

CHINESE LITERATURE

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CHINESE LITERATURE

QUARTERLY

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Flames Ahead

LIU PAI-YU

I

South China in July is really hot. The sun seems to spurt flames that threaten to consume the atmosphere. Our troops were advancing rapidly in the Chingmen Mountain section of the front in western Hupeh, and their ration bags, their cartridge pockets, their leather belts, all were soaked black with sweat.

Then, three days later, an unexpected storm arose, and rain fell in a deluge. It poured roaring down, bending trees swishing against the ground. The surrounding mountain peaks were lost in shadowy obscurity. The men couldn't open their eyes, the horses couldn't raise their heads. Shielding their faces with their hands, soldiers muttered angrily, "This is a hell of a place! The raindrops hit like bullets!" For two days and two nights the storm raged without a let-up. The bumpy road, twisting like a sheep gut, became a mire of slippery mud.

Our troops were in a tearing hurry. From the very first day they made contact with the enemy, the latter had gone into continuous retreat, hoping to escape our grasp. Our men, determined to wipe them out and push across the Yangtse, drove on in relentless pursuit. Now the rain was holding up the enemy too. They weren't far ahead. With one more spurt we could catch them and finish them off.

But that night, after our troops crossed a mountain, they found themselves in a vast watery region of lakes and ponds.

It was pitch black. The measured tread of feet sloshing through the mud was all that broke the silence. A small group of men detached themselves from the ranks and walked to the side of the road. Then a beam of light shone beneath a clump of bamboos. Division commander Chen Hsing-tsai was squatting in the mud, examining a map with his flashlight. A staff officer and an orderly held their raincoats over his head. Chen spread the map on his knees. Raindrops, caught by the beam of the flashlight, shone in a golden line.

At Chen's side, two staff officers consulted quietly. "Is there a river ahead of us?"

"Yes, a big one."

The division commander was searching his map in vain for a fording

point. He overheard the staff officers and quickly turned to them in annoyance.

"A big one? So big that men can't cross it?"

Nobody replied. There was only the incessant nerve-tautening hissing of the rain. Chai Hao, chief of the reconnaissance section, was returning from a mission to the river's edge. He had borrowed the division commander's horse. The beast hadn't eaten its fill for three days and it wheezed as it galloped through the mud, splattering the soldiers generously. Cursing, the men shouted, "Dismount! Get off!" The horse's churning hoofs had splashed mud all over the reconnaissance chief's head and face too. Although rain continued to fall, the weather was still hot and muggy, and rain mixed with perspiration streamed from Chai Hao's forehead to sting his eyes.

"Where is 306 (the division commander's designation)? Where is 306?" he shouted as he wound his horse among the troops. Then he spotted Chen, leaped down—right into a puddle—splashed across, saluted and gave his report, his voice coming in harsh gasps:

"A big white stretch of water—can't tell which is the river and which is the road. . . ."

The division commander folded his map and stood up.

"The enemy?"

"They crossed the river before it flooded."

Chen peered intently at Chai Hao's face. He knew that this man with the swarthy pockmarked visage was brave and enthusiastic. The report was quite correct. The river certainly was flooding, flooding terrifically. Paddy fields, paths, ponds and mounds were all indistinguishable. A while ago, standing on the river bank, the division commander could hear clumps of earth crumbling beneath his feet into the water.

Now, reports began coming in from the different units: "Big river." "We can't find a fording place." "Await instructions." "How shall we advance?" The messengers crowded around Chen, waiting for his reply.

Lightning flashed, and the division commander caught sight of an old scout, his brimless straw hat perched at a comic angle on his head. Rain poured from its crown on to his neck, and from there down into his clothes. This old scout was always calm and cheerful at the front. He never lowered his head. Once, a bullet thudded into a sapling right beside him, but he only laughed and said, "Hey! That's what I call good shooting!"

Chen now said to him, "Old Hsia, you go take a look. There must be a road."

"Commander," said the old-timer, "in the Northeast I could find a road if I had to feel it out. But here in the south—"

Cracking rifle fire interrupted his words. The shooting sounded about five *li* away.

No doubt about it—the enemy was just ahead. The division commander raised his head and listened. Around him, the men stood motion-

less and silent in the rain. They didn't want to disturb him while he was coming to a decision.

Actually, Chen was thinking of his past. In 1933, the Communist Party had sent him to this region of lakes and ponds to lead a group of guerillas. For about a year he travelled in and out of all kinds of intricate bays and inlets on small boats. At that time he knew this section in much greater detail than was shown on any map. Here he had been wounded twice, and once he had lost contact with his unit. It was here that he had been through countless storms and floods; he had run all over this place. But now he couldn't find a fording place on the map. It wasn't that he had forgotten. Many years had passed and the appearance of the terrain had changed. The military situation was different too. He couldn't put all his men on one small boat today. There were thousands of men under his command, with trucks and artillery. Then the lakes and streams were perfect for fighting guerilla warfare; today they were a hindrance.

A flash of lightning ripped across the sky and thunder rumbled without cease. In that sharp eye-piercing flash, the whole surrounding countryside was illuminated: the bamboo groves, the shimmering water that covered the ground, the green sheen of the raincoats, the wet rifle stocks, the pale faces of the men—then all was dark and invisible again.

The division commander listened to the thunder. He thought how similar it sounded to the artillery fire during the battle of Szepingkai in the summer of 1947. It was as though the very heavens were falling, the sound rolling and rumbling endlessly. That battle had made a great impression on him. The lake region was a long way from Szepingkai. Whatever made him connect the two?

All this went through his mind in less than a minute. Suddenly he began walking forward. He didn't turn his head, he looked at no one.

"Comrades!" he cried. "Our army fought its way through here . . . this place isn't going to stop us. . . . Which is the vanguard company?"

"Number Six."

"Let the Seventh Company take over—and drive forward hard! I'm going to the Seventh Company right now. We have a way to get across!"

Messengers and scouts from the different units left him immediately. In an instant they were gone. He instructed his orderly:

"Tell the chief of the radio section to make contact with Corps and Army while we're crossing the river. I'll be on the other side!" Chen strode off without another word.

Back on the road, he saw the troops moving steadily ahead. Arms and equipment clattered in the dark. The men rolled forward like a tide. They were not going to let anything stop them. No one even thought of stopping. Chen heard two soldiers talking:

"Go a little faster! We'll be soaked here or drenched there anyhow. Don't let the enemy get away!"

"Balls they will!"

"Balls they will? A dumb hulk like you—maybe they're waiting to give you all the comforts of home!"

"Listen, *huochi*,* this is a surprise attack! They think we're stuck, that we're groaning in the mud. But we'll hop across that river in no time. You'll see!"

"Look at that!"

A string of red flares rose into the sky ahead. The enemy was signalling.

Division commander Chen wanted to see who the two soldiers were, but an artilleryman leading a horse cut across his path, and the soldiers were lost in the crowd.

The road was submerged under water and the troops continued their march on the raised paths between the paddy fields. Chen walked behind the artillerymen. He was unable to pass them on the narrow winding path. There was barely enough room for one man. It was even more difficult for the horses, whose hoofs kept slipping. The water in the paddy fields on both sides had risen almost to a level with the path. The rice stalks looked like reeds in the water, only a bit of the grain heads showing above the surface. Horse after horse slid into the water. The Northeast soldiers, who had never walked between paddy fields before, skidded and fell and got to their feet again. By the time a company passed over a section of path, they trampled it out of sight.

The artillery unit ahead of Chen stopped, looking for a road. The horses had splattered the men with mud from head to foot. Chen jumped into the water to detour around them. Before him was a stretch of paddy fields; the river was beyond. He could hear splashing on all sides. The soldiers, holding hands, were wading forward. Chen caught up with them. In his wet sticky clothes his body felt scalding hot. He stepped into a hole beneath the water and was about to fall when the strong hand of a soldier steadied him.

"Comrades!" shouted Chen. "Push across the river and get the enemy!"

Gradually, the flashes of lightning withdrew into the distance and the rain lessened.

In a grass shack behind a grove of trees, a radio operator was working feverishly in the light of a flickering candle. Covered with mud, his sleeves rolled up to the elbow, lines of black water trickling down his arms, he was absorbed in his apparatus. Suddenly he turned his head and cried joyfully:

"Corps is calling us! Corps is calling us!"

Standing behind the operator, the chief of the radio section, his

* Pal, chum, friend.

glasses gleaming on his pale face, grabbed the earphones. He put them on his head, sat down and began recording the message himself.

For two days and two nights they had been buffeted by the storm, ~~cut off from outside contact~~ like a ship lost at sea. Now, how delighted they were to again hear the sharp, clear call signals! The piping staccato ~~words~~ pulled everyone to the table like a magnet. In the candlelight the men's faces were grey, dirty, but they smiled victoriously.

They could hear a hubbub of noise coming from far beyond the trees—horses neighing, men shouting. The division commander was leading his troops to the river's edge!

Just then, Lei Ying, chief of the liaison section, came into the shack. He slung his oilcloth-covered haversack from behind his back on to his chest, sat down on a pile of straw and promptly fell fast asleep. Lei Ying was a bold youngster. During the heat of battles in the snowstorms of the Northeast, he could always be seen flying off on some mission on his big chestnut horse. "Our young section chief really moves!" the soldiers used to say.

The excited chief of the radio section finished taking down the message and handed it to a short, rosy-cheeked code clerk for deciphering. He then turned to talk to Lei Ying, but refrained when he saw how soundly the latter was sleeping, his chin resting on his chest, rainwater slowly dripping from his clothes to the floor. He drew out one cigarette after another from an inside jacket pocket. They all were sopping wet. Finally, he roasted one in the flame of the candle.

Corps evidently was also on the move. At the end of their rush message, they had signed off fast. Contact with Army's station so far had been impossible. Suddenly the radio picked up a faint signal. "Peking," said an operator with a grin.

"See if there's any statement by Chairman Mao," said one of the men.

"Chairman Mao's resting. How would he be making a statement in the middle of the night!"

"You're talking through your hat! Chairman Mao works all night. He knows we're marching in a big storm. He's thinking about us, for sure!"

The radio chief listened, smiling. The clerk handed him the decoded message. He took one look at it and shouted, "Start dismantling!" He woke Lei Ying, and the two of them rushed out together.

Division commander Chen at that moment was standing in the mud on the river bank, supervising the crossing. The water before him flowed in a vast white expanse. There was no telling how deep it was.

Number Seven Company was the strongest company in the strongest regiment of the division. It had been awarded the red pennant inscribed "Fighting Heroes Company." The men of the Seventh marched past Chen and plunged into the river. They listened to the stentorian orders of Chai Hao, the reconnaissance chief, who was directing them.

Company Six felt very hurt over this change in plans. Chin Teh-kuei, its commander, strode through the rain, his face red, every hair on his head burning. He was the first of his men to jump into the river. A mass of black shadows waded through the white water. The lapping of the waves muffled all other sounds.

On the bank, division commander Chen felt as though he were standing in space. The river was eating away the ground beneath his feet; clumps of earth kept crumbling into the water. Messenger after messenger came running up to report on the crossing. It was dangerous! Would they fail? He suddenly recalled a method that had been used to ford a river in this region in his guerilla days. Excitedly, he shouted for the commander of the Seventh Company, and told him about it. The latter then leaped into the water.

Fighting and struggling through swirling current up to his chest, Chin, commander of Company Six, at last reached the other side of the river. But his men were laden down with many pounds of equipment, most of it on their backs. They were top-heavy and they couldn't keep their footing in the fast moving water.

"Come on!" yelled Chin, looking like a mud figure on the opposite bank. "Come on!"

"Hey! Company Seven's swimming!"

Immediately a number of soldiers in Company Six who could swim followed suit, and threshed their way across.

Then came the order, Chen's method—"Tie your puttees together!" Soon a line of knotted leg bindings over a *li* in length stretched across the rushing water. With this aid, the two companies crossed the river.

The happy cry spread through the ranks:

"The advance companies got across! The advance companies got across! Hey! They made it!"

Chen's orderly had to hold him tight to prevent him from leaping into the water with joy and wading over. Chen was roughly pushing the orderly's hands aside when Lei Ying was seen galloping up in the distance on a white mare. The horse slipped and foundered in a deep mud puddle. She struggled to rise, whinnying. Lei Ying shouted and flailed his crop, and she finally pulled herself out and flew toward the river bank. Galloping like a whirlwind, Lei Ying could vaguely see several black lines in the river. Soldiers were wading across.

"Don't cross the river! Don't cross the river!" he kept bellowing as he drew near. Then he spotted the division commander rolling up his trousers. Before the horse came to a full stop, Lei Ying sprang to the ground and saluted.

"Commander, there's a new order from Corps!" He handed over the message.

Chen turned on his flashlight. Its glare hurt his eyes. After he finished reading the message, he gave instructions to Lei Ying. The

liaison chief then ran from one unit to the next, shouting at the top of his voice. Immediately the cry was taken up, spreading far and near, all the way to the men in the turbulent river:

"Stop the crossing! Don't ford the river!"

II

There had been a change in the situation. Kuomintang general Sung Hsi-lien, who had boasted of his "bastion north of the Yangtse River," began running as soon as he became aware of our attack. Corps ordered the division, driving west across the Tsushui River toward the city of Ichang in pursuit of the enemy, to turn south immediately, cross the Yangtse and then sweep west to cut off the enemy's retreat.

By midnight the night before, a battalion had forded the Tsushui. But Commander Chen ordered his division to march south at once, without waiting for the battalion to cross back. The entire division about-faced and set out toward the south.

At dawn on a high hill, the men were allowed a long rest. They had been marching in two long lines on either side of a highway. Too exhausted to eat, the soldiers lay down where they stood and instantly fell fast asleep.

The division commander sat drinking boiled water in a grass thatched shack—the village tea shop. He had already dispatched a messenger to summon to a meeting the officers of the first regiment in the line of march. That ruled out any sleep for him. Strangely enough, he didn't feel the least sleepy. His mind was full of the new orders he had received and he was calculating how to execute them. The rain had stopped before dawn. Now, misty clouds drifted in the sky. Lovely jade green trees and groves of bamboo dotted the landscape. A reddish glow was spreading on the eastern horizon. The storm was over, but when Chen thought of the fierce midday sun in this region he looked toward the sleeping soldiers and frowned.

Two mounted men appeared, coming down the same road the troops had travelled. At first Chen assumed they were being sent from the regiment further back to make contact with the advance unit. He didn't pay any particular attention. It wasn't until they were only about five yards away that he noticed the face he knew so well—Liang Pin, the division's political commissar, had returned!

Liang Pin had been home on leave when the division had started its chase, but now, suddenly, he had caught up. A tall man who always held his head high, he was an alert, steadfast person of nearly forty. His jaw had been shattered by a bullet, and it was still an effort for him to speak. But his voice never failed to move the men, to arouse them.

