as few of the villagers ate white rice. But the third grade was another matter — and here the boat had made the biggest cut.

"Is it going to damage me too, after all those others?" he wondered.

He manipulated his abacus, and found he still had a margin of profit.

"I'll come down to your price, and see if you can still steal my customers!"

Uncle I-hsin brought down his prices to the boat's: Six twenty for the first grade, five sixty for the second, and four eighty instead of five dollars for the third.

Once again the boat's business fell off. After all, the villagers were Uncle I-hsin's friends. They came back to his shop. Not one bought from the boat.

"Machine-polished rice — poor stuff! Gives you beriberi. Who wants that?"

When Lin Chi-kang knew that his plan had failed because Uncle I-hsin had lowered his prices too, he made another cut. He reduced the two top grades by five cents, the lower by ten.

Uncle I-hsin flicked the beads of his abacus again, and reduced accordingly.

The trade remained his.

Then Lin slashed his prices again, selling the third grade for four dollars sixty cents.

Uncle I-hsin made another calculation. Fresh paddy cost a dollar ten every hundred catties and a tenth of it disappeared during the drying. A bushel of rice cost four dollars, a day's labour thirty-five cents. With food this came to over four forty a day. If you added rent, taxes,

transport, incidental expenses and interest, he could only sell at a loss.

Make another cut or not? Unless he reduced, he would lose his customers. New rice would soon be on the market, and keeping old stocks would make his losses greater. Gritting his teeth, he brought the prices down.

Apparently Lin was tired of losing money, for now the boat stopped coming. It moored idly in Peichieh.

Uncle I-hsin sighed with relief. He had not yet lost too much, and should be able to recoup during the next two quarters.

"The scoundrel must have hurt himself as much as anyone else," he reflected angrily. "If not, why should his boat have stopped coming?"

Little did he know that Lin had decided to destory him.

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

The harvest was no sooner in than the boat reappeared in the village.

It was still hulling and selling rice. But the price in both cases was lower than ever. It charged fifteen cents only to hull rice, the price the villagers had asked. And the price of rice went down from day to day, till the third grade had fallen to four dollars.

Uncle I-hsin, who had just bought in new supplies, cut his prices in desperation. But his rice would not sell. The whole village knew that Lin was playing with him and did not mind losing money. Each time Uncle I-hsin cut his price, Lin would cut his again. So though Uncle I-hsin made reductions, nobody bought from him — next day they could buy at a cheaper price from the boat.

Uncle I-hsin dared not go on losing like this. He announced that he had stopped selling rice, closed down half his shop, paid off his assistant, and prepared to sell the rice he had bought in.

"This is the end!" he sighed. "The man has capital — what can I do?"

But Lin had not finished with him yet. Knowing that Uncle I-hsin wanted to sell, he played another trick. When the new rice came on the market he had bought in large

quantities, and now he started dumping this on the market. Uncle I-hsin did not want to sell, but his hand was forced. If he hung on to the grain, there was no knowing how good next year's harvest would be. Besides, to keep all that rice instead of changing it for money would tie his hands in his grocery business. He had to sell out at a loss again.

Chug, chug, chug . . . .

The boat's business picked up once more. It captured not only the rice trade, but the hulling as well. It came every few days — sometimes every day — to the village.

"The devil!" Uncle I-hsin ground his teeth and swore under his breath each time he saw the boat. He was in a cold sweat at the thought of his debts. In all his years of trading, he had never suffered such a setback before.

He saw business boom for the boat, and rice go up again. When he had sold all his paddy, the price of that rose too.

"Well, I can take it!" he thought, and this was his answer to questions about his affairs. "Rice was a side-line for me in any case. I shall concentrate on my main business now. I've got some good lines there."

It was true. His one hope now lay in his grocery. If not for this, he could never have hoped to raise his head again after such a crash.

His Chang Hsiang Store was an old establishment, his credit was good, and so was the location. The shop was the first building after North Bridge at the top of the street, so that anyone passing that way by land or water could be seen from behind the counter. On market days pedlars and customers crowded round his entrance, making it easy for him to do other business and for them to buy from him. The rent was forty dollars a year, which was not exorbitant for a double frontage, with store-rooms and a kitchen at the back. Now that he had stopped dealing in rice, he had much more space; but he did up the premises and turned one room into a public parlour, to give the place a more prosperous appearance. Quite a number of folk liked to drop in for a chat, and once there was this parlour they did not have to squeeze behind the counter but could sit

longer. As they all had the surname Hsueh and Uncle I-hsin was such a good-natured fellow, they could sit there as long as they pleased whether he was in or not, chatting, listening to the news, and watching the road or the river. Though the shop had no manager, accountant, assistant or apprentice, all this coming and going made it a lively place.

Among these habitués were some who felt concerned for Uncle I-hsin, as well as some who just came to have some fun. One day one of them said:

"They say the rice boat's business is so good that Lin Chi-kang wants to rent a shop front from you."

Uncle I-hsin glared.

"Never!" he growled from between clenched teeth. "The man must be dreaming! I wouldn't take him as a tenant for a hundred dollars a month! Not unless I were bankrupt!"

"Quite right too," agreed the others.

It was the village head who had spoken first. As he was fond of a joke, Uncle I-hsin thought this was just a bit of his fun. That was why he revealed his true feelings. The fact was, however, that the village head had been asked by Lin to see how the land lay. If Uncle I-hsin were to refuse, that would mean a loss of face for Lin, which explains why he asked the village head to sound him out casually. As he had expected, without caring whether the proposal was serious or not, Uncle I-hsin flew into a rage.