His pale face was a reflection of a wound he had received in Kwei-

chow during the Long March.* He had fainted for a spell, then hid alone in a bamboo grove. For several days he lived solely on the tender bamboo sprouts he dug up. Our troops managed to get through, but the class enemies—the landlords and the local tyrants—went completely crazy. Many were the Red Army men they cut down. Liang Pin, on top of his wound, caught malaria. Finally, he collected a group of about a dozen other wounded who had fallen behind. Armed with only one hand grenade, they pushed forward for thirteen days and thirteen nights until they caught up with the troops. Ever since that time Liang Pin frequently suffered from dizziness and nosebleeds.

Now, seeing the soldiers sleeping by the roadside, he tried to rein his mount to a slower pace. Heated from its run, the horse skittered and pranced, scattering mud. Liang Pin swore, then leaped off and walked the animal. He walked softly, smiling affectionately at the sleeping men. They were sprawled in all sorts of awkward positions, some with their heads pillowed on their companions' legs. But they slept soundly, as only soldiers can. Liang Pin knew that even an exploding shell couldn't awaken them. In the dawn's early light he could see their faces—streaked with dirt, cut with scratches from branches of trees. Last night, standing under the eaves of a house during the big storm, Liang Pin had been thinking of his soldiers. . . .

Reaching the grass thatched shack, he looked up and saw the division commander standing to greet him. Chen's big eyes were smiling, and his round ruddy face broke into a grin as he said:

"It's about time you came back, comrade!"

The commissar strode forward delightedly, his head high.

"*Huochi!* You don't get more than one chance in a lifetime to cross the Yangtse like this!"

Looking at each other's mud-caked clothes, the two men burst into laughter.

After they sat down on a pile of hay, Chen said, "We had to set out before you got back. I divided the job with Comrade Li. He's in charge of the first reserves. . . . Too many men are sick. The artillery has fallen behind; it can't keep pace with us. Nobody's handling policy questions in the food and fodder department. Seventy to eighty per cent on our sick list are malaria cases. . . ."

In a few words, Chen brought the commissar up to date on the situation in the division. Then he asked:

"*Huochi*, how are things at home?"

The division commander's own home was still many miles to the south—on the Hunan-Kwangtung border. Continuously moving north, traveling from one battlefield to another, he had seldom thought of "home"

in the past seventeen years. It wasn't that he had no feeling for his home; but during a long period of fighting and working a man's emotional outlook broadens, deepens, becomes richer. Even on the rare occasions when, in the course of the war, he ran into an old comrade from his native village and they talked of home, the place seemed too distant for him to think of returning.

But now, the question of his village was actually confronting him. The place toward which they were advancing, the place which they were going to liberate, was his own native region! For the past half year every time he heard the phrase "liberate the people south of the Yangtse" spoken at a meeting, or read it in the newspaper, he had thought of it only in the general sense. Not until he began moving south step by step, closer and closer to his old home, did he suddenly realize that there was a flesh and blood connection between his own family—his parents and brothers—and the people south of the Yangtse whom he was going forward to liberate.

As to Liang Pin, the day he walked toward his native village, his reaction originally had been only lukewarm. Is there still anyone left at home? he thought to himself. Suppose I see them again, then what? What will we be able to talk about? . . . Usually steady and competent, he couldn't help feeling rather flustered. He had no answer to the questions in his mind. Following the road with his head down, he had stopped on a wooden bridge. He stamped on it a couple of times, looked at it and thought—This bridge is no good. It couldn't even hold up under a light artillery piece going across! . . .

But then he saw a row of tung trees growing on the other side of the stream. Ducks were paddling in a small pond. And beyond that pond. . . . Wasn't that his native village? Smoke used to rise above the roofs. Now where was it?

His heart leaped, and suddenly he felt a surge of emotion. Moisture stung his eyes. He swore at himself. To this day he doesn't remember clearly how he ran toward that group of people. He only knew that they were there—many eyes shining at him, many hands gesticulating, stretching toward him, old folks weeping, children cheering. And suddenly in their midst he saw a thin white-haired old woman, blind in one eye. He didn't recognize her at first as she came toward him. But when she silently took hold of him with two trembling hands, he knew—It's Mama! It's Mama!

Without a word, his mother buried her head on his chest and wept as though her heart would break. The recollections of twenty years ago came flooding back. Liang Pin remembered that very tense night when the White army surrounded the village, shooting and searching. When his mother had secretly seen him off, she had been heartbroken then too, and she had wept with her head against his chest, her shoulders moving spasmodically. "Mama," he had said, "wait for me. I'll come back." What a long twenty years they had been! He had come back after all,

CORRECTION

The footnote on page 12 should read: "The Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (which later became the PLA) in 1934 began an epic 25,000 li trek from Kiangsi, in order to go north to fight the invading Japanese army. After terrible hardships, it arrived, one year later, in north Shensi."

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but now, supporting his trembling mother, he bit his lips. He didn't know what to say. Finally his mother wiped her eyes. She raised her head and looked at him.

"How are you, son?" she asked.

Only then did his heart flame, and tears sprang to his eyes.

His mother had aged terribly, but she was still tough and unyielding. She took Liang Pin by the hand and led him a few steps, then pointed to a patch of ground, densely overgrown with grass.

"See, son! The Whites tortured your father for two days and two nights, then they killed him with spikes. He called your name just before he died. . . ." She turned, her eyes gleaming, and pointed again. "See, over there!" Her shoulders hunched, and she silently dropped her head.

Liang Pin looked at the heap of rubble that had once been their home. Here he had been born, here he had grown up. In that house he had held meetings with Youth Leaguers, from that house he had been forced to flee. He still remembered the orange tree in front of the door. Now there was nothing left. This was how the enemy had treated his family because he had escaped their clutches! Fury mounted in Liang Pin, consuming him like a living flame. He calmed himself only with the greatest effort.

Several long-bearded old men, their eyes damp, came up to comfort his mother.

"I'm all right," she said to them. "Son, I never bowed my head. I remembered what you told me. I never bowed my head."

The village wasn't the old village any more. Chiang Kai-shek troops had burned and murdered here time and again. The Japanese had been through here "mopping up." They too had burned and pillaged and destroyed. Liang Pin didn't recognize any of the young men or the girls.

Liang Pin's mother looked at him. He had changed. He was older, but he was much stronger, much firmer. Later, she began to weep again. By then other people had told Liang Pin about his younger brother. Brother had joined the underground local Communist Party organization after Liang Pin left. Sold out by a traitor, he was arrested by the Whites during a secret Party meeting in the forest. He and more than twenty others were machine-gunned to death on the bank of the river. Liang Pin realized his return was making the old woman think of his brother.

It made Liang Pin's heart ache—so many fine people had been destroyed. . . . He recalled that winter night when his brother-in-law—unable to stand the injustice and oppression any longer—ran out through the snow to search for the Red Army. He was caught and dragged back. The Kuomintang soldiers bayoneted him in a dozen places, till his whole body was dripping fresh blood. After they brought him home, he only lived for three days. Sister had a hard life ever since.

She still remained a widow. There were many in the village who met the same kind of tragic fate.

The night of Liang Pin's return, he slept beside his mother's bed, on a straw pallet. Long participation in the revolutionary struggle steels a man and he doesn't show how deeply he is stirred inside. He had chatted and even laughed with relatives and neighbors that day. They spoke of their life during the past ten years or so, they talked of Chairman Mao and Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh. Liang Pin spoke mostly of the discipline and policy of the People's Liberation Army. What the peasants wanted to know most was how the land problem was going to be solved. Now, lying on his straw pallet, one bloody deed after another passed before Liang Pin's eyes, and he couldn't sleep. The thought kept tormenting him—all the time he was at the front in the thick of battle, the enemy was here too, killing, murdering, destroying his family.

His mother's bed creaked. She asked, "Aren't you asleep yet?"

Of course this had also been a very upsetting day for Mama. Liang Pin recalled how she had wept that afternoon for his younger brother. But he thought talking about it would be bad for her, so he only said:

"I was sleeping, I was sleeping," and lay back quietly on the pallet.

Then, as he wrestled with perplexing and confused ideas, there came to his mind something Chairman Mao had said, words that had made an indelible impression on him:

". . . They got up from the ground and wiped the bloodstains from their bodies. They buried their dead companions and continued the battle. . . ."

His father and brother were among the companions who were buried! They died glorious deaths. He remembered saying, at an army memorial service, words to this effect—We must keep looking forward. Ahead of us are many places to be liberated; many people are still being tortured, insulted, killed. . . .

When he finally fell asleep, Liang Pin had a nightmare. He seemed to be staring. He could see the enemy, and they were burning something. Then he looked into the flames and saw that it was his father. His father cried out his name. . . . Liang Pin woke in a cold sweat. He sat up and thought for a long time. He knew he would never forget the monstrous things the enemy had done. But now he wanted to put these thoughts aside; he felt he ought to calm himself. The revolution teaches a man to keep marching forward. He forced himself to think of the army, of the many fighters he knew so well, of the urgent problems awaiting his solution, of the unfinished drive to defeat the enemy for good. Gradually, he put the lid on his seething emotions. Just before dawn, he slept again, soundly, for about an hour.

His mother had awakened early, and gone outside for fear of disturbing him. When Liang Pin got up he decided not to wait for his sister who was coming from twenty li away to see him, but to return

at once to the army. He had been planning to show his mother the snapshot of his children, but in his hurry to leave, he forgot. He gave her his accumulated army allowances and grain ration tickets and said, "I'm going." She looked at him without speaking. She was much steadier than she had been the night before.

After Liang Pin took leave of his neighbors, he sought out an old revolutionary with a long beard, and went with him across the paddy fields to visit the home of a comrade. Liang Pin had held meetings and worked there with that comrade many times in the past. Later they were together in the Red Army, and the comrade had been killed in the war against Japanese aggression. When they reached the place, they found the house had been levelled to the ground. The old-timer said the comrade's family had to move away five or six years ago, no one knew where. . . . So many bloody crimes crying out to be revenged. All these were deeply engraved on Liang Pin's consciousness as he hurried to rejoin his unit.

He fretted with impatience on the long journey back. Riding in the cab of a truck carrying ammunition, he said to himself, "I've been fighting at the front for twenty years now. I've been clenching my jaw for more than ten (meaning since he was shot in the jaw). I'm going to have to clench it still tighter! There isn't anyone clearer than us on what we have to do to the enemy! . . ."

Whenever truck got stuck in the mud, Liang Pin, carrying his head high, deep in thought, pushed forward on foot. He felt relieved now, although aware of the heaviness of his responsibilities. All his thoughts led to one focal point—the job ahead.

This morning at dawn he had finally caught up with his unit. For several nights he hadn't slept well. It was as if he had been away for a long time, and now that he was back, he was happy beyond words. But when the division commander asked him about conditions at home, Liang Pin only frowned and said:

"Comrade, I learned a very good lesson!" That was all you could get out of him.

The regiment's commander, Tsen Yung, and its political commissar, Tsai Chin-sheng, arrived at the grass shack to attend the meeting Chen had called. The division commander spread a military map on the ground. He told them that according to order from Corps, they were to cross the Yangtse River before tomorrow night.

III

Late the same evening, the troops reached the Yangtse River. Although they had made a forced march of more than one hundred *li*, they couldn't rest right away. They had to labor all through the night to complete their preparations for the crossing. By dawn they had to be

concealed from the sight of the enemy on the opposite bank. Company Six worked hard that night, combing the dense reeds in the coves and inlets along the shore, searching for boats. All they were able to find was one small wooden craft. By the time they dragged it back to their camp, well hidden behind a hill, the sky was nearly light and white mist was beginning to rise from the river. The officer in charge of inspecting boats for the crossing examined their find a long time. Then he said:

"This boat leaks. You can get along with it in the inlets. But before it could be trusted to the winds and waves of the Yangtse, you'd have to spend two or three days repairing it."

Chin, leader of Company Six, was furious. He glared after the retreating back of the inspector, cursed him hotly, then dashed into the grass shack, flung himself down on a pile of rice stalks and lay with his arms behind his head.

Disconsolately, the men of Company Six dispersed. A few went behind the hill and kindled a fire to dry their clothes. Some went to sleep in the grass shack. Only young Yang Tien-pao remained beside the battered craft.

"Hey, comrades! We've got to think of something!" he called after his mates.

Wang Chun, who came from the Northeast, snorted, "You're always blowing what a great place your south China is—you think of something!"

"Say, that's no way to talk. Chairman Mao gave the order to cross the Yangtse. I didn't invite you down here!"

"You invite me? You couldn't tempt me to come to this place if you sent a sedan-chair with an eight-man carry!"

"Don't get so tough!"

"What if I do!"

Hearing them wrangle, Chin didn't utter a sound. He stuffed his fingers in his ears and buried his face in the rice stalks. He gnawed his lips to suppress his bitter irritation. They had come ten thousand *li*, all the way from the Sungari River in the Northeast, just to cross the Yangtse. (Along the lower reaches, in the Shanghai-Nanking region, the Second and Third Field Armies had already smashed to the southern banks.) For years, they had been trying to reach the river, and now that they finally had arrived, they had no way of getting to the other side.

Chin thought about the river they had crossed the night before—Company Seven had been sent ahead first. Humph! Maybe Number Seven was the "Fighting Heroes Company," but at Fat Ox Hamlet and at Golden Mountain Fort that time of the big snowstorm while Company Six was in the fore of over a dozen assaults—where was Company Seven then? Now, the new company of heroes had pushed the old company of heroes into the background. Well, last night Chin had sworn he get to the opposite bank first if it killed him. He'd be damned if he'd let anyone say Company Six had fallen behind again!

But how was he going to wade across the Yangtse? This was no shallow Tsushui River, but the mighty Yangtse. How was he going to wade across this one? . . .

Although the squad leader stopped the quarrel between Yang and Wang once, they still continued to argue.

Most of the men had been in high fighting spirit when they came down into Hupeh, but some of them began to get a bit moody. Wang, for instance, a short stocky youngster with a round face burned as black as a pot bottom by the sun. After a few days being bitten by mosquitoes and soaking with sweat, his face swelled out in boils. Wang was very brave, but he was stubborn, he wasn't adaptable. When the army was preparing the men for the drive to the south, he was anxious to do his part in the liberation of the rest of the country. During a discussion in his unit of the men's attitude toward the campaign, someone had said that the south was so hot you could roast a griddle cake on the wall. Wang had gotten up and argued with him, "That's very funny but I don't believe it. Who ever heard of roasting a griddle cake without a fire? Anyhow, we're Chairman Mao's army and we can go anywhere. Don't you remember that song—'Fires don't burn us, water can't drown us'?"

Then this latest attack began. The sun was scorchingly hot; when it rained you were soaked to the skin; villages in western Hupeh were few and far apart, and the troops slept out in the open every night. In the bamboo groves, the mosquitoes buzzed, buzzed. They're worse than the Northeast's scorpions, thought Wang. All right, bite, you bastards! Do your worst! . . . But after battling with the pests all night, toward dawn just when he'd be falling asleep, the dew would wet him as thoroughly as if he'd been out in a shower. At first Wang had been looking forward to a chance to wash and dry his clothes. After two days in this region, he gave up hope.

All this Wang didn't mind so much. A man who's been through the battle of Chinchou shouldn't be afraid of anything! he thought. Time and again machinegun fire had swept past him like an iron broom, felling comrades on his either side. A bullet had only to hit you once and you were a sure goner. But I kept my eyes wide open and I walked straight ahead, he said to himself. Now we're going to finish the enemy off for good. Am I going to let the sun and a couple of mosquitoes stop me? He was determined to stick it out no matter what happened. But his conflict increased daily—like two little men wrestling inside his brain.

Yang was a different sort. He was a southern youngster from Hunan, and he specialized in telling everyone in the company what a wonderful place the south was. The past few days his praises of the south began getting on Wang's nerves. Yang had joined the PLA after he was captured as a Kuomintang soldier in the Liaohsi campaign. At first he was homesick for his parents and his wife; he brooded constantly. But as soon as the drive south began, he came to life. He taught an

entire squad how to swim when they were practising in the Hanshui River. Yang became one of the most hardworking men in the company. He was twice publicly commended by his superiors. Yang was in his glory. You could hear his chatter everywhere you went. Someone had only to mention the south, and he would be telling him avidly, "Wait till you see it! The south is the place to live. That millet you eat—we feed it to the birds!"

Hearing this theme all the way from Peking, Wang had gotten used to it. But the last few days, he had begun snapping back—"You can say anything you like, Yang, only don't try to kid us! The south is a fine place, huh! I get here after fighting for three years and there aren't even houses for us to billet in!"

But no amount of cold water could dampen Yang's spirits. He never lost his grin.

Now, however, the Yangtse was before them, and he was at a loss. Where was he going to find six or seven boats to take a company of men across the river? After his quarrel with Wang he sat down under a tree in front of the grass shack and buried his head on his knees.

Wang felt listless, annoyed with himself for having raised such a row. He picked up his rifle and walked to a post where he took over as guard.

By then the sky was a pale grey. Wang saw a tall officer strolling in his direction. The officer hailed him.

"Comrade, what company are you?"

Wang didn't pay much attention to the man. "The Sixth," he said casually.

The officer raised his head and smiled. "The old company of heroes. How's it going? Can you stick it out?" He walked up to Wang.

"Of course. A soldier can always stick it out." Wang cradled his rifle in his arms and sat down on the beach. He pulled out a piece of newspaper and started to roll a cigarette. The officer sat down beside him and handed him a cigarette. Wang twirled it under his nose, sniffing it.

"Got a match?" he asked. He lit up and took a long drag. "As we say in the Northeast—it's rough. You can't die of cold, but heat can sure kill you! If I were running this campaign I get the fighting started soon, finish it off soon and start resting soon."

They chatted for a while, and Wang began telling what was in his heart.

"Just after I joined the army I bumped smack into the battle of Szepingkai in '47. Ho! That was a battle! I don't mind fighting any more—I just don't like the life here in the south. Son of a bitch! It's like being in another country. None of the people here understand what I say. I fought for two years in the Northeast and every place I went was like my own home town. Here . . . well, never mind. I'm a free

man, comrade. I till my own land now, and I don't pay anybody rent. I've got my mind set on seeing the revolution through to the finish."

Yet, in spite of speaking this way, there wasn't much of a lustre in Wang's eyes. The sky was light now. The officer listened patiently with his head thrown back. He seemed to be thinking about something. Finally he said slowly:

"Comrade, let me tell you a story. Over ten years ago there was a small body of soldiers called the Red Army. They struck out from south of this Yangtse River. The enemy was strong then, and they were weak. The enemy would hit at them from all sides, but they would break through. Breaking through—that was the only way to keep alive. If you didn't . . . the enemy would kill you to the last man. One day, they were really exhausted. Every one lay on the ground, his feet swollen and bloody. Walking was very painful. Some said, 'We're finished. Let's die here and be done with it!' But then a man shouted, 'If we're going to die, let's take some of the enemy with us! And let's die on our feet, not lying down!' That was our commander. Well, they broke through—and that's why we have our army today. Things are much better now than they were in those days. . . ."

Just then Li Chun-ho, the political instructor, came rushing over. He stared in surprise at the officer, then snapped to attention and saluted.

Wang leaped to his feet like he had been stabbed. Awkwardly, he stood looking at the officer.

All smiles, the political instructor was saying breathlessly, "Commissar, we've got the river crossing licked."

The officer who had been talking with Wang was indeed Liang Pin, political commissar of the division. He stood up and eyed the instructor gravely. The latter turned and pointed:

"Look, commissar!"

Liang Pin's face lit up in a smile. Coming from the direction the instructor had indicated were an old man with a long beard and a woman of about forty. Liang Pin went to welcome them. They carried ropes and oars, and as they drew near they were grinning joyously. By then Liang Pin had a pretty good idea of how the crossing was going to be solved.

Chun-ho, the political instructor, was a youthful man, intelligent and lively. "Company Six searched all night," he said, "and all we could find was one leaky old boat. No company would ever get to the other side in that! They dragged the boat into camp, but I didn't come back. I thought—if I only could find some peasants . . . wherever we go we work out our problems by relying on the people. . . . I followed along the river for about two *li*, and there was a shack with this old grandpa in it. At first he couldn't figure out what I was saying, but then I told him simple and straight—'Chairman Mao sent us here to cross the river.' Well! The minute he heard that, he yelled 'You've come back!' and went tearing out. He ran up the inlet shouting the news, and

before you knew it there were six boats. Even old grandpa wants to come along. I tried to talk him out of it, but he insists."

Liang Pin shook hands with the local people. He was touched by the enthusiasm of the grey-haired old peasant.

"*Laopan*,"* he said, "it's good of you to lend us your boat. When we get to the other side, we'll send it back to you."

"No, comrade. This is a big river. You wouldn't be able to sail it yourselves. I took your Red Army brothers across this river more than once in the old days. We've been waiting for you to come for over ten years, and bitter years they've been too. Two weeks ago the Kuomintang tried to get rid of all the boats on the river. Some they burned, some they sank—there was shooting every day. . . . Those whose boats weren't sunk, ran away. We talked it over—how were we going to ferry you comrades across? So we hid these few boats and waited for you."

Wang had long since dashed back to the grass shack, prodded the sleeping company commander with his foot and roared.

"The boats are here! They're all here!"

The soldiers went pouring out of the shack and ran to where the peasants were chatting with the officers. In an instant the soldiers had surrounded them in an affectionate, hand-shaking, laughing ring. Rays of the rising sun were stretching across the sky, and the commissar urged:

"You'd better talk to them in the shack."

Liang Pin himself, deep in thought, took the political instructor into a grove on a slope facing the water. They could see clearly the white-looking river.

"Comrade Chun-ho," asked Liang Pin, "how's the morale of the men?"

As was his habit, Chun-ho didn't think twice before speaking:

"Pretty fair."

The commissar stared ahead silently, as though he were studying the great river. Then he shook his head.

"It's not pretty fair."

Chun-ho said nothing.

"It's the duty of the leaders to fully understand the ideas and moods of their men," Liang Pin went on. "The men won't come and tell you, and if you ask the lower ranks they'll draw themselves up straight and say, 'Don't worry about a thing. If we don't finish the job we won't come back!' I don't doubt their word. Our men run forward when the guns start firing. You only have to give the order and they charge. But just depending on courage isn't enough. What about when we aren't fighting? We've got to stick to the finish in this war. Chun-ho, look. This is the Yangtse River, isn't it? But beyond it are thousands of

* Respectful form of address to man.

high mountains, big rivers, weather hotter than this, much more mosquitoes, still heavier rain—do we keep on going or don't we?"

Chun-ho blushed. "It's true, commissar. Sometimes when I can hardly stand it, I pray—let the shooting start; let's hurry up and attack, let's hurry up and fight! There's more glory in dying in battle than in this damn heat!"

"Well, what are you going to do when you get those kind of ideas again?"

Chun-ho pondered for a minute, then he said sincerely, "I'll think of the Party."

"And you better think of what's ahead of us too!" The commissar pointed forcefully at the hazy opposite bank. His tone was serious and decisive. "Any place we haven't reached yet—there the enemy is burning homes, murdering the people!"

A breeze sprang up from the river, and the tree leaves rustled above their heads. The heavy grey fog dispersed like smoke. Clouds of reddish gold flamed in the eastern sky. A water fowl was winging its way due south toward the far opposite shore. It shone white and clean against the background of the scarlet clouds. It seemed so free. Soaring over the enemy positions, it could easily spot their weak points, it could tell us how we should attack. . . . Liang Pin laughed at himself for indulging in these petty bourgeois intellectuals' daydreams, and turned his gaze elsewhere. Something unusual appeared to be going on nearby. A dozen or so soldiers were approaching rapidly, their pinched fallow faces covered with perspiration. They sighed with relief when they saw Chun-ho.

Surprised, the political instructor asked why they had come here. Hadn't the quartermaster department set up a place for the sick soldiers to rest in the rear? An old veteran stepped forward, his face covered with black bristling whiskers. His skin was yellow with malaria, his eyes looked startingly large. Liang Pin recognized him as machine-gunner Li Feng-tung—an old campaigner, and an old problem case. He was a skilled gunner, but he didn't like fighting. Several times he had asked to be transferred to the kitchen. They turned him down each time. Now he was standing with his hand in a crooked salute at the brim of his cap. He brought his arm down and said quietly:

"Instructor, in all our three Sungari River campaigns, in the four battles of Szepingkai—I was there in every one of them. Now we're going to cross the Yangtse. . . . Commissar!" His eyes were moist as he pleaded. "I was backward before. Now the whole country's going to be liberated soon. Give me a chance to prove myself. Instructor, I'll go along if it kills me. Don't send me back!"

The grim expression was gone from Liang Pin's face. He smiled infectiously. He stood with his hands behind his back, listening, his head cocked to one side. A raging snowstorm suddenly recalled itself to his mind. It was a bitter time, and the sky had seemed at its dark-

est. Then too he had heard the men talking with such fixity of purpose. . . . He could see the big drops of perspiration rolling from the gunner's temples. Liang Pin took a quick step toward the soldiers and shook hands with them, bending his tall body slightly forward. The sun was blazing bright now. He looked at their determined faces, their clear understanding eyes. Here was the answer to the problem that had been worrying him. . . .

IV

Sparkling in the sunlight, the swollen waters of the Yangtse River came surging out of the narrow Gorges. The muddy waves rushed east at an alarming speed, past Hankow, past Shanghai, into the sea. In the east, where both of its banks had been liberated, the red flames of festive torches illuminated its waters and a great song of victory rang out without end. Only here in the upper reaches was the Yangtse still being fed with the blood and tears of the people. Its waves howled day and night, and it flowed on as it had been flowing for thousands of years. There were beautiful fields and orchards along the river banks, fields and orchards in which the people had been suffering long and bitter hardship. The dykes their ancestors had left them badly needed repairs. If the river should burst across the long mounds of earth, its waters would be swirling over people's roof tops. May these days of danger hanging by a thread quickly pass!

In the east the sky was bright, and today the Yangtse flowed as rapidly as usual. The sun blazed forth. There was not a cloud in the sky, not a bird flew above the river.

The division observation post was concealed in a small fisherman's hut in a grove of trees.

Chai Hao, chief of the reconnaissance section, was shouting into the phone to the division commander: "306! An enemy officer and two sentries came out for a look on their fortifications and then went back. There's nothing happening in the west." He put down the phone, raised to his eyes the field glasses hanging on his chest, and focused through the small window facing the river.

The interior of the hut was dim. On the bamboo lattice wall hung a map of the river and its banks, marked with red and blue lines and symbols. A field telephone rested on a wooden chair beside a small table. On the table was a sheet of paper and a crayon pencil red at one end and blue at the other. Chai Hao had been hard at work in the observation post ever since they reached the Yangtse. He hadn't had a wink of sleep. Swarthy and pockmarked, his intelligent face was tense. He still felt ashamed that he had been unable to find a fording point of the Tsushui River the night before last in the storm. By now he had put in nearly fifteen intensive hours of scouting and observation.

Highly experienced, he had finished making a drawing of the opposite shore—the paper on the small table was a map of the section of the enemy line we were going to breach. Enemy artillery was located at their left flank on high ground; directly opposite us across the river were a number of trees set up for camouflage. The trees had already become dry and withered, but the enemy had not bothered to replace them with fresh ones. These trees, and the sentries pacing back and forth behind them, were the first things to give the position away. Shelters and dug-outs for infantry, interspersed with machinegun nests, and the position in general formed a line cut into the side of a steep hill that crowded the river bank. Behind the position were mountains, and beyond them still more mountains, rising higher and higher.

That day, division commander Chen personally came to the observation post three times. Silent and grave, he was collecting the information that would enable him to make his decisions. When he came at four in the afternoon, he said to Chai Hao:

"The enemy hasn't spotted us—that's definite. What we need most now are specific details of the terrain and enemy emplacements on the beach where we'll make our landing. Keep on observing. Phone me every five minutes!"

Bending slightly forward at the waist, Chen strode briskly through the grove of trees and returned to division headquarters.

The radio unit was extremely busy too. Messages kept pouring in from Army and Corps, indicating that the whole front line had its attention fixed on this place. As Commander Chen entered the division command post, Liang Pin the political commissar, frowning, handed him a message. The situation was very tense. Kuomintang general Sung Hsi-lien was scrambling to pull his main forces back toward the city of Ichang on the north bank of the Yangtse so as to concentrate strength for an escape dash. One PLA unit had rushed south from Yuanan, and this evening would reach Nanchinkuan, to cut off the enemy's road along the north bank of the Yangtse west into Szechuan province. Corps' request of Chen's division was—cross the river tonight without fail! Cross the river 20 li east of Ichang, knock out the important enemy artillery stronghold at Red Flowery Hat, and block the road against any attempt Sung Hsi-lien might make to cross the Yangtse and flee south. . . . The division had to get to the opposite bank without stirring up the enemy's defense positions. Otherwise we might not be able to grab them. . . .

There were many problems confronting the military leaders. This was to be a turning point in the campaign, and the division commander and the political commissar racked their brains.