"We'll wait till he's bankrupt then!" Lin reacted with a laugh.

He started planning how to get his way.

He was in no hurry to drive Uncle I-hsin out of business, but preferred to bankrupt him slowly. First he took a copper or two off the price of soya sauce in Lung Mao Soya Shop.

It was only two and a half *li* from Peichieh to the village — no distance at all. Some of the villagers went there every day, and although the price reduction was so small they heard of it at once. As two and a half *li* was nothing to them, they took their soya sauce bottles to Peichieh.

"Times are certainly bad!" Uncle I-hsin shook his head, not realizing that this was aimed at him. As he did not sell much soya sauce in any case, he decided not to lower the price but wait to see how things went.

Before long wine went up, and it was quite commonly said that the wine tax would be increased from five dollars a keg to seven. And glutinous rice would go up like other grain, because of the general unrest in the district.

"What I lose on one line I can make up on another," thought I-hsin.

He made some calculations, and as glutinous rice had not yet risen much he borrowed money and bought in a stock of wine.

Sure enough, grain went on rising, to Uncle I-hsin's delight. Wine was beginning to go up too, and he increased his prices.

But before long the price of wine in Lin's shop was reduced. As Uncle I-hsin did not believe it would go down any more, he kept his stock to sell later rather than cut his price. Then all his drinking customers went to Peichieh.

The prices in Lung Mao Soya Shop fluctuated, till Uncle I-hsin believed Lin was unsure of himself, and this made him more determined not to reduce.

But on the first of September the wine-tax collector arrived. There was no increase after all, and times were more settled again, so the price of wine dropped. Then Uncle I-hsin knew he had made a mistake, and brought his price down too. But Lin seemed to be the more nervous of the two, for he sold more cheaply than anywhere else, cutting his prices again and again, till wine that had sold for thirty coppers a catty was going for twenty.

By this time Uncle I-hsin had to do the same. Other shops could keep their wine for a year or a half, but not he. He had to repay his loans, and the interest was heavy. If he kept his wine, it might depreciate. Just the interest on the interest he owed was a sizable sum.

He was going bankrupt again in the same way as before, and this made his life a nightmare. He dared not keep up the price of soya sauce either.

But Uncle I-hsin was an experienced tradesman, who had watched countless shops thrive and close down. He combined caution with boldness. In debt as he was, he did not give up hope.

"I've done business since I was twenty-four," he said. "And for the first few years I did well enough out of groceries alone."

"We shall see," was Lin's laconic comment. "We shall see."

He started lowering the prices in Tien Sheng Hsiang Grocery too, and posted up announcements to this effect all the way between the village and Peichieh. It was now approaching the end of the year, when everyone buys more groceries than usual. The practice had always been to give customers a bonus in the shape of one packet of sweetmeats to sacrifice to the Kitchen God, but now Tien Sheng Hsiang gave two packets, and its goods were much cheaper. The villagers flocked to Peichieh again. By the middle of the twelfth month there was still no New Year spirit in Uncle I-hsin's shop. Though he lowered his prices too, his business was poor. And the men who used to drop in to chat had nearly all stopped coming, for they were busy at the end of the year. The money-market was tight too, and statements of his account started coming in from his wholesalers, while the money-lenders sent to demand payment.

As far as Uncle I-hsin could see, he was finished. He had spent all his savings and raised loans to build his house that year, confident that a few months would clear his debts. He had not foreseen the ruin of his rice and wine trade, nor the fact that now he could make nothing on his groceries. If not for his popularity, the fact that his was an old establishment and his credit was good, he would long since have lost room in which to manoeuvre, and had to close down as a bankrupt. Luckily many of the housewives had a high regard for him. They tided him over by depositing with him the New Year's money sent home by their sons and husbands, or their savings, fifty or a hundred dollars at a time.

So he got through New Year. But he hardly dared think of the future, which he knew was even more black. He tried to delude himself by saying:

"Now I'll make a fresh start. Luck changes every year. There's no reason why Lin should have it all his own way; he may break up even faster. And there'll be no way out for that scoundrel once he crashes, while I can still get along as a middleman." Indeed, he could make a living as a middleman. There are goods to be weighed all the year round. Cabbage, turnips, bamboo shoots, plums, apricots, peaches, melons, gourds . . . and firewood pretty well every other day.

The firewood alone was almost enough to keep him busy, running here and there looking for customers.

"I guarantee that fuel isn't damp!" He stood up on the bridge to stop Sister Pin-sheng, when he saw her putting one finger into a bundle. "If any were damp I'd have picked it out. And the price couldn't be fairer — five twenty."

"Can't you come down a little?"

"I'll give you a good weight. This is the market price, we can't go below it. Fuel isn't like other goods. I burn the same at home, and only wish I could get it cheaper myself. Do you only want two bundles? Here, let me weigh it. Forty-eight. All this wood makes just forty-eight catties — that shows you how dry it must be. Fifty! Fifty-one! Forty-nine! . . ."

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

The boat started up its huller by the jetty at North Bridge.

Uncle I-hsin could see nothing but those hated black circles, going round and round, blotting out everything else. He nearly choked and could hardly keep his eyes open. Horrified to feel the strength ebbing from his limbs, he hastily sat down, clutching the balance.

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

His heart was thumping loudly. He made a tremendous effort. All his energy seemed to have been drained by the boat, leaving him fearfully empty — like his shop. It

was still open, there were goods on the shelves, and the signboard was hanging out; but in actual fact he was already bankrupt. The old stock in his store-room was finished, and no new goods had come in. He was heavily in debt.

"I want a catty of dragon-eyes,* Uncle I-hsin!" Aunt Chi-sheng had come in.

He opened a drawer in the counter, and discovered there was only half a catty left.

He hurried into the store-room, but found only mouldy black dates there.

He came quickly back to the counter and opened several drawers, but all were empty. Hastily hiding these from Aunt Chi-sheng, he closed them again.

"Sold out. Shall I send you some this afternoon?"

She shook her head and left.

There was a quizzical look in her eye, as if to say: "You'll be going bankrupt any minute, I see!"

"A tin of bamboo shoots!" Sister Pen-chuan was at the counter.

"Please have a seat!" He took a quick grip on himself and conjured a smile on to his face. But afraid she would notice something wrong, he turned and went to the cupboard.

He stayed there for a time as if lost in thought, and finally found a tin. He wiped the dust off it.

"Why is it rusty?" Sister Pen-chuan stared in surprise. "Give me a better one."

"The outside doesn't matter. It was brought here in the rain, that's why it's rusty. Take it and try it. I'll change it if it isn't good." He was afraid as he spoke. Sister Pen-chuan was gazing round her searchingly, appraising the goods in the shop. As she took the tin and left, she seemed to be saying: "Chang Hsiang Store is going to close down!"

"He'll have to close down!" He heard her announce outside.

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*Nephelium longana.

"He's going bankrupt!" others chimed in, coming towards him.

Uncle I-hsin hastily opened the back door and walked to the bridge.

"Please settle for the firewood for me," said Sister Pin-sheng.

That was not what she meant. She wanted her deposit back.

"Fifty for me."

"A hundred for me."

"Three hundred for me."

"Please pay me back, Uncle I-hsin!"

". . . ."

". . . ."

". . . ."

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

"Give me your house to settle your debt."

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

"Make over the shop to me!"

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

Sister Chang-sheng, Sister Wan-fu, Aunt Hsien-kang, Ah-lin, Uncle Kuei-tsai, Uncle Ming-fa, Sister Pen-chuan, Grandad Hsin-sheng, Sister Ah-ken, Hunch-back Mei-sheng, Lame Ah-li, Pock-marked Third Brother . . . the wholesalers, the money-lenders . . . all had come. Like the converging black circles, they were surging towards him from all sides.

Uncle I-hsin stood up by the parapet, letting go of the balance. He could not even go on as a middleman now. He must get away at once.

"All right. All right. Tomorrow is market day. Come back tomorrow! I'll have your money ready."

As he spoke he walked down from the bridge.

Chug, chug, chug. . . .

His footfalls sounded heavily in his ears.

1935

Translated by Gladys Yang

Profile

YUAN YING

Chang Tien-yi and His Young Readers

In a rather quiet street in east Peking small groups of children, many of them Young Pioneers, may often be seen entering an old-fashioned gate, passing the wistaria in the courtyard and trooping merrily upstairs.

These are Chang Tien-yi's young visitors.

They have a great deal to tell this writer who is one of their favourite teachers and friends: what poems their Pioneer group recited during an excursion to the country in the spring, how the aeronautics group has made a new type of glider called a "pigeon-glider" because it is carried up in the air by a pigeon, how Chao Hsiao-ming or Yu Hung-hung has been doing better in arithmetic and got full marks in the last weekly test, how their school had a football match with another school and lost one point owing to the goal-keeper's carelessness. . . . They have endless stories to tell. Before even sitting down they start chattering like a brook.

And this "Uncle" of theirs welcomes these young visitors eagerly and listens to each one with great interest. He knows them well, knows virtually each child's family background and temperament, which of them are lively or pull faces when talking, which little girls are shy and bend their heads to play with their plaits, whose father is a labour hero, whose mother is a doctor. . . . As a true friend he helps them to solve their

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Yuan Ying is a well-known writer of children's stories. At the moment he is a literary editor of *Renmin Ribao*.

problems, and as one of the elder generation he teaches what life means. Sometimes he tells them about his hard struggles in the past or the new things he has seen in the people's communes or construction sites during his travels.

Chang Tien-yi gives unstintingly of his best to these children, the young readers he loves.

His love for children was evident nearly thirty years ago.

During the thirties in China the revolutionary literary movement, led by the League of Left-Wing Writers headed by Lu Hsun, swept forward like the tide in spring despite all efforts by the reactionaries to suppress it. This revolutionary literature grew and gained strength in the hard fight against the enemy. This was the time when a new literature for children also appeared.

This new children's literature was different from the earlier children's literature, most of which encouraged children to escape from the world they lived in, to close their eyes to reality, to be docile as sheep, to grow up without high ideals, conscious only of petty selfish interests. That old literature did not give them much room for imagination, much less inspire them to change the world.

But the writers for children who grew up during the revolutionary literary movement, made untiring efforts to alter this situation. Chang Tien-yi was one of those who aroused most interest. His *Big Lin and Little Lin* and *King Tutu* were published during this period.