Lei Ying, chief of the liaison section, came and went constantly, picking up messages and reporting on the progress of the preparations being made for the crossing. The telephone never stopped ringing. Occasionally, the chief of the radio section came in. Other than this,

there was very little conversation in command headquarters. Liang Pin smoked one cigarette after the next. The division commander hardly ate anything, although the cook had specially prepared a fish which Chen had often mentioned as his favorite in this part of the country. The meal was continually interrupted. After he just sat down for the third time, a call came from the observation post:

"Considerable activity in the enemy position. They seem to be moving."

This was the worst possible news. Were they trying to run? The atmosphere became grim. Liang Pin, the tall commissar, stood up beside the table with a scowl on his face. Chen put down the phone and ran to the observation post. Through his powerful field glasses he could see the enemy clearly. He loved these glasses, a prize he had captured in the first campaign in the Northeast. Now they were proving useful indeed. In the late afternoon the sun had lost most of its intensity. Bathed in a golden light, the enemy soldiers were scurrying around like ants. What in the world were they up to?

Two minutes, three minutes, five minutes . . . Chen kept his eyes glued to the powerful lenses. Then, with a laugh, he lowered the glasses.

"Old Chai, those enemy fortifications must be hot as an oven."

"How can you tell?"

"Look for yourself! Their men can't stand it. They're dashing to the river, diving in, then running back again. That's their movement!"

Chai Hao blew his breath out with relief and cursed the enemy heartily. He said he wished we had permission to use our big guns. He'd like to fire one personally a couple of times and kill all of those sons of bitches. But all the while he continued with his meticulous observations.

Chen was deep in thought as he returned to command headquarters. He made no further attempt to eat, and leaned over the big military map. The sun was sinking in the west, its last soft red glow rippling on the surface of the river. An orderly helped the officers move their equipment to a table outside, beneath some pomegranate trees. Behind the trees, white lotus flowers floated lushly in a small pool.

They had already reported to Army the exact time of the proposed attack, but Army had not yet replied. Chen looked again at the enemy installations marked on the map, and again reviewed the questions in his mind: First, would we fail to get across? (He emphatically shook his head. We were sure to get over.) Second, after reaching the other side, could we quickly establish a bridgehead before the enemy artillerymen had time to get set? Third, could we overrun the enemy's artillery positions before dawn? At daylight, the combination of enemy bombing and heavy artillery fire could inflict heavy casualties! . . . But

worst of all would be that we would fail to keep large enemy forces further west from fleeing south across the Yangtse.

"Cross the Yangtse tonight without fail!" That was an irrevocable order. According to reports from the observation post, the weather was calm, the speed of the river current had not increased. There would be a moon at midnight, making it easy for the enemy to see us, but the division commander wasn't worried. He had already decided to send six small boats across to stage an assault landing. What he needed now was a top-notch guide, someone who could lead the men to the place they had to attack as soon as they hit the beach. But the enemy had sewed the river up tight for the past month. Where could he find that kind of a guide? . . .

At Liang Pin's suggestion, the regiment had given the assault job to Company Six. The company was upstream from division headquarters in a dense wood behind a hill. Their camp was completely secluded. A winding path led from it to the river.

After dark, Company Six got busy. Several local boatmen took a squad of soldiers into the reeds of an inlet and repaired the leaky craft the troops had discovered earlier. Platoon leaders rushed around inspecting arms and equipment. In his little shack, company political instructor Chun-ho read the men's written pre-battle declarations, forwarded to him by the various squads. He had never seen included in the declarations so many applications to join the Party in the three years of the War of Liberation. Practically every soldier in the company was requesting admission. The common idea of them all seemed to be: "The war is nearly over. If I'm still not a Party member by the time I go home, I won't be able to look anybody in the eye!" Chun-ho could see the familiar face of each writer as he read declaration after declaration. With a pleased smile, he rested his writing pad on his knees, and began composing a report to his superiors.

Company commander Chin was grinning from ear to ear. He had brought most of his men into a large room and asked the white-bearded old boatman to tell them what to look out for while crossing the river. The flame of the oil lamp danced and flickered, and the noisy, laughing chatter of the men filled the room. Thick smoke from many cigarettes poured out through the window. Earlier, when they had heard that they would have the honor to carry out Chairman Mao's order to cross the Yangtse, the entire company had been plunged into a maelstrom of excitement, tension, activity, joy! . . . All day, company headquarters had been jammed with men demanding to be assigned to the leading boat.

It came to Wang's turn to stand guard at the river. He slung his rifle across his back. A half finished cigarette dangling from his lips, he walked from the boisterous room with head down. He was very uneasy today. There were too many confusing ideas whirling through his brain. The division had been camped at the river a day and a night. Even at night Wang had not been able to rest. He lay on a pile of hay, his

eyes open and staring. The two little men in his mind were no longer just wrestling—they were fighting to the death. A mental struggle is nothing rare in a soldier of the revolution. Wang's conflict was that of any energetic soldier confronted with difficult reality, but in his case the conflict was unusually intense. More than once today, he had thought of his distant home on the upper reaches of the Nun River. . . .

Two years ago, in 1946, he was still a farmhand. At the time of the big snows, the Communist Party had lifted the peasants to their feet and led them in the land reform fight. Wang was terribly confused then—Suppose the Communists had to leave? . . . What if the Kuomintang came back and the landlords took power again? . . . In the middle of the night, he had rushed to find the leader of the team that had been sent to organize land reform. The team leader had taken him by the hand—it was trembling like a leaf—and spoke to him affectionately: "Old Wang, tell me what's on your mind. The Party is standing right with you!"

Wang was so moved that he cried. He threw off all the doubts and hesitations the old society had imposed upon him. From then on he took his stand firmly, once and for all. He joined the army in 1947 and fought bravely at the front. He was wounded once. Finally, in the Liaohsi campaign, he received a first class award. "At last I'm a man too," he had said to himself. "Now I'll show what I'm really made of!"

He had retained his enthusiasm on the long trek south until they ran into the miserable conditions of the past few days. Then suddenly he became "backward". . . . Wang thought of his quarrel with Yang this morning, he remembered the kindly light in the eyes of the division commissar during their chat—and these recollections stung him like a whiplash. His face flushed hotly and perspiration stood out on his forehead. A tear stole down his cheek. He couldn't figure it out—Am I really scared of hard going? In the cruel battle of Szepeinghai, I went without a drop of food for two days and two nights. I drank rain water that stank of dead men's blood. I ate raw potatoes, sitting beside corpses. Bullets whistled past my ears, and I wasn't scared. Here we've got a hot sun, rain and mosquitoes. Am I going to let them get me down? . . .

Today, the company had made preparation for battle. In the afternoon at a meeting of the entire company, the political instructor had spoken about the assault landing. He also praised machine-gunner Feng-tung—who usually never showed any spirit. . . . Have I even fallen behind a guy like Feng-tung? Wang wondered. He angrily wiped a teardrop trickling down his chin. The cool night breeze refreshed and sobered him. He swore he'd distinguish himself in this battle. He'd win an award and join the Party. Wang went looking for the political instructor.

But just as he was about to enter the lamp-lit shack and announce himself, he heard voices inside, and stopped. The political instructor was talking:

"Comrade, I believe you. As long as you keep making progress and do a good job in battle, everyone will support your application to the Party."

Then there was a voice which Wang perhaps would have been better off not to have heard. For it made his heart sink. The man speaking to the instructor was none other than the young southerner, Yang!

"Instructor," Yang was saying, "if only it'll get me into the Party, I'll do the hardest job you can give me! I'll jump under a tank with dynamite, like Tung Tsun-jui,* instructor!"

Wang was in a cold sweat. His eyes burned, his legs were as heavy as iron. Keeping his jaws clenched, he turned and ran to the river.

The bank of the river was pitch black and the surface of the water was like a long dark shadow. Wang stood on a boulder. The water seemed to be thundering directly beneath his feet. He suddenly had the feeling that the river was creeping higher, and in one grab would snatch him away. Angrily clapping the rifle under his arm, he paced up and down the beach. In the solitude, his thoughts again gradually turned to the endless broiling hot road that lay ahead.

"No! I can't!" he suddenly shouted. "I'll die in peace from a bullet—but I won't die from sunstroke or drowning!"

He stood motionless, all his dark thoughts again riding wild through his brain. The day the deputy leader of his platoon had fainted in the sun, his face purple, his eyes shut tight . . . Wang, nearly ready to burst with heat himself, had run to a peasant's home to borrow a bowl of water for the fallen man. But all his talk and all his gestures couldn't make the peasant woman understand. Furious, Wang glared at her and raised his fist, then arrested it in mid-air, turned and rushed out. How he hated this place then, how he hated its people! He longed for the Northeast. Ah, to be able to return to a billet on a snowy winter day, with a hot stove going, the room warm, and fragrant with the odor of soya sauce, salted and pickled vegetables, and friendly peasant folk to chat with you warmly, affectionately. . . .

Just then, a fearsome swishing sound from the river broke Wang's reverie. Tense, he grasped his rifle. He could see a black lump in the water, moving, coming swiftly toward the bank. Wang was startled, but he didn't want to fire until he could make sure of his target.

"Who's there?" he yelled.

The fearsome shadow could be heard splashing in the shallows. Then came an urgent, struggling, gasping, high-pitched voice:

"Ah . . . I'm a friend of . . . the PLA! . . ."

It was a man who had come floating up, holding on to a plank. Though Wang held his fire, he was cautious.

"Stand still!" he shouted. "Don't move!"

* A platoon leader in the PLA, who gave his life in 1948 by blowing up an important enemy blockhouse with a charge of dynamite.

Dripping water, the man staggered up the bank. He held forth his arms and pleaded, "Comrade . . . the guerillas from the south side sent me . . . comrade! . . ."

The platoon leader, making his round of inspection of the guard posts, heard Wang's cries, and came running over, pistol in hand. A squad that was camping in a nearby grove of trees also closed in quickly with fixed bayonets. Then the platoon leader let the man approach.

"Comrades, we hear you want to cross the Yangtse," the man said in a voice that trembled with eagerness. "My outfit sent me here to get news about you. I've been held up on the south bank four or five days but I finally got a chance to slip across. Comrades, take me to your superior officers, quick! . . ." He seized the platoon leader's hand.

"What's the enemy set-up over there?" asked the platoon leader.

"There are thousands of them. They nabbed me as soon as I came down from the hills. They had me toting artillery shells and grain day and night. One of their officers even asked me, 'When the Communists come, are you going to help them kill us?' I played dumb. I said, 'Squire, they'll never come here. Didn't your troops wipe them all out?' He got mad and slapped me a couple, but I didn't make a sound—just kept moving stuff for them. After four or five days they didn't watch me so closely any more, and tonight I sneaked into the river with this board. I've been in the water ever since dark, being knocked around by those big waves. A couple of times they pushed me under and I nearly didn't get here. . . ."

The guerilla still had a lot he wanted to tell them. But the words stuck in his throat like a bottleneck. He was so excited, he hardly knew where to start. The platoon leader ordered Wang to come with him, and they led the dripping guerilla to company headquarters.

Word of the exploit flew through the camp—a man from south of the river has come to make liaison with us, to welcome us across. The company commander and the political instructor received the guerilla in the small shack. Soldiers came running over to get a look at this man who had broken away from the enemy, who had risked a crossing of the Yangtse alone. They quickly lit a fire so that he could dry his clothes, they poured hot water for him, gave him dry rations, covered him with their own clothes while his were drying.

This unexpected visitor of course created a great change in Wang's heart, but Wang said nothing. Only a little later when they were escorting the guerilla to battalion headquarters, did Wang ask him quietly, "What's it like over there?"—meaning is it just as hard a life as here, with no houses, not enough to eat, a scorching sun?

"You better get there fast!" replied the guerilla, pointing south. "The people are going through hell! Their blood's being shed while they wait for you!"

The words struck Wang like a blow. He stared toward the dark bank in the distance. Many little fires had sprung up. Maybe the enemy

were trying to bolster their courage, or maybe they were hoping to discourage the mosquitoes. Anyhow, the fires were blazing fiercely. . . .

The division commander was lying on a bamboo bed, his hands clasped behind his head. Suddenly he sat up and shouted for the commissar:

"Liang Pin! Liang Pin!"

There was no answer. The exhausted commissar was asleep.

Chen smoked a cigarette, then another and another. An old campaigner, usually after all his preparations had been made for a particular military action, he would lie down beside the telephone and go right to sleep. But not tonight—tonight we were going to cross the Yangtse. Didn't people say that no army in Chinese history that crossed the Yangtse ever won the war? But now we have Chairman Mao and he had proclaimed, "I order you, drive forward boldly!" We were going to change the experiences of history with our deeds. Chen was too thrilled to sleep. He reviewed the plan of attack in his mind, weighing every contingency that might occur after the men reached the other side of the river. On the forced march from the Tsushui River to the Yangtse, Chen's groom—who was also his orderly—had gotten stuck behind the artillery unit, and fallen far to the rear, with all Chen's personal equipment. Without a mosquito net, Chen had to spend every night battling the little pests. This also kept him awake.

Outside, all was perfectly still now. Chen recalled something that had happened two months before. After the battle of Tientsin, his stomach ailment had become serious, and Corps approved that he go to Peking for a rest. Some time later, he was sitting quietly at ease beside a radio, listening to a broadcast, when the announcer interrupted to report that the Chiang Kai-shek government in Nanking had refused to make peace. This news was immediately followed by the order issued by Chairman Mao and Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh to strike south across the Yangtse! Chen had leaped to his feet. That call electrified all the people of China. It aroused them to unite for one common objective—finish off Chiang Kai-shek and his gang! Chen promptly wrote to his superiors, requesting a termination of leave. I've been fighting for over ten years, he thought to himself, and always in the front lines. Late the next afternoon, when his orders came through, his unit had already left for the south. He dashed to the railway station. It was twilight in Peking. Suddenly a sound rose, higher and higher, nearer and nearer, a sound that aroused the people—the screaming shriek of the air-raid siren! The tail end of its wail swirled over the people's capital. It was the signal for battle.

People jostled Chen as they ran past. He did not take shelter. He stood on the platform beside the green express train, watching the sky. Half an hour later, he was on that train rushing toward the southeast, and the metropolis of Peking was left far behind.

Day and night, the entire length of his journey, he saw train after train of soldiers, ammunition, artillery—all streaming with red flags—

service units of the various field armies, medical corps—rolling south, rolling south. . . . Little mud huts had been set up to replace destroyed railway stations along the line. Station-masters busily signaled with flags of green and red. Train after train, rolling south, booming with song as they rolled on to the south. . . .

Chen had gotten off at Techou, and after a muddy difficult march caught up with his outfit on the plain of the Yellow River.

He remembered it all clearly. Of one thing he was very sure—no great event was ever accomplished without much hardship and suffering. His men were thin, yellow. They fainted in the sun, they were drenched in the rain. But every one of them drove forward. . . .