The story of *Big Lin and Little Lin* is as follows: Little Lin and his brother Big Lin, leaving home to find work, are separated by an ogre; Little Lin falls into bad hands and is sold as a slave; but he and his friends fight stubbornly against their wicked owners. Big Lin is adopted by a millionaire and lives like a parasite, eating and idling till he becomes as fat and lazy as a pig; finally he falls into the sea and is carried to Gold Dollar Island where he dies of hunger on a pile of gold. This story first revealed the writer's political insight and literary gifts. He led his young readers into a world of fancy and showed them the good and the bad in life through a series of strange adventures, teaching them to love what is good and hate what is bad. This he achieved not by empty moralizing but by humorous incidents adapted to a child's interests and level of understanding.

Twenty-five years have passed since *Big Lin and Little Lin* was first published. This story has delighted two generations of children. Even today, like many of his later tales, it is still a favourite with Chinese boys and girls.

In 1957, Chang Tien-yi made the children another charming gift — *The Magic Gourd.* This story is not about some fairyland inhabited by fairies and goblins, but is set in China today and deals with the fancies of present-day Chinese children. Young Wang Pao has heard many stories from his grandmother about the magic gourd which gives its owner whatever he wants. He dreams of possessing such a gourd and actually acquires one, so that he can have whatever he asks for or even thinks of. The magic gourd does everything for him. But since he loses the fun of making things or working himself, the magic gourd deprives him of something more important than its gifts — the satisfaction a child of New China finds in community life and working with his friends. Finally he reveals the secret of the magic gourd to his teacher and classmates and it loses its magic power.

This story tells children the truth that there is no good fortune to be attained without work. Anyone in this world who seeks for this type of good fortune will find nothing but trouble and unhappiness. True happiness lies in study and hard work.

This story, like all those written by Chang Tien-yi, makes a warm personal appeal to children; for the life described is their own and so is the language. They enter into the joys and sorrows of the characters because these are genuine children.

Chang Tien-yi has many public duties. He is a people's deputy, a council member of the Chinese Writers' Union, the editor-in-chief of *People's Literature*, Peking. The hardships he suffered under the Kuomintang regime have permanently injured his health. Yet when writing or talking with children he seems so full of spirit and so careless of himself that his small guests often remind him:

"Uncle Tien-yi, you ought to rest now."

But he answers with a smile:

"No, there's no need."

Yes, for the children's sake, to help educate New China's next generation, this indefatigable writer will not rest.

Notes on Literature and Art

CHANG TING

Folk Toys

Chinese folk toys have a long history. Merely in the Sung dynasty paintings of street vendors by Su Han-chen and others, we can see several hundred varieties, while museums today display many small porcelain and terracotta toys made during the Tang and Sung dynasties.

These children's toys are not simply small reproductions of objects in daily use. When boys and girls play, they create a world of fancy of their own, and these folk toys in the traditional style are among their most popular playthings.

These folk toys are usually made by peasants or deft-fingered housewives for some of the many traditional festivals celebrated in the Chinese countryside. Thus before the Lantern Festival, the Spring Fair or the Dragon Boat Festival, all sorts of toys are made for sale in the market, for personal enjoyment, or for the children of relatives and friends.

These toys are made to suit the children's mental level. For instance, a tiger is a frightening beast, but parents want their children to become as strong as tigers to be able to stand up to all difficulties; so in some districts every family makes cloth tigers to hang on the curtains, doors or children's clothes, to be used as toys or sometimes even as pillows. These stuffed tigers are generally made of bright yellow cloth with black designs on their bodies and wrinkled brows. They have short

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Chang Ting is president of the Central Institute of Applied Arts in Peking.

Cloth Tiger and Rabbit

Clay Uncle Bunnies

legs and tails, large eyes and a cheerful expression. The result is something rather magnificent — a beast who looks both stupid and intelligent. This is exactly how children imagine tigers: friendly animals with whom they can play and chat. So they are not afraid of them but love to carry them around.

Folk toys are made in many different materials: straw, bamboo, wood, terracotta, porcelain, clay, cloth and so on. The medium varies from district to district according to what is available locally, and the toys have their distinctive characteristics owing to special local customs and conventions. The terracotta whistles of Sian in Shensi, for instance, are made in the form of human figures with coloured designs on a black ground; and most of these simple, charming figures are based on characters in the local opera. The clay figurines of Wusih in Kiangsu are plump and bright. Chekiang wood carving is sophisticated and neat, depicting fishing, boating, hulling rice, herding cattle or other scenes from the life of the coast-dwellers. The popular clay toys of north China, characterized by simplicity of form and strong colour, are miniature horses, dogs, lions or legendary figures. Wooden toys are favourites too. And so are the pottery moulds with which in spring and summer children turn out designs of all kinds.

These folk toys cost next to nothing. During festivals, vendors with carrying-poles or carts take their brightly coloured knick-knacks to the temple fairs. As they sound their small gongs — the gongs are like toys themselves — the children crowd around. For a few cents you can buy a cock with brilliant plumage which whistles when you blow it, or a bamboo dragon-fly which can be flicked straight up into the air. These simple toys stir the children's imagination and appeal to their sense of beauty.

The folk artists who make these toys depict movements and postures with great technical economy, deliberately omitting irrelevant details. Instead of striving for verisimilitude they grasp the fundamental spirit and make bold use of artistic exaggeration. Much ingenuity is shown in this art, which is natural, simple and highly evocative. These toys are dynamic and vibrant with life, and their decorative qualities make the children love them.

In recent years considerable attention has been paid to folk toys by artists, students of folk lore, educationalists and those

concerned with child welfare. Much material is being collected and studied. Children's toys in New China will develop further on the basis of our classical and folk traditions and by absorbing the best features of the toys of other lands.

CHAO WAN-LI

The Yung Lo Encyclopaedia

This monumental work is a huge encyclopaedia compiled 550 years ago. In 1403, the first year of the reign of Yung Lo of the Ming dynasty, the emperor, to consolidate the new regime and win over the country's intellectuals, ordered his imperial academy to compile a *Wen Hsien Ta Cheng* or compendium of literature, which was finished the following year. Since the work was hastily done and there were many omissions, in 1405 Yung Lo ordered his academicians to compile a new encyclopaedia, summoning scholars from all over the empire to assist in the compilation and the copying. Some three thousand men were thus employed. First they embodied the information in the Sung-and-Yuan-dynasty books in the imperial library; then scholars were sent to Fukien and other provinces to collect additional material. Within a short period, about eight thousand books of history, philosophy, Buddhist and Taoist canons, northern and southern dramas, popular stories and so forth were classified in separate sections or books under different headings arranged according to a rhyming system. By the end of 1408, the sixth year of Yung Lo, the encyclopaedia was completed. It comprised 22,937 books, which were bound in 11,095 volumes, totalling about 370,000,000 characters in all.

This encyclopaedia was compiled in Nanking, then the capital. In 1421 a new palace was built in Peking. Subsequently the Nanking imperial library and the Yung Lo Encyclopaedia were sent to Peking for safe keeping. Owing to the tremendous size of this work, it was never printed. In 1562, the 41st year of Chia Ching, a fire broke out in the palace, but the encyclopaedia was saved from the flames. This induced the emperor to give orders for another copy to be made in case of further accidents. One hundred and eight copyists were employed, each of whom copied three pages a day, and in six years the whole was completed. Thus in the Ming dynasty there were two editions of this encyclopaedia: the original compiled at the beginning of the 15th century, and the copy made in the middle of the 16th century. Later the original was destroyed, but the copy was preserved in the imperial academy. By the time of Chien Lung when the government made a check, more than 2,400 books were lost, only some nine thousand remaining. These proved immensely useful when the Ching court began to compile books, for much valuable historical material came to light again. But later on this encyclopaedia was forgotten, and more volumes were stolen or damaged by rats and maggots. These further losses were discovered in 1890. A worse blow was in store, however, for in 1900 the troops of eight imperialist powers entered Peking. Part of the encyclopaedia was destroyed in fire, and the remaining volumes were looted by the foreign officers and troops. Many were taken out of China to be sold as curios, or found their way into public or private libraries as relics of oriental culture. Since then the largest libraries in the United States, England, Germany, Japan and other countries have possessed volumes of the Yung Lo Encyclopaedia. This is one of the most blatant instances of the looting of China's cultural relics by the imperialist powers.

The destruction and theft of this work was an irreparable loss to the study of ancient Chinese literature, art, history and science. Thousands of books dating from the Sung and Yuan dynasties on local geography, medicine, poetry, prose and drama embodied in the Yung Lo Encyclopaedia were lost or left incomplete. Many ancient works of scientific value on agriculture, architecture, medicine and kindred subjects must

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Chao Wan-li now working in the Peking Library is an expert on rare editions of Chinese classics.

have been included in this encyclopaedia; if not for its loss we could compare the earlier texts with the current, inferior editions and work out a better version. Unfortunately, this is no longer possible.

The Peking Library made great efforts to collect what volumes it could of the Yung Lo Encyclopaedia, and by the time of liberation in 1949 it had assembled 110 volumes. In 1951 the library of the Institute of Oriental Studies of Leningrad University sent the Chinese Ministry of Culture 11 volumes of this encyclopaedia which had been in its possession since tsarist days. In 1954 the Lenin Library of the Soviet Union sent our Ministry of Foreign Affairs another 52 volumes previously kept by the library of the Japanese-owned South Manchuria Railway Company. In 1955, when Premier Grotewohl of the German Democratic Republic visited China, he presented the government with three volumes of this work formerly in the Leipzig University Library. These three sets of volumes were later made over to Peking Library. Since a few more volumes were collected from different parts of China, by 1958 there were 215 volumes of this work in Peking.

The value of this encyclopaedia lies in the fact that its compilers collected a mass of material current at the beginning of the 15th century, much of which is now lost or has been handed down in mutilated form. As it embodied whole sections, parts and sometimes the complete work without any alteration, this encyclopaedia is therefore of great value for research work and a comparative study of texts. Some classical works believed lost have been rediscovered here. For instance, during the second half of the 18th century when the Ching court was compiling the Four Libraries, over five hundred unknown books came to light in the Yung Lo Encyclopaedia. Moreover, when we compare our current texts of ancient books with those in this work, we find that it usually has the better text.

There are works on agriculture and technical subjects in the Yung Lo Encyclopaedia. Thus Book 13,194 contains Wu Tsan's *Every Man's Guide to Agriculture* with Chang Fu's supplement, summarizing experience in growing wheat, hemp, beans, spinach, turnips, peaches, plums, apricots, persimmons, pomegranates, lotus, peonies and bamboo. Book 18,245 is a work from the beginning of the Yuan dynasty by Hsueh Ching-shih dealing with carpentry, the making of wheel-barrows, weaving-

looms and so forth with drafts and specifications. Though these are slender manuals, they are useful for the study of old Chinese technology. The encyclopaedia also contains many ancient treatises on medicine and prescriptions not to be found elsewhere, which would no doubt be valuable in the study of our traditional medicine.