The mosquitoes were droning like thunder; sleep was impossible. The moment Chen closed his eyes he could see a vast and mighty river. "Cross the Yangtse tonight without fail!" Abruptly he got out of bed, went outside, walked through a bamboo grove and climbed a hill. In the inky night he could see campfires burning on the opposite shore. Then the telephone in his shack rang, and he ran back. Battalion headquarters was calling to report that guerillas on the south side had sent a man across to make contact.

"Bring him here right away!" Chen said quickly. Excited, he woke the sleeping commissar. "Liang Pin, we're going to lick this thing!" he shouted. "The south sent a man over. They know we're coming! They know we're coming!"

Liang Pin grinned for pure joy. He rose to his feet, bulking tall and large in the little room and looked at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. Time was racing, racing to the moment of decision. . . .

The division commander and the commissar welcomed the guerilla warmly. Liang Pin grasped his hand for nearly five minutes, and asked him his name.

"I'm called Wei Chin-lung."

Liang Pin praised him for his remarkable courage, and Wei reported to the division commander all the observations of the enemy positions and installations he had made during the time he had been forced to labor for them. Then Wei lay down on a straw pallet in a dark corner of the room and fell into an exhausted slumber.

The division commander issued his final orders over the phone. His eyes shone, his motions were sharp and sure, his words were simple and to the point. He turned to speak to Wei, but the guerilla was oblivious to everything. He had travelled over two hundred *li* in five days without a stop, and had swum the mighty Yangtse. Wei slept soundly. Chen hesitated a moment, then roused him.

"We're going across!"

The guerilla leaped up. "Where? At what point?"

Wei and the division commander walked out together. Ahead of them, the tall figure of Liang Pin, the political commissar, was already striding toward the river.

V

By eleven p.m. the clouds had scattered and the moon came out. The river shone whitely.

Deep in the reeds of a small cove, political instructor Chun-ho was giving his final directions:

"We've got to get into the boats quickly. We've got to sit still while we're crossing. And when we hit the beach, hit it hard! Wherever you see an enemy—shoot! Get every one of them! Move only forward—there'll be no going back! Comrades, we're crossing this river on the personal order of Chairman Mao, to finish off the enemy! It's an honor!"

His every word thrilled the hearts of the men. Wang also made up his mind.

The time had come. The company commander, whose clothes gave off a white sheen in the moonlight, was walking toward them from the reeds with another man. They hastily removed their cigarettes from their lips, stamped them out and stood up. Then they followed the company commander through the damp grass to the river bank. In the shining quiet cove, clouds of mosquitoes rose from the soggy ground and stung the faces of the men painfully. Pretty fireflies drifted through the air, glowing with soft bluish little lights. The division commander and the commissar appeared; immediately the atmosphere became grave. They gave the order to cross the river. Wang was impressed. This was first time since the battle of Szepingkai in 1947 that division leaders had come down personally to an assault company. They didn't have to say a word. Their just standing there, seeing the company off, was enough to give the men a wonderful boost.

During gab sessions, company commander Chin liked to talk about the battle of Golden Mountain Fort in the Northeast, when he was still a private. He told how guns were firing ahead of them that day, as they moved up rapidly through a valley. Suddenly they saw a rather pale man in a grey greatcoat. He was looking at them steadily from under bushy brows. Their company commander—now leader of the regiment—had told the men excitedly:

"Lin Piao—General Lin is watching us!"

He seemed to feel that steady glance on him all through the battle, said Chin. And so he was especially bold every time he joined an assault. . . .

Now the leaders of the division had come down, and Wang was deeply stirred. He heard Chin and the political instructor saying to them, "Don't worry about a thing. We're going to do this job right!"—the exact words that were in Wang's heart. Then the company leaders saluted, turned and ordered the platoons to board the boats in accordance with the directions previously given.

As they were getting into the boats, Wang suddenly noticed Feng-tung, the machine-gunner. Feng-tung had been lying in the reeds,

shaking with a fit of malaria, his whole body trembling, his teeth chattering audibly. But when he heard the order to board the boats, he got up and dragged himself on board, perspiration streaming down his face. Feng-tung had been polishing his machinegun all day, swearing at his assistant, insisting that the youngster had ruined the gun. Now he held it cradled in his arms and pushed toward the prow of the boat. Wang didn't think it right for a sick man to sit up front. He took Feng-tung by the arm and said:

"We need you, Feng-tung old man. You're a machine-gunner. Let me sit in front of you. We don't want you getting hit." And Wang stepped quickly into the rocking boat to grab the first seat in the prow.

Soon they were out of the cove and sailing on the main body of the river. Wang could feel someone's hot breath on the back of his neck. He turned around and there was Wei, the guerilla who had come over from the south. At the same time, he could hear Yang telling another young soldier, "Don't say the south is no good. Wait till you see the other side of the Yangtse!" Of course, Wang was a little annoyed, but things were happening too fast for him to have time for petty matters. The boats had already quietly formed a straight line and were heading directly south.

The moon shone brightly on the waves, making the boats look like black chips, swiftly skimming the bosom of the river.

On the north shore, four men were tensely watching the progress of the small craft. Chen and Liang Pin, commander and commissar of the division, stood together on a boulder with Yung the regimental commander and Tsai, the regiment's political commissar. The moonlight seemed to blend with the darkness in the distance. The south bank was invisible, except for a few campfires glowing red like little candles, streaking long reflections in the water. . . .

The boats drew further and further away, until the sound of their oars could no longer be heard. Chen kept his eyes fixed on the boats to try and estimate how near they could get to the opposite shore without the enemy being able to see them. Liang Pin's vision was weaker than Chen's and he lost sight of the boats against the dazzling motion of the waves. "I can't see them, Chen," he said. But the division commander could still make them out. With teeth clenched he was concentrating all his attention on the boats. He made no reply to the commissar.

It was nearly midnight, and the bright clear moon was approaching its zenith. Time seemed to be dragging. All the other companies and battalions were waiting beside their boats, the moored craft tossing gently with the motion of the waves. From the boats, from the bank, thousands of eyes were staring out across the mighty, dangerous river, waiting for the results of the assault of the six small boats.

Liang Pin was optimistic. He had supported the decision of the division commander from the beginning. He was confident the company could do its job. That morning at a meeting of battalion officers and

above, he reminded them of how the seventeen Red Army heroes had crossed the Tatu River during the Long March, and he called on them to carry on the Red Army's glorious traditions. As a matter of fact, the closer they drew to the crossing of the Yangtse, the more apparent it became that our officers and men were thinking in terms of those traditions. It was as if every one of them wanted to vie with those heroes of an earlier day. . . .

The six boats, strung out in a line, battled the powerful current and angry squalls of wind that tormented the middle of the river. The craft pitched like see-saws—one moment the prows climbed up and up, the next moment they were plunging steeply down. . . . Whitecaps leaped and rolled higher than the men's heads, dashing against the boats, drenching the men's clothes. They seemed to be enshrouded in an eternal mist. The men sat motionless, tightly gripping one another's hands. It felt as though the boats were making no headway, as though they were being buffeted about on one spot on the surging, heaving river. Nothing could be seen behind them; before them, the campfires flickered and danced.

Suddenly, one boat wrenched ahead of the others, then sped lightly forward. Then a second, and third—until every one of the craft had extracted itself out of the heavy waves, into calmer waters. They were two thirds of the way across now. The boats moved along at an even keel. Gradually, two of them pulled into the lead—company commander Chin's boat and another. Slightly behind them was the boat bearing political instructor Chun-ho. Its great sweep and the paddles in the hands of each of the soldiers swung in unison like wings, breaking the water and propelling the craft forward. The campfires on shore looked higher and brighter now. The men could see quite clearly the twisting flames and strongly blowing smoke. They could even make out the flitting shadows of the enemy soldiers walking back and forth. The men in the boats grew tense, their muscles hardened into rock. They wished they could spring across the narrowing stretch of water. They were indeed in a very dangerous spot. With such bright moonlight pouring down, the enemy should have observed them long ago. But there wasn't the slightest movement on shore. They were terribly close—five hundred yards, four hundred yards, now only three hundred. . . .

Abruptly, all the campfires were extinguished. At that instant, the attackers felt as if they were standing completely naked in the open. The moonlight was as bright as day. Nobody dared to breathe.

The machineguns opened up from the bank with streams of liquid fire flying like thousands of red-hot sparks that curve through the air when a cauldron of molten metal is overturned. And the little boats, caught in the web of cross-fire, were the bits of iron bobbing in the seething flow. The chief enemy artillery position to the west also began firing blindly. Booming thunder, the big guns hurled huge shells that trailed long screaming tails behind them; but all landed far beyond the

boats. The river glowed with many fires of different hues. Bullets sang against the sides of the boats—and into the boats.

The first boat pushed forward through the rain of lead. In the craft behind it, the old man with the white beard was hit, and fell against the chest of a soldier. Immediately, the boat tilted alarmingly and was spun in erratic circles by the fast current. The soldiers were frantic. Boat number three caught up, artillery shells exploding geysers of water on all sides of it. The fate of the whole operation was hanging by a thread. A loud clear voice that every man could hear rang out from number three:

"Comrades, we're the soldiers of the Communist Party!"

It was the voice of political instructor Chun-ho, a voice that would admit no defeat. On the craft spinning and about to capsize in the current, a man swore vigorously, climbed over his mates to the stern, and grabbed the rudder.

"Paddle!" he yelled. "Paddle!"

As though roused from a lethargy, the soldiers dug their paddles into the water hard. Another bullet hit the hand of the man at the rudder, and blood flowed on to the tiller. The man cried out once in pain, then clenched his teeth and held on. But he couldn't control the craft. Just at that critical moment, the old man crawled to his feet from the floor of the boat. Moonlight shone on his bloodstained face. He lunged toward the stern, seized the tiller and put upon it all the weight of his pain-racked body. Battling with the ugly waves that were stubbornly trying to smash the craft to the bottom, the old man smartly swung her round with the current and pointed her again on her course. Then he turned to the soldiers, and with eyes open large, shouted:

"Comrades! Get ready to land!"

The little boat flew forward through the hail of bullets. Ahead of them, the men could see the first boat in a circle of fire, doggedly, proudly driving on.

From the leading craft, now very close to shore, the dark looming fortifications on the bank were clearly visible. The boat had only fifty yards to go, and the enemy concentrated all their fire on it. Wang crouched in the prow, getting ready to be the first ashore. Machine-gunner Feng-tung jumped up beside him. Feng-tung raised his weapon to his chest, clenched his teeth and fired toward the bank, his body vibrating with the violent shaking of the gun.

Chin, the company commander, shouted, "Communists, follow me!" Pistol held high, he leaped past Wang into the dark river. There was no telling how deep the water was here, but without an instant's hesitation Wang jumped after his commander. All the soldiers promptly abandoned the craft for the river. The water, which came up to their chests, moved very strongly. They had to fight to keep their footing. Wang could see his friend Yang and Wei the guerilla advancing boldly, their hands extended to either side for balance. They quickly neared the shore. Directly ahead, a machinegun was spitting fire. Chin heaved three hand

grenades, one after the other. The gun disappeared in an ear-splitting blast and a dazzling burst of light. There was a grenade in Wang's hand too, but for some reason he didn't fling it. It was as though he didn't have the time to stop and throw. Still clutching the grenade, he splashed on to the beach.

When the third boat was still about fifteen yards off shore, it was hit by a mortar shell. It tipped over to the gunwales, shipping water. An instant later, another shell shattered the rudder. The boat began to sink rapidly. Every man on board was wounded by splinters from the bursting shells.

"Comrades!" roared Chun-ho. "Into the water! We'll reach the shore if we have to swim!" He vaulted into the river, and at once felt the current driving him down. He had only recently learned to swim a little but he struck out mightily with arms and legs, and found himself moving forward. Raising his head for a gasp of air, he saw that most of the wounded men were swimming behind him. Chun-ho doubled his efforts, and with the aid of the waves pushing him onward, he soon was swept into the shallows.

Ahead of him, an explosion sent a sheet of flame fiercely skyward like unrolling a bolt of scarlet cloth. Chin was evidently leading the men from the first and second boats to fan out after breaking through the enemy's initial defense line. With all his strength Chun-ho struggled forward—he didn't know why he felt so weak—and at last crawled up beside a boat on the edge of the beach. He raised himself half erect, and in the light of the flames, saw a man lying in the bottom of the boat. It was the long-bearded old boatman. At dawn this morning he had rounded up the six craft for them, and now he was dead. There was a solemn, peaceful expression on his face, across which the glow of the flames of victory was flitting like the shade of a tree. One of his hands trailed from the boat into the water. Chun-ho threw his arms around the old man and hugged him tenderly. In that instant his leg began to burn like fire. He knew he had been hit, but he raised his head. Seven rocket flares sailed into the sky, shining with a brilliant whiteness, to tell the whole army that the assault across the Yangtse was successful. Chun-ho at once scrambled to his feet. The last two boats had almost reached the shore. He heard the sound of men running through the water, and he shouted:

"Come on! The spearhead squad broke through! Get in there! Hit them, smash them, wipe out the enemy!" He picked up a rifle with fixed bayonet from a fallen comrade and rushed into the flames.

Standing silently in the darkness of the northern bank, division commander Chen had realized at once when the campfires were extinguished that the enemy had spotted our boats. He immediately ordered out more boats as reinforcements. If the assault company should fail, this second group could follow up. He ran along the bank. Just as he expected, shooting started on the opposite shore. There were spurts of fire, and

the flames of a real battle sprang up. Chen leaped into a boat. As he was crossing the river, he saw the victory signal flares from the south.

The six little boats had completed their mission. After first settling with one squad of the enemy and taking over their machinegun, the assault company occupied the beach-head. Twenty minutes later, under cover of mortars, soldiers began scaling the rocky promontory stretching back from the bank. Between midnight and dawn they repulsed three very fierce enemy counter-attacks. At the same time, Company Seven, which arrived in the second wave, stole along the shore, carefully avoiding all enemy posts, then swiftly advanced on the enemy's main artillery position in their Yangtse River defense, and sealed off the crossing point of the enemy forces still north of the river. The enemy artillerymen were still firing blindly toward the north bank and the middle of the river as dawn was breaking. They were surrounded and trapped before they knew what was happening.

The early morning sun turned the river, the hills and the treetops to a lovely rouge-red, soft and bright. Commissar Liang Pin walked toward the hill that had been wrested in battle the night before. It was pitted with shell craters, many of which still smelled of burnt powder. The hill looked like the aftermath of an earthquake. Inside and outside the twisting trenches were piles of enemy bodies. . . . Liang Pin stopped short. There before him were one of our men and an enemy soldier—both dead—locked in a tight embrace, after what obviously had been a fierce hand-to-hand combat. Lying beside them was a rifle, its bloodstained bayonet snapped in half. Liang Pin studied the broken bayonet point, then stooped and picked it up. With head high he continued walking toward the distant places, gleaming in the sunlight, beyond the screen of the mountain range.

VI

After our troops crossed the Yangtse, the enemy fled along the western mountain range. We raced after them and soon were hot on their heels. It was a high, thickly wooded area. The enemy had left an undetermined number of men in the village of Lungchi, on the other side of a small turbulent river. Division commander Chen appraised the situation, and decided to fight here first before pushing on.

In the woods, the troops made their preparations and waited for orders. Regiment stationed its command post in a shack in a mountain gully. This was the first time since they began the chase nine days before that regiment had a building of any sort to house its command post in proper battle style. Now, at last, it had set up shop. But neither the commander nor the political commissar of the regiment seemed to like this little shack over which one of the staff officers had taken such pains. They went in, looked around, then came out and

climbed the hill in front. From beneath the trees on this hill they could view the whole panorama ahead with their field glasses.

Yung, the commander of the regiment, was a dashing, courageous young man. He always looked neat, no matter what the circumstances. His uniform had been washed so often it was faded to a pale green, but it fitted him perfectly. Political commissar Tsai had been a middle school student when the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression started. Now he wore a small wisp of a beard. They had been marching and fighting without a rest, and he hadn't been able to find time to shave.

Their friendship began when they were guerillas together in Shantung province. Yung had been the leader of a company then; Tsai was the company political instructor. Today they were still military and political leaders respectively of the same unit, only now it was a regiment. After years of innumerable battles, their affection for each other was deep and firm.

The regiment's Second Battalion captured an enemy messenger. According to him, the enemy didn't know we were so close to them. They were all concentrated in Lungchi, under the command of a major general. The messenger had been sent out to find chickens and ducks for this worthy. Tsai ripped a sheet from his notebook, and wrote down this information as a news circular to the men. The result was the whole regiment became excited. Even the crippled jumped up and demanded an immediate attack. The men were bored with this long chase—they wanted to fight. But an immediate attack was impossible. Routes of assault had to be planned carefully. The idea was to surround the enemy, secretly, then close the net tight. Yung sent out all his staff officers to take direct charge of reconnaissance.

The staff officers were quickly gone. Now there was a lull as everyone waited for their return. Neither Yung nor Tsai felt like sleeping. Lying in the grass on the hill, Tsai said:

"Well, *huochi*, if we do a good job in this next fight it'll be smooth sailing into Hunan."

"Hunan is where Commander Chen comes from," Yung noted.

"Chairman Mao's home town is there too. We'll have to get our reporters to give us a real coverage when we go into Hunan."

"And then. . . ." Yung's voice trailed off.

Everyone knew the war would be over before long, and the army men often thought about their future occupations. Maybe it was idle for them to do so, but some people like to speculate on such matters. Yung and Tsai never expressed themselves on this question in the presence of others. When they were alone together, however, they talked about it constantly. After exhausting every other possibility, they finally decided upon remaining in the army. They felt this was the most honorable course open to them.

"I can't do anything else," Yung had said. "As long as China has

an army, I won't leave it. I know soldiering. *Huochi*, we'll carry rifles all our lives! . . . So many comrades died—but we're still alive. If we don't do the job, who will? We fought a long time to bring a little happiness to the people. Now we've got to protect that happiness. We've got to fix anybody who tries to spoil it!"

Tsai lay gazing at the treetops. The refrain of a Soviet song that an apple-cheeked youngster in the political department of the division liked to play on his accordion kept running through his mind:

*On guard at our country's frontier,
The soldier dreams of his darling. . . .*

Yung flicked away the butt of his cigarette. Tsai remembered something, sat up, then rolled over on the grass and began pondering over the military situation. Yung was still lying on his back, immersed in his own thoughts.

A messenger from the Second Battalion came running up the hill, his head drenched with sweat.

Tsai, who liked to tease, asked, "Are you bringing us a little chicken thief again?"

No. What the Second Battalion brought in this time was an impressive-looking peasant with sparkling eyes and hair streaked with grey. The peasant was missing a left arm. An empty sleeve hung limply at his side. Yung and Tsai stood up. The peasant introduced himself:

"Comrades!" he said warmly. "I come from beyond Lungchi. The Kuomintang 79th Army grabbed me and brought me out this way to carry artillery shells for them. You're going to wipe out the Chiang Kai-shek Whites, aren't you? That's fine! I only wish we could squash every one of those bastards right this minute!" The peasant ground his teeth. "Let's go, comrades! I'll be your guide. You won't go wrong."

"We're the People's Liberation Army, old neighbor. If we hadn't come to wipe out the enemy, we wouldn't dare to trouble you for help!" Tsai replied.

The peasant raised his eyebrows. "That's no way to talk, comrades! We're all our own people. Come over here!" He took the political commissar by the arm. "I'm telling you—there are more than a thousand enemy troops in Lungchi! Now that river there is called the Five Finger River. Lungchi, on the other side, has four approaches. Directly ahead is Kingfisher Cliff. We'd have to ford the river and attack up the cliff to go in a straight line to Lungchi. If the enemy pressed down with their fire power, we'd have a hard time! The southern approach is from Kang Bridge. On the north is Red Bluff. To the east is Mengchuang. But none of them is any good! Comrades, believe me—don't take any of those routes. . . ."

Gesticulating as he talked, the peasant obviously knew the terrain

like the palm of his own hand. Yung and Tsai became very interested. They looked through their field glasses at the places he indicated, and sure enough, every one of them was thickly sprinkled with enemy sentries. They could also see machinegun nests and temporary pillboxes.

Yung lowered his field glasses and said to the commissar, "From the looks of things, the enemy are holding all the main passes. If we stage a frontal assault, they'll be able to get away. Our straight drive will turn into another chase! . . ."

But he and Tsai were determined that under no circumstances would the enemy be permitted to run off again. They would have to be grabbed tight and gobbled up. After discussing the pros and cons, Yung proposed coming round from the northwest in an encircling movement.

With this idea, the peasant promptly agreed. He slapped his thigh enthusiastically. "Right, right!" he chortled, nodding his head in approval. "That's the only road for us!" And he began to outline their path through the tumbled mountains.

Tsai made notes and Yung checked a map as the peasant talked. Tsai's face shone with sheer bliss, for the path the peasant described never appeared before on any map. No men had trod that path—only birds in flight had seen it. They were much impressed with the peasant's intelligent understanding in solving their problem.

The peasant concluded with a laugh, "We'll give them a real surprise, comrades. We're sure to succeed!"

By then a platoon of scouts had made their way back. It already was afternoon, but they had learned nothing of value. Sunk in spirits, they had been standing around, listening to the peasant. When he gave them a path, they realized they weren't checkmated after all!

The commissar jumped up and wrung his hand. "You're our guide, our staff officer, our military expert!"

The messengers produced a cigarette, and gave a light to the peasant. The leader of the scouting platoon produced his very best dry rations and invited him to eat. Surrounded by youngsters, the peasant laughed as he accepted their gifts. He suddenly became youthful; he seemed one of their own number. Yet at the same time he was like the father of them all.

Yung telephoned to division, which promptly approved the regiment's plan of action. Walking through the woods on his way back from the command post shack, he saw many of his men sleeping soundly on the turf. He loved these youngsters with all his heart. Going past them, he trod particularly softly so as not to awaken them. The peasant guide was still surrounded by a large group. As Yung drew near, Tsai seized him by the hand and said:

"Let me introduce you, Yung. This is Comrade Huang, a soldier of General Ho Lung's Red Army!" And Tsai was pointing at no other than the flashing eyed, grey haired peasant with the amputated arm.

Tsai had thought it odd from the beginning that this peasant

should know so much about military matters. When the youngsters crowded round him, his story gradually came out. At first he had asked:

"Is Ho Lung still alive? Is he still so stocky, and has he kept his mustache?"

"Where did you meet Ho Lung?" The others had demanded.

The peasant had pointed to the wooded mountains. "When Ho Lung's Red Army came to our village, the gentry and the scoundrels all ran away. I went out to meet him, and he gave me grain himself. . . ."

Tsai could see that peasant Huang's eyes were moist. There was pressure in his own heart, and he took Huang's hand for a moment. The peasant broke from his clasp and continued:

"Afterward—this was more than ten years ago—Ho Lung went away. As he was leaving he sent us word—keep up the fight as guerillas . . . the people of China are sure to win . . . the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army is sure to come back. . . . You see that big mountain over there?"

The soldiers looked where he pointed. A high peak densely covered with trees reared up behind the massive mountains in the foreground.

"It was on that Yellow Dragon Mountain that we guerillas fought—from five hundred men until we were twenty-five. In three years we never had a hot meal or lived in a warm house. We just camped out under the trees. People came and whispered to us that during the Long March the Red Army was wiped out at the Tatu River to the last man. Others said: the Red Army was far away, that it could never come back. . . . But we thought about what Ho Lung said when he left—never give in no matter how tough things become. And we told the men—even if the Red Army is finished, as long as there are poor in China, more Communists will be born!"

Huang's grey hair bristled and his eyes shone fire. He was reliving those years of bitter struggle. "Comrades, you can't imagine how we felt! Nobody who's worn the red hat can ever wear a white one again. We said if we were going to die, we'd die on Yellow Dragon Mountain. It was the last bit left of our old Red Area. In '39 that year there was a big rainstorm that plucked up by the roots trees you couldn't put your arms around and threw them down to the foot of the mountain. For four days and four nights not a morsel of food passed our lips. One night, with our rifles on our backs we slipped down into the village. All the people knew Ho Lung's guerillas were still on the mountain. Even the little kids would point up there and say, 'The Red Army uncles are coming!' About midnight, we knocked on old Sun's door. We dried our clothes by his stove and ate a few handfuls of beans. Our idea was to bring some rice back up the mountain before dawn. Sun was in our Poor Peasants' League. He put on his straw raincape and ran around the village collecting rice for us. We didn't know that Scabby Ting—that whoring, gambling son of a bitch—would

sell out the revolution. It was still pitch dark, and we had taken off our pants and made sacks out of them by tying knots in the bottom of the legs. Just as we were filling them with rice, we heard shots and cries. The twenty-five of us moved all over that village, fighting a deadly battle. The Whites outnumbered us and they pushed us back to a narrow strip between a fork in the river. Many died, many were wounded. From the village to the river, we left a trail of blood. Finally, there was just a handful of us left, one holding up the other. It was nearly light. I remember how even lying on the ground we kept singing the song of the Red Army—'. . . brave comrades, fight to the last drop of blood, the last drop of blood! . . .'

Tense and quiet, the young PLA men had their eyes glued on the guerilla. He shook his grey head slightly and said in a low voice, "The Whites thought we were all dead. They buried us and went away. The peasants dug us out again. I was the only one with a breath of life left. That was how the enemy destroyed the Red Army forces of Yellow Dragon Mountain."

Huang fell silent. You could have heard a pin drop. This tragic bit of history moved the men tremendously. Then suddenly, Huang raised his head, tears rolling from his eyes.

"And today, now that I've seen you, I could die happy! They pinned a bandit label on me for twenty years, but it's ripped off at last!"

The news of "the soldier from Ho Lung's Red Army" spread quickly through the entire regiment. Tsai first reported it by phone to the division leaders. In a short time, Liang Pin, the division commissar, arrived at regimental headquarters, his uniform washed and very neat. Liang Pin threw his arms around Huang. For several minutes the commissar was speechless. Then they began to chat, and talked well on into the afternoon. Liang Pin was exceptionally relaxed. Only after division phoned him twice urging him to return, did he finally depart. As he was leaving, he took Tsai by the arm and said softly:

"Comrade, take good care of him! Take very, very good care of him!"

That night, as the men of the assault force wound along the twisting little path through the inky darkness, they all were thinking—our earliest army followed this same path more than ten years ago. They beat the enemy. . . .

Huang, serving as guide, was in the lead. Behind him was the regiment commander, taking personal command of a battalion to strike at the enemy's rear flank. They climbed five *li* up Devil's Slope and plunged into a vast thicket. The path disappeared. This was virgin land, covered with vines and brambles. Huang was the only man left in Lungchi who could find a way through the tangled undergrowth. The men were completely blind in the black night. Sometimes they could hear the gurgling of tumbling streams, sometimes the only sound was the sleepy chatter overhead of birds whose slumbers they had disturbed.

Occasionally, the gleam of fireflies broke the darkness, and at times the men caught glimpses of the roaring campfires enemy sentries had built in the pass ahead. Once or twice, in response to Huang's signal, they dropped on their bellies and crawled laboriously through bushes to inch past enemy sentry posts. Finally they stopped, and Huang triumphantly rose to his feet. He turned and squeezed the hand of regiment commander Yung, then pointed forward.

About five hundred yards ahead and to the left Yung could see the gleam of a campfire against which the outline of a house was etched blackly. Listening carefully, he could hear the snores of an enemy sentry, sound asleep. The next tense five minutes would tell the story. There was a series of soft bursts and three signal flares sailed up into the sky, dazzlingly eye-catching like bright silver lanterns. The peaceful night exploded into battle.

Before the first rocket flare reached its zenith, our men poised on the north bank of the Five Finger River began wading across, pouring a withering fire against the opposite Kingfisher Cliff. They were supported by a heavy mortar barrage. The night was rent by cries and the stutter of machineguns. This sudden attack from all sides in the middle of the night struck terror to the enemy's hearts. A large haystack burst into flames that leaped toward the heavens—a sign that our men had already entered Lungchi. The huge red glow was a fearsome sight.

The battle died down before dawn. There were a few final scattered rifle shots, and all was silent again. The whole bag of the enemy was tightly bound in the net.

At daybreak in a small house in Lungchi, a forlorn individual stood before regiment commander Yung. He was the enemy major general—fished out of a haystack by the First Battalion. A fat bloated figure of a man, he stood with his cap clutched against his chest, making short jerky bows and mumbling, "Please be lenient, please be lenient!" Yung stared at him coldly.

Commissar Tsai came in with Huang, the old Red Army guerilla. Tsai ordered that Huang be given some of the captured rice and clothing. Huang laughed as he loaded the trophies on his shoulders.

"I won't say thank you—you're my only family giving me these things. And I've got four at home who haven't anything to eat!"

Yung and Tsai couldn't induce him to stay; they came out with him to see him off. Soldiers who had just finished extinguishing a blaze hurried over for a look at the old Red Army man. Huang's eyes shone with excitement and joy as he gazed affectionately at the men surrounding him. He refused to let them escort him any further.

Shaking hands with Tsai he said, "Comrade, it's a real pleasure to see our forces so strong. I'm too old to go along with you, but you keep pushing on!"