There are also many local operas preserved here. The *hsi-wen*, popular in the Yangtse Valley in the 13th and 14th centuries, is one of these. Of the three plays of this type preserved, that of the scholar Chang Hsieh is excellent, describing how prosperity made him turn ungrateful and leave his wife. This is reminiscent of the Ming dynasty story *The Beggar Chief's Daughter** and the Ming dynasty play *The Tale of the Lute.***

In addition, there are all sorts of other forms of ancient literature: prose, poetry, songs and stories. Among these are some of a high artistic order, as well as lyrics and writing in praise of patriotism and labour, all of which constitute important material for a study of our literary heritage.

For the convenience of research workers, the Chunghua Book Company in Peking plans to make photo-lithographic copies of the available volumes preserved in the Peking Library. 1958 was the 550th anniversary of the compilation of the Yung Lo Encyclopaedia. The reprinting of these volumes will arouse great interest among scholars in China and abroad.

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*See *Chinese Literature* No. 3, 1955, p. 108.
**See *Chinese Literature* No. 4, 1957, p. 175.

HUNG YU

Lively Art from Hungary

Forty years ago in spring a Hungarian workers' and peasants' government appeared in Budapest. This was immediately hailed by progressive intellectuals in China. The *Weekly Review*, the *Morning Daily* and the *Political Commentary*, well-known revolutionary papers and periodicals in China then, published articles about this event. Mao Tse-tung, Marxist theoretician and great leader of the Chinese people, wrote an article for the *Hsiangkiang Review*, of which he was then the editor, expressing enthusiastic admiration for the Hungarian revolution. The friendship between Hungary and China has grown with their revolutionary struggles.

This spring, in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, an Exhibition of Hungarian Graphic Arts and Photographs was held in Peking's Peihai Park. The Hungarian artists' works exhibited took us back forty years. Mihaly Biro's poster *Burial Song for Austria-Hungary* shows a pair of brawny arms, symbolic of the strength of the working class, driving two ugly birds representing Austria-Hungary into the coffin. In his painting *We Want a Red Parliament*, we see a proletarian giant smearing the parliament house crimson with a huge paint brush. The artist metaphorically records history in its true colours.

The Hungarian Soviet Republic existed only 133 days. The artists successfully reflected in a most trenchant manner this precious seed of revolution which has been preserved, while portraying the dreadful situation under counter-revolutionary rule. Sandor Ek's *Memorial* series was a case in point. In "She Is Left Alone," the artist draws a little girl wandering in a vast wilderness, the cloth doll she holds in her hands her only dear one. "Solitude" shows a burly young revolutionary, lying on the ground, his fists tightly clenched even after death. Sandor Ek's paintings recall the voice of the poet Petofi:

If not allowed to live, then die we will,
Die beautifully, die bravely we will.

Though the Hungarian Soviet Republic was strangled, the revolution grew defiantly, culminating in the final victory of 1945 with the birth of the People's Republic of Hungary. This year marks the 14th anniversary of this great event. In celebration of the occasion an Exhibition of Hungarian Revolutionary Art was opened in April in the ancient Palace Museum of Peking. More than two hundred works of art by 95 outstanding Hungarian artists were put on display. They mirrored vividly the difficult path of the Hungarian revolution. Mihaly Munkacsy's *Strike*, sombre in colour and heavy in tone, portrays the indignant state of mind of the ground-down Hungarian workers. Bela Czene's *June 20, 1918 in Mavag-ban* shows hungry workers brandishing their forceful fists.

When the revolution broke out in 1919, most artists took the people's hard life as their theme. After the revolution was defeated, in the scores of years that followed under fascist rule, revolutionary artists continued to depict the life of the labouring people, but by different means. Gyula Derkovits' *The Danube Transport Workers* lodges an accusation against society after the defeat of the 1919 revolution through four carters at a bridge. Bela Uitz's *General Ludd* series were cartoons depicting the fearlessness and valour of the working class through the deeds of this valiant worker.

The liberation of Hungary in 1945 and the new life it has brought gave new colours to the artist's brush. Laszlo Bencze's *Setting Up the Agricultural Producers' Co-op* is active with men and women, old and young, in happy mood against a snowy winter background. Jozsef Legendi's *Fight to the Last Grenade* depicts the heroic life-and-death struggle of the people against the counter-revolutionaries in 1956. Under a portrait of Lenin are two young men, one of whom has already given his life for the revolution. The other holds their last grenade, while outside the malicious counter-revolutionaries wait. Laszlo Bencze's *Honour Students on a Trip* presents an entirely different picture. A group of young students joyously crowd around the door of a train. They are off for a holiday.

Every picture in the exhibition was permeated with revolutionary spirit. This was the common characteristic of them all.

Scarf Sketch by Li Ke-yu

At the same time these pictures were on display, the Ballet Troupe of the Hungarian State Opera Theatre was also giving performances of classical and folk music and dances in the big cities of China. Klotild Ugray, prima ballerina, gave an appealing performance of the innocent Odette. A pair of young Gypsy lovers are featured in the *Scarf*, scarf being the symbol of their love. Klotild Ugray dances the part of the Gypsy girl boldly and passionately as a blaze of fire. In a lyrical interlude to Grieg's *To the Spring*, Adel Orosz and Levente Sepeki dance the role of a young man and a young woman who have fallen in love for the first time. The audience were brought into a realm of poetry and romance. Pianist Amade Nemeth, oboist Peter Pongracz and violinist Agnes Deak provided accompaniments and also gave performances of their own. When Agnes Deak played *A Summer Evening*, a Chinese tune, on her violin, the audiences were simply thrilled by the genuine Chinese atmosphere the artist had so successfully caught and produced on her violin.