As word spread that Huang was leaving, soldiers, messengers,

grooms, cooks, staff officers, all rushed up to bid him good-bye, saluting him respectfully in the military manner. Then he departed and they watched him striding away. Commissar Liang Pin stood among them, waving his hand till Huang was lost in the distance.

VII

The night our troops successfully crossed the Yangtse, Liang Pin had given a job to Wei, the guerilla who had swum over to meet them. He told Wei to hurry back and make contact with all the guerilla forces, and have them organize the people to co-ordinate with the PLA when it crossed the provincial border from Hupeh into Hunan. Wei then pushed on day and night, followed along the Hutu River, went past Kungan and into Hunan to find his guerillas. . . .

Western Hunan was ruled more cruelly by the enemy than any other part of the province. Especially in the past year, the people had been pushed to the brink of extermination. Chiang Kai-shek wanted to keep a tight grip on this region, and his warlord ally Pai Chung-hsi was even more interested in it as an escape route back to the south.

At that time the PLA had already reached the north bank of the Yangtse, and the enemy generals knew they couldn't prevent the crossing. They decided to organize a vast network of spies, bandits, troops and armed landlords to institute a reign of terror to crush any rising of the people. From then on, the countryside was torn by heart-rending cries at night. Countless peasants were strung up in their grass shacks, dim lamplight shining on their battered faces, and tortured to extort money or rice. Some were beaten, some were buried alive. Everywhere the blood of the people was shed.

Not long after the PLA liberated Hankow in May, in the countryside wonderful news flew from mouth to mouth: "Chairman Mao's order—he wants us to arm ourselves!" At once the villages were in a turmoil. The class struggle had come to an open crisis. Long-bearded old men whispered stories of Chairman Mao to the youngsters—how he had organized the harvest uprisings in Hunan in the '20s, how he was leading the revolution. . . .

Now, for the past few nights, whip blows from the Kuomintang spies and thugs had been raining on the heads of the peasants. The swine knew their days were numbered, and they sweated, striking out frantically with their whips. Every morning when the sun rose, bodies were found in the bogs. But they weren't peasants' bodies—they were corpses of the bastards who swung whips in the night. This region which had been the scene of the revolutionary storm of 1927 once again was racked by a new storm that seemed to whirl up from the very ground. Then, on the 26th of June word came, from where no one knew—the

PLA had crossed the Yangtse into Hunan at Huayung, and the enemy's defense line along the big river had collapsed.

That night, not a single lamp gleamed in any of the villages. Three peasants and a man in a white shirt held a secret meeting in a grove beside a pond. At midnight, the whole countryside suddenly went into action. It was as though a trail of flame ran from one village to the next, igniting everything it touched. Peasants smashed village government offices and seized the weapons of the administration's "self-defence corps." Then they set out, some groups going east, some groups going west.

But on the Yangtse River at Huayung all was quiet on the 26th of June. The so-called crossing of the PLA at that point actually was only a rumor. Kuomintang newspapers carried screaming headlines—"Hundreds of Thousands Revolt in Western Hunan!" KMT general Sung Hsi-lien ordered his troops in various parts of the province to rush into battle against the peasants in the west. Carrying their rifles, most of the peasants withdrew to the forest-covered mountains in the region of lakes and ponds. Hotly pursued by the KMT troops, they went without food and sleep for three days until they reached Tangkang Mountain. On one side of the mountain was a lake. By then, the peasants could walk no further. Their legs were swollen badly, and they clamored and swore that here they would make their final stand against the enemy. With their rifles as pillows, they slept on the ground. They were confronted by the vast misty lake, with no food and very little ammunition. . . .

It was at this critical juncture that the man in the white shirt again made his appearance. The peasants knew him as Lu, a schoolteacher from the city, who sympathized with them and took part in their uprising. He hadn't come to lead them in a battle to the death, but to urge them not to give their lives in vain. The main thing, he said, was to stay alive and co-ordinate their fight against the enemy with the action of our troops. The PLA would soon be crossing the river and liberating western Hunan that had suffered so long.

He went from group to group, telling them, "Our army is coming across the Yangtse. It'll be here in a few days!"

At first no one would pay any attention to him, but he gradually won them over.

"As long as we're doing this thing, we might as well do it right," the peasants agreed.

They decided not to abandon the mountain completely. In case they couldn't get away, they could always come back to it as a base. Leaving about one hundred armed men behind to hold the Tangkang Mountain area, during the course of the night the rest of them concealed their weapons in the holds of their boats, separated into small groups and followed the twisting rivers and creeks to safety. Then they turned and headed north.

At noon the next day rifles sounded. The Kuomintang punitive expedition was concentrating in an attack on Tangkang Mountain. The guerillas holding the base gave ground slowly, moving back to the mountain from the lakefront. Behind them were the steep cliffsides; before them a dozen enemy machineguns spat fire. They concealed themselves behind the trees. Machinegun bullets cut down young saplings; leaves showered to the ground. By sunset, the guerillas had run out of ammunition. More than half their number were dead or wounded.

The leader of the defenders was a man named Tsui Yu-hsi, who had no experience in guerilla warfare. A Kuomintang agent had beaten his father to death and Tsui was thirsting for revenge. Now, he shouted to his mates:

"Let's make a break for it! We'll go to Hungmeng and find Lu!"

One man got up and ran, but was brought down after only a few yards. Then Tsui tried a dash through the web of fire. Hit, he sagged at the knees and collapsed on the edge of a precipice. His head hung down, dripping fresh blood. . . .

Behind the trees, the guerillas looked at their fallen comrades and ground their teeth. They remembered how Tsui, on the morning of the 27th, had gone with them to wrest the rifles from a platoon of Kuomintang soldiers. With no regard for his life, machinegun bullets whizzing past his head, he had plunged straight at the enemy and grappled with the machine-gunner. By the time the rest of the guerillas had rushed up to join him, his wrist was bleeding from a vicious bite. Now he was lying dead before them. . . . Holding Tangkang Mountain wasn't going to be easy.

The guerillas lay motionless, pointing their empty rifles. It was dark and the enemy didn't dare to attack. The guerillas waited until the night was deep and black, then, with aching hearts, they smashed against the rocks the rifles they had captured at the cost of so much blood and sacrifice, and threw them over the cliff. There was not a man among them who didn't weep. Then, one by one they slipped like lizards out of the encirclement. Stealthily, they swam through the intricate network of waterways, going north to find schoolteacher Lu.

When news of the defeat at Tangkang Mountain reached the main body of the guerillas, Lu addressed the men:

"We can't rely only on terrain," he said. "We have to depend on the people. You see what happened—though you said Tangkang Mountain was a good place, we couldn't hold it without the people's help!"

From then on, everyone had faith in Lu's words, and he told them openly he was a member of the Communist Party. The guerillas elected him political commissar of their band. They were constantly on the move thereafter; they appeared suddenly and were gone just as quickly. While they waited for Wei to return from the Yangtse with news of the PLA, they raided enemy service units, set fire to enemy grain stores, stole enemy arms and ammunition. The enemy hated them with a

deadly hatred, and sent out expeditions to exterminate them. But the peasants welcomed them. Wherever they went they were surrounded by people presenting them with grain, bringing them water. At night, the guerillas organized meetings of peasants. They told the people of Chairman Mao's order to cross the Yangtse, of the victories of the PLA. Everywhere the word spread—"Dawn is breaking—rise up and fight!" For the guerillas, the next twenty days passed in a twinkling—the enemy fearing them, the people loving them, and the noise of rifles—firing, firing.

One morning before daybreak, they camped in Tsaichi Village. A few hours later they received a report—a Kuomintang punitive corps was less than ten *li* away. For five minutes a meeting was conducted in a little house. The guerillas decided to steal around behind the enemy and let them grab nothing but the empty air. They themselves would dash for the main highway at the Hunan-Hupeh border and stage a large-scale raid.

Part of the men hid their guns in the holds of their boats and paddled away early through the twisting streams. Lu remained in a grove of big bamboos supervising the burying of the arms and ammunition that couldn't be taken along. Ammunition was their very life; it had to be kept if they were to continue the fight. Second by second, time passed. Suddenly a forty-year-old peasant came rushing up, his face running with hot perspiration. This was Yen Ta-san, the guerillas' underground contact in Tsaichi. Jumping with anxiety, he grasped Lu by both hands.

"Lu! They're coming! Get out of here, quick! Leave this place to me. I won't let you down," Yen spoke with deliberation.

Not far off, a rifle cracked sharply, twice. The enemy were closing in. With infinite affection, Lu squeezed Yen's hand. Then he ran to the river, pushed off his boat and hopped in. He was the last of the guerillas to leave.

Kuomintang troops swung off the main highway into Tsaichi. Viciously, they drove the people back into their houses and began a door-to-door search. The village became a bedlam of noise, children crying, women screaming. Only the chickens concealed beneath the hay were silent. Every hut resounded with the flailing of bamboo staves and the nasty snap of whiplashes.

Yen finished burying the ammunition. He was tired and drenched with sweat. Steadily, he wound through the bamboo grove to a little stream. There he squatted and calmly washed his hands. His face expressionless, he walked back to the village. A man pounced on him as he was rounding the pond on the path to his door.

"Where have the Communist bandits gone?" the man barked. "Speak up, quick!"

"What Communist bandits?"

"The guerillas! The guerillas!"

"Oh, you mean the guerillas. Eating, over there. . . ." Yen pointed to the bamboo grove.

The man turned pale. "What!" Holding Yen tightly, he began to run. After a moment of panic, he stopped and questioned Yen more closely.

"They were eating over there about two weeks ago. After they finished, they went away," Yen explained innocently.

Furious at having his cowardice exposed, the man punched Yen hard in the mouth. Yen spat a couple of teeth into the palm of his hand, then cast them to the ground. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. With head high, he followed his captor into the village.

Throughout the village, beatings went on all day. By dark, the enemy had learned only one thing—the guerillas had buried ammunition near here; but exactly where, the enemy still couldn't discover. Several soldiers dragged the half-dead Yen to the house serving as the Kuomintang officer's headquarters. After fruitless questioning, they began beating him again. He clenched his teeth and wouldn't utter a sound.

"Where is the ammunition?"

"I'll tell you!"

"Where?"

"In the ground!"

The officer's face went green with rage. He seized a club and rained blows on Yen in a frenzy. Yen gave up hope. Eyes shut tight, he fell to the floor and waited for death. A dozen more smashes of the club and he fainted from the agonizing pain. They revived him by blowing smoke in his nostrils. At first he could see only the bright dancing flame of a lamp. Then he raised his eyes. His fourteen-year-old son was standing before him. When the boy saw his father staring at him, he rushed forward and flung himself weeping on Yen's bosom. One of Yen's legs had already been broken. With trembling hands, he embraced his son. Yen flung back his head, his eyes filled with tears. He thought how for fourteen years the boy had suffered cold and hunger; how sallow and thin he was. Yen's heart ached and he groaned to himself—let me die, but don't torture me like this! . . . Then he remembered Lu and the guerillas, and strength flowed back into him. I've got to see them again! . . . With a cold laugh, the officer drew a pistol. He pointed it at the boy.

"Where is the ammunition? Are you going to talk?" he asked Yen.

Yen jerked his body erect. "No—I won't tell you."

Crying in a thin tragic voice, the boy was pulled from the room. Yen closed his eyes and turned around. His head dropped to his chest. When the shot sounded outside, his shoulders heaved for a moment. Then he opened his eyes. After that, he seemed insensible to everything. No matter what the enemy did to him, Yen wouldn't say a word.

Time after time, they beat him like maniacs. Just before he died, he suddenly gave a terrible cry:

"Kill me! Go on and kill me!" And in the feeble morning light, his body a mass of bleeding flesh, Yen expired.

In that same feeble morning light, when the fireflies still glowed blue over the lake, guerilla Wei was rowing his small craft rapidly. Just back from the Yangtse, he had made his contact with the underground and was skimming across the Golden Lake to the hide-out of the guerillas. He reached the shore and picked his way through the dense high reeds where the mosquitoes droned like thunder. At last he entered the hut in which the leaders of the guerillas were gathered.

Guerilla headquarters was in the process of planning an ambush to take place at daybreak. Leaders of lower echelons were there too. When word spread that Wei had returned from north of the Yangtse, the little room became jammed with men. All the guerillas—except for the cartridge belts slung across their chests, they looked like any other peasants—all wanted to squeeze into that small hut.

Lu sat beside a table on which an oil lamp burned, its light illuminating his face. He was young, with a pointed chin and long hair. His eyes shining, he listened quietly to Wei's report. Wei sitting on the opposite side of the table, was so excited he didn't know where to start.

"I saw them. . . . They've crossed the Yangtse! . . ."

The little room burst into an uproar of triumph. One man ran outside to the guerillas. They had long been packed around the hut, peering at the yellow lamplight through the window. The guerillas clutched at their comrade eagerly, as though each wanted a personal face-to-face account. He was tightly surrounded, those in the rear standing on their toes and shouting, "What happened?" "Speak up, will you!" But the man was so agitated he couldn't get a word out. He only automatically fended off the hands that reached toward him. Then a second man came racing out, yelling:

"The PLA has crossed the Yangtse!"

The peasant guerillas went delirious with joy. There was no way of telling who was saying what. All was a medley of tremendous roars—an ecstatic, completely triumphant bedlam!

In the hut, Lu was leaning across the little table, pressing:

"Did you bring us any orders?"

"You bet I did. I talked to the division commander and the division commissar. They said we should co-ordinate with them."

Lu jumped to his feet. He reached for a pencil on the table, but it took several tries before his nerveless fingers could close firmly.

Everyone was smiling, looking at Lu with eyes that shone with a new light. They noticed how much Lu had changed. His white shirt was in tatters, his eyes were large in a gaunt sun-blackened face. For a long time he was sunk in his own thoughts. Then he blurted:

"We'll never be hounded again!"

"You brought us through at last, old Lu!" a leader of one of the guerilla units said.

Lu waved his hand in denial. "No, I didn't do it. The people just couldn't stand it any more."

A new course of action had to be decided for the guerillas immediately. Lu raised his head and called to the men crowded outside the window:

"Is it daybreak yet?"

Many voices replied in chorus:

"It is daybreak."

Only then did the men in the small room become aware of the crowing of roosters far and near.

The next three or four days were like a mighty storm. Everywhere guerillas emerged from the deep forests and network of lakes. In the pitch black hours before dawn and in the dark of night, as rain poured and lightning flashed, fire spurted from barking rifles. Shouting guerillas ran, charged, raided. Men in the front ranks stumbled and fell—those behind leaped up and rushed at the foe. . . .

VIII

After its victory at Lungchi, the division swept south down the highway toward Hunan. The entire enemy line had disintegrated, and Corps ordered the division to enter Hunan at all possible speed and link up with other fighting units to do battle.