In the past Chinese people learned much about the Hungarian people and their contributions to world literature and art through Petofi's poetry, Moricz's fiction, Erkel, Bartok and Kodaly's music. . . . Today, the outstanding artistic creations of Hungarian artists refresh the old acquaintance and strengthen the new solidarity cemented by a common cause for progress and a happy future.

SUN MEI-LAN

Illustrations for Children's Books

Every time I go into a bookstore I enjoy going to the shelves where the children's books are kept. It is fun to look at the illustrations: so many different kinds of pictures used for the many kinds of books, the fairy tales, poems, nursery rhymes and stories. You simply cannot help being fascinated by them with their variety and colour.

Take Chang Tien-yi's fairy tale, *Big Lin and Little Lin.* We see on the first page an old man with a long beard wearing a straw hat. This poor farmer whose wife bore him two sons in his old age beams with happiness as he clasps the two babies to his bosom. "What names should they choose?" — This is the first illustration.

Later, the sons, Big Lin and Little Lin, chased by an ogre, separate and enter a strange country. We see two of the "learned" local gentry who sell Little Lin like a piece of merchandise. One is a dog named Pi Pi, the other a fox named Ping Ping. One walks head high and chest out in a majestic manner while the other saunters along with assumed elegance and grace. Each however has a tail. What's more, Pi Pi has a big bone stuck in his belt while a chicken feather sticks out on Ping Ping's hat. Thus we get a pretty good idea of the nature of the two gentlemen at a glance.

by Hua Chun-wu

These illustrations are the creation of cartoonist Hua Chun-wu, who draws his characters as seen through the eyes of children. They are vivid and charming, imaginative yet true

by Wang Shu-hui

to life. Their exaggeration and humour enhance the charm of the fairy tale.

Beautiful legends are great favourites of Chinese children. With their rich national flavour they are best illustrated by pictures in the traditional style. Artist Chang Kuang-yu who illustrated *The Magic Brush* is very successful with his use of fine and harmonic lines, his method of exaggeration and contrast and his strongly decorative style. Whereas Hua Chun-wu's illustrations are for the most part highly original and imaginative portraits, Chang Kuang-yu's drawings show the characters in action, so that we are taken directly into the story itself.

Wang Shu-hui, who also illustrates folk tales, applies her skill to advantage in detailed delineation of characters and the scenes of daily life. Her style is fresh, delightful and imaginative.

Liu Chi-chu, who has been working on picture-story books for some time, is very good at arranging the composition of his illustrations. He portrays feelings with sensitivity. With his mastery of traditional technique and ability to catch the most dramatic point in a story, he creates lively and interesting pictures.

Each of these illustrators of folk tales has his own distinctive style, but they all have one thing in common — clear-cut lines of fine and detailed strokes. By high-lighting the characters and their costume, they are always able to bring out the local flavour of the tales.

Some Chinese artists like to employ our traditional sketches in ink and colour to illustrate short poems and nursery rhymes. Chen Chiu-tsao illustrated the prose poem, *Flowers of Spring*, with his sketches of more than a dozen spring flowers. The beautiful colours and tints created by his brush bring us a whiff of spring air and the fragrance of the flowers. He also uses

this form of art to advantage in his illustrations of *We Sing Mountain Songs*, a collection of nursery rhymes. Here we see a series of adorable little creatures: a kitten, goats, ducklings and chicks, a rocking horse. . . . To illustrate the following lines:

Mew, Mew, Mew!
What a lazy thing you are,
Mummy says to wash your face,
But all you do
Is pat your nose.

The artist sketches a kitten with head cocked and one little paw washing the tip of its nose. Its mischievous expression brings to mind a naughty child unwilling to be clean. The flock of ducklings and chicks under the pumpkin vine which illustrates the rhyme, *We Sing Mountain Songs*, are not only sweet in their naïveté but convey to us the sense of bustle and activity of these young things. The illustrations are appreciated by children also because of their attractive colours.

by Chen Chiu-tsao

In recent years our artists have also begun to use scissor-cuts to great advantage for children's books. This unique folk art of our working people has always been popular in the countryside. Now, Lin Hsi-ming's scissor-cuts made specially for a collection of Szechuan nursery rhymes have brought out the best of this decorative art with its strong affinity to real life. We cannot but admire the cricket playing on the lute, the frog beating the drum, the little girl massaging grandpa's back and the wisp of smoke curling up from the little cottage.

Woodcut artist Huang Yung-yu's illustrations of the folk poem *Ashma* are a good demonstration of the artist's lyrical talents and insight into human feelings. His little animals too are particular pets of children. The artist observes with care

the shape, movement and characteristics of the animals before he starts to engrave. He uses traditional cutting methods and creates fine lines. The little animals thus created by him, such as the clever squirrel and the naughty little bear, are attractive to his young readers who see in the animals either a friend or something of themselves. . . .

I have touched upon only a few of the illustrations made for children's books. Lithographs and pen sketches are also used sometimes. Chinese artists are proud to do what they can for the little folks and to help educate China's next generation. They are always eager to create new forms of illustration to please their young readers.

Chronicle

Classical Literary Criticism Series

The People's Literature Publishing House is compiling a series of books of literary criticism. They fall into three categories.

Category One is composed of seven parts which will contain excerpts from the writings of ancient and modern writers and anthologists on literature.

Category Two will be devoted to critiques of literary works and famous writers. It will treat with the *Book of Songs*, *Chu Tzu*, the *Historical Records*, *Yueh-fu* poems, and such well-known classical writers as Tao Yuan-ming, Li Po, Tu Fu, Po Chu-yi, Han Yu, Liu Tsung-yuan, Wang An-shih, Su Shih, Hsin Chi-tsi and Lu Yu.

Category Three will contain 60 special works (in whole or in part) including a 6th century book on literary criticism entitled *Carving a Dragon at the Core of Literature*, and articles on history, poetry, *tzu* and *chu*.

The books will be published as they are compiled.

Gogol's Anniversary Marked in Peking

March 31 was the 150th anniversary of the birth of the great Russian writer Nikolai V. Gogol. That day a commemoration meeting was held by cultural circles in Peking.

The meeting was presided over by Lao Sheh, vice-chairman of the Chinese Writers' Union. Tsao Ching-hua, council member of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association and vice-chairman of the Peking branch of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association, talked on the life and works of the great author, stressing the contributions Gogol has made to world literature and the influence he has exerted in China. Most of Gogol's important works have been translated into Chinese; among them Lu Hsun's translation of *Dead Souls* has become a modern classic

in itself. Performances of *The Inspector General* have been given on the Chinese stage ever since the thirties.

S. K. Katleko, well-known Soviet scholar, also spoke at the meeting. He analysed the social meaning and patriotism of Gogol's works, and his sympathy for the people. After the meeting, a Soviet colour film, *The Inspector General*, was shown.

Commemorating Cheng Yen-chiu

To commemorate the first anniversary of the death of Cheng Yen-chiu, famous actor of Peking opera, on March 9, the Union of Chinese Dramatists and the Institute of Chinese Dramas and Operas gave performances of outstanding items from the late artist's repertoire in the special style which he developed. (*Chinese Literature* No. 4, 1958 published an article on the characteristics of Cheng Yen-chiu's special style of acting.)

The 12 operas that were performed, including *The Wife's Dream in Spring, A Bag of Treasure* and *Tears in the Wild Mountains*, are representative of Cheng's special style. Wang Yin-chiu, Chao Yung-shen, Hou Yu-lan and Chiang Hsin-yun, all of whom had been trained by Cheng, played the roles which he had made famous.

A collection of Cheng Yen-chiu's writings has been published, as well as a selection of operas in which Cheng played leading roles, and a book by him entitled *On the Four Drills and Five Ways in the Dramatic Art*.

Czechoslovak Puppet Film Exhibition

An Exhibition of Czechoslovak Puppet Films opened on March 12 in Peking's Chungshan Park. It was sponsored jointly by the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and the Sino-Czechoslovak Friendship Association.

All the exhibits were the creations of Czechoslovak puppet film artist Jiri Trnka. They included puppet models and scenes from the films *One Year in Czechoslovakia, The Emperor's Nightingale, Prince Bayaya, Good Soldier Schweik* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. All the puppets are remarkably expressive, and possess great charm. Their excellent performances fascinated both young and adult audiences.

Largest Chinese Dictionary Revised

One of the largest Chinese dictionaries, *Tzu Hai* is now being revised by the Chunghua Book Company in Shanghai, with the aid of some of the country's leading scholars.

First published by the Chunghua Book Company in 1936, *Tzu Hai* contains about 11 million Chinese characters. It is one of China's biggest compendiums of words, events and phrases. But it has never been brought up to date.

The new *Tzu Hai* will have some 90,000 entries of words, phrases and expressions, including a large number of terms, idioms and expressions that have come into popular use since the May the Fourth Cultural Movement of 1919, and expressions of the new socialist period.

"Daybreak in Iraq"

Recently released in Peking was the colour documentary film *Daybreak in Iraq*. Colourful and interesting, the film gives an introduction to the history of ancient Iraqi culture and presents incidents in the struggle of the Iraqi people against enslavement and exploitation by foreign invaders. The scenes showing the Iraqi people, under the leadership of General Kassim, engaged in peaceful construction while fighting courageously against imperialism aroused the admiration of the Chinese audience.

This documentary was made last September by cameramen sent to Iraq by China's Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio with the enthusiastic help of the Iraqi government and people.

Just off the Press

THE RISE OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S COMMUNES

by Anna Louise Strong

This is a booklet written by the well-known American writer Anna Louise Strong after she had visited widely scattered people's communes in different parts of China. She relates the birth and growth of the people's communes and the tremendous achievements they have made, together with a truthful description of the communes as they are of present date. With convincing arguments and numerous facts, she shows the vitality and superiority of this new social organization.

Illustrated *18.5 × 13 cm.* *133 pages*

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On the Long March with Chairman Mao

By Chen Chang-feng

This is a fascinating series of personal reminiscences written by Colonel Chen Chang-feng, who worked with Mao Tse-tung from 1930 to 1936, first as an orderly and then as his bodyguard, and was with him throughout the famed Long March. This daily contact makes it possible for the author to throw many revealing sidelights on the character of this great revolutionary leader. As a participator in this great epic of Chinese history, the author also gives a fresh and lively account of the life of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army.

Included in the book are the author's account of later meetings with Chairman Mao, and a résumé by the editor of the events related to the Long March.

Illustrated *18.5 × 12 cm.* *102 pages*

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