Commissar Liang Pin was deep in thought as he strode along the level highway. They had been marching for more than ten arduous days since they crossed the Yangtse, he mused, and now they were going to join brothers in arms for the fray. Only by close solidarity with them could they defeat the enemy. But under extremely difficult conditions, solidarity was often easily disrupted. It was more important than ever now. . . . He considered the new methods they would have to use in their political work, and decided to call a meeting of the commissars and instructors today to anticipate dealing with the solidarity problem.

As the troops advanced, they became aware of an awkward situation: A division ahead of them was rushing forward like a whirlwind to nail down the enemy. This was very important. It had to be done before Chen's division could come to grips with them. But in its haste to advance, the vanguard left behind it piles of ammunition, as well as service and kitchen personnel, sick and wounded, and soldiers who had been unable to maintain the pace of the forced march. All these men now packed the highway. All wanted to catch up and get into the fight. Each considered his personal assignment of the utmost importance; no one would give way to anyone else. An artillery unit rolled past walking men and whipped its horses into a gallop along a stretch of open road,

raising clouds of billowing dust. Ahead, a cart loaded with cases of hand grenades was stuck in the mud. The sorrel horse between its shafts was wheezing and struggling to rise. A long train of carts, men and animals were jammed behind it. The horses pulling the artillery caissons were forced to stop too. They stood glistening with sweat, like satin, their sides heaving. It was a scorching day without a cloud in the sky. The earth seemed to be on fire, the very air burned as if it were going to explode. There wasn't one tree along the road. Soldiers, shouting and rushing about, poured perspiration, their heads spinning drunkenly.

Finding this obstacle in its way, the division left the highway and detoured through the narrow paths between the paddy fields. Three li ahead was a big river. The scouts reported that things weren't so good at the fording point; they were afraid crossing wasn't going to be easy.

When this report was forwarded from regiment, division commander Chen pushed into the lead himself. He skidded into the water of a paddy field, scrambled out and continued on. Liang Pin followed several men who were directly behind the commander. Because the path was wide enough only for one, he had no way of passing them to catch up with Chen.

A heavy droning sound grew in the sky. Liang Pin looked up into the eye-stabbing glare and searched the heavens. He spotted two gleaming bits of silver, flying in this direction. He turned around to glance at the soldiers. They were sweat-drenched, trudging with their heads down, apparently not the least interested in the planes. We can't stop, he thought. He was carrying the order from Corps in his tunic pocket. It said: "Full speed ahead." An infantry company could conceal itself easily enough, but Liang Pin was worried about the ammunition carts on the highway, and the six-horse howitzer caissons (the pride of the division). He mounted a nearby hillock that afforded a good view of the highway. Ah, those artillery boys were really on their toes. They had spread out along the road as soon as they saw the planes, and covered the guns with camouflage nets. In the bushes beside the road, two anti-aircraft machineguns were set up. Men were steadily unloading boxes of rifle ammunition from the big carts near the mud puddle, running back and forth. From the looks of it, nothing would stop them from completing their job short of a direct bomb hit. Those transport men certainly had Liang Pin's respect and admiration.

But then he noticed something very unsatisfactory—the stragglers continued sauntering past the artillery caissons down the highway. "What do planes matter?" they seemed to say. "We saw lots more at Szepingkai and Chinchou!" Commissar Liang Pin was infuriated. They had no right to attract attention to the artillery. The drone of the planes was very close now. He shouted at the stragglers:

"Are you trying to show them the target? What's the matter with you men!" He ordered them to halt in a voice that would brook no

opposition. Ordinarily, no one would believe the commissar could be so explosive.

The stragglers immediately took shelter amid the rice stalks of the paddy fields beside the road. Along the paths and beside the highway, the infantry affixed their camouflage branches and stood still.

Roaring ominously, the planes swept overhead, circled once, then flew low toward the fording point. . . .

With his eyes on the sky, Liang Pin stood motionless on the little hill beside a small tree. Actually, the tree was shorter than he. A sudden wish grew in him that the planes would drop their bombs closer to where he was standing—anything rather than bomb the fording point. He could see a terribly obvious target there—a huge telegraph pole rearing up into the blue. Of course the pole had to be high so that the wire could stretch across the wide body of water, but poles like this were a dead give-away to every fording point on this section of the river. It at once occurred to Liang Pin that we should have picked a place to cross at least one thousand to fifteen hundred yards away from the pole. . . . And just as he was thinking this—at that very moment—his whole body was suddenly shaken violently. First there was a great roaring explosion, then two tremendous booms, and a fearsome column of black smoke billowed into the sky.

Men shouted, "They're bombing the fording point! They're bombing the fording point!"

Liang Pin stood stiffly erect. His face was etched with grim wrinkles, his eyes shot fire. He remembered previous campaigns—every time enemy planes came down it meant vicious strafing and casualties. He had seen the smashed bridges and gutted homes as the division marched south.

"Destroy, you dogs! We won't forget you!" Liang Pin gritted. He could see smoke rising from three places. He decided to go at once to the fording point. Things there were sure to be in a turmoil. It was highly likely they had suffered losses if they were jammed up anything like this part of the road. He got back on to the highway—now deserted because everyone was still taking cover—and soon was approaching the river.

In the scorching sun, the ground burned his feet like a hot stove. Black smoke was still rising as he neared the fording point, and the acrid fumes made his eyes tear. A large bomb had blasted a wide crater in the middle of the road. The throbbing of the big engines was fading into the distance. The planes were out of sight. A crowd of soldiers had gathered around the hole. The men said an ammunition cart had been standing on this spot, and the blast had flung it on to the roof of a nearby house. The strange thing was that none of the ammunition exploded. But the big heavy cart had crushed the roof and some of the occupants of the house were killed. Liang Pin could hear a woman weeping amid a group of peasants. It was a tragic sound. . . . It ripped

through him, wringing him with misery. Burning with rage, he quickened his steps to the fording point.

The fording point was indeed in a ferment. Big carts at every angle blocked the road, crowds of soldiers milled and pushed. Two carts had been turned end upwards. Men were lying asleep in the shade of the waggons. Liang Pin swore, "These men are practically asking to be killed!" He saw bare-wood crates of ammunition scattered around like stalls at a bazaar. The men weren't anxious to move around in the heat of the day. Draft animals were streaming blood from the bites of horse-flies. They were tied to the carts and nobody paid them any attention. Switching their tails, they shifted uneasily, obstructing the only avenue by which a man might walk. . . . "No organization at all," muttered Liang Pin. "What a mess!"

It was even hotter at the waterfront. Not only wasn't there a breath of wind, but the river surface seemed a mass of humid steam. The reflection of the sun, like a million golden needles, made you shut your eyes in pain. A row of green trees lined the dyke on the opposite shore. Behind them two clouds of smoke were slowly rising. The Kuo-mintang fliers had dropped their bombs far wide of the mark again.

What was serious at the ford was not the bombing but the fact that the pier built by the unit which crossed the river several days previous was buckled by the action of the flood waters. Carts were already stalled at this end for two days and nights. As rear units approached, they only concerned themselves with pushing forward. The men on the banks could see the river swelling and swelling before their eyes. An individual could still ford across, and there were plenty of boats; but everyone was so busy trying to get boats for his own unit that no one was really in charge. The boatmen were working very hard, but they were exhausted and their craft moved slowly. Efficiency was at a low ebb. Though the soldiers were frantic with anxiety to get across and go on, they couldn't think of any way to speed things up. The fording point had become a bottleneck. . . .

Hands on his hips, division commander Chen stood on the shore questioning some of the men.

Liang Pin came and stood beside him. Head down, streaming perspiration, for a long time the commissar could hear nothing. It was as if a great weight was pressing down on his head. He could feel the pressure of this new problem. And what was this problem? "A problem in the midst of victory"? That was it exactly. Did you think victory came as easily as taking a stroll after an evening meal? No. There were always these obstacles, difficulties. Only after you overcame them could you talk about "victory." Liang Pin was thinking calmly and clearly now: When we were fighting on the plains of the Northeast, we had railroads, highways; we could drive jeeps right up to the door of our billets. It's very different here. We had to leave the division command car several hundred li north of the Yangtse. (It couldn't get through the paddy

fields and virgin forests in this part of the country.) Now there are rivers to be crossed. Hunan province alone has four big rivers athwart our path. Well, comrade, the problem is simple enough—if we can't ford rivers, we can't beat the enemy. River crossing is our top priority military job. It's our top priority political job.

"Ho, comrade!" he said to himself. "Anybody who can't see that isn't going to get anywhere!"

He urged the division commander to go back and look after the rest of the troops. Liang Pin wanted to struggle with this ferment, to direct the river crossing himself. He asked a staff officer to remain and help him.

Several rifle shots rang out.

Liang Pin leaped with irritation. When the troops had first gone into the Northeast, rookies often fired at random—not only on the battlefield, sometimes even from trains. Time and again, he had railed against this lack of discipline, "When we fought guerilla warfare in the old days there were never more than a dozen bullets to a rifle. I don't know how many of us died because of lack of ammunition. Now you're wasting bullets, firing just to hear the sound!" Later, headquarters had quickly corrected this situation. But why had it started again now? In the middle of this thousands of *li* victory march south across the Yangtse, why were rifles being fired at anything except the enemy? Liang Pin was white with anger. He ordered an orderly to bring the men who had fired to him immediately.

He then turned and directed that every man, vehicle and animal should stop where they were, and sent for a company of his own unit to come at once and repair the pier. Liang Pin stood on a pile of lumber, his head high. He shouted his commands so that everyone could hear. Then, with grim determination, he gave his attention to the ammunition carts and vehicles blocking the road.

In a little while, the three soldiers who had fired were brought to him. The scars on the commissar's cheeks crimsoned with rage.

"What kind of army do you think you're in?" he snapped. "The ruling class reactionaries'?"

The three men stood at attention and hung their heads.

"You were shooting ducks! The people gave their sweat and blood for those bullets—so that you could fire them at the enemy!"

Liang Pin looked at the men. They had been through many days of burning sun, drenching rain. Their faces were dark and thin. Skin stretched tightly over their cheekbones. Their eyes were large and without lustre. He remembered when they set out from Peking last spring—every soldier's face was full and rosy. The past twenty days had been especially hard. They had sapped the men's strength terribly. A wave of compassion began to swell within Liang Pin, but he promptly berated himself—So you want to be soft, eh? Discipline's just an old rag then?

To be relaxed when the going is tough? We ought to demand less strength of character from our class army, is that it?

Again Liang Pin stared at the three soldiers. "You've been appointed by the Party," he said to himself. "Is this the way you carry out Party policy? Huh, you really shine at being forgiving!"

The men stood with downcast eyes. They were plainly very ashamed, and Liang Pin finally spoke to them in a different tone of voice:

"Don't you realize what kind of an impression you're giving the people here—a newly liberated place? They suffered under the enemy for so long. Every day they lived in fear and trembling. Do you want to frighten them some more? You ought to go back to your company and ask to be punished!"

He was silent for a long time. The red spots gradually faded from his face and he looked his usual self again. He waved the three soldiers away, then turned to the staff officer beside him:

"Comrade, we're not going to be really operating properly until we get all this well organized."

There were two things Liang Pin wanted to work on right away. One was to organize all the boats that could transport the division across the river. The other was to take a company of infantry and all the available service personnel, systematize the fording point, and repair the pier. He gave the second job to the staff officer—an intelligent, competent man, who was very strong on organizational work. Under the most chaotic circumstances, he could always produce complete neatness and order in a couple of minutes. The commissar said to him:

"We've got to handle this, comrade. We're the highest ranking organization here and we have to be responsible for everything. A command section must be organized to direct the crossing. Everyone—no matter how much of a bigwig he may be—has to take his order from the command section. And we're now appointing ourselves to take charge of it!"

Liang Pin looked at his wristwatch, then at the sun. The beams were beginning to slant from the west.

"We're going to start across before dusk," he said, though from the confused scene that lay before him no one would have believed it possible.

He went to the riverfront and asked the boatman of a sampan to row him to the boat moored offshore. Fifteen minutes later, he was conducting on the boat a meeting of representatives of all the fording point boatmen.

Liang Pin sat completely natural, chatting with the boatmen, an amiable smile lighting his face. He listened with particular sympathy to the words of an old woman.

"Mr. Official!" she cried. "We're people with no clothes and nothing to eat. We know that if things go well for you, they'll go well for all of us too."

The commissar corrected her. "When you say 'you,' you mean the revolution."

"That's right!" said the old lady. "The Kuomintang grabbed me to work for two months on the Yangtse and didn't give me a grain of rice. I had to beg for food. When they ran away, they threw my oars and sweep into the river. They burned my boat, sank it. . . . I'd been sailing since I was fifteen, and now I'm so old. I held on to an oar and pleaded with them. . . . They beat me, they took my fifteen-year-old grandson away to be a soldier. My son was worried about him, so he went along too. Only my daughter-in-law is left with me now. . . . When we heard that the PLA wanted to cross this river, we all hurried here. How could you get over and chase the enemy without our help! I've been sailing up and back across this ford for three days and three nights. . . . Mr. Official! The army comrades are all so good to me, they won't let me move. They help me row. 'Old Mama,' they say, 'everything's going to be fine after we finish the enemy off for good!' . . ."

Smiling, she wanted to continue. Liang Pin interrupted her:

"Are you having any trouble now?"

"Trouble? You've got your troubles too! . . ."

A youngster spoke up for the old woman. "I'll tell you what the trouble is. We don't have enough to eat."

The unit that had crossed earlier had paid each boatman three catties of rice per day. But now the river had risen, and the troops presently at the fording point were not well organized. The food department men were out in the countryside buying supplies, and still had not returned with grain that could be given to the boatmen.

After discussing the problem with the representatives, Liang Pin decided to immediately issue five catties of rice per day as wages. He planned to ask the men of the division to save on food so that supplies for the boatmen would be available right away.

The old lady's eyes danced for joy when she heard this. "There's another thing," she said, taking Liang Pin's hand affectionately. "When you load those animals and big carts on board—do you think it'll hurt our boats?"

A great light dawned on the commissar. At last he had discovered the key to the whole problem. He laughed happily.

"So that's been the question all along! So that's it! Very reasonable too!"

Liang Pin promptly offered a plan of operation. He would set up two points at the ford. At one, the large boats would load only vehicles, animals and ammunition; the other would be for the embarkation of troops exclusively. The PLA would recompense or repair any damage caused to the boats. Liang Pin considered this to be the only way to keep order. Crowding the animals and the troops together merely caused confusion, and it wasted time.

The boatmen greeted his proposal with enthusiastic applause. As

he said afterwards, "We worked out a rule in half an hour." A phrase danced in his racing mind: "When you run into difficulty, talk it over with the people." How sound was this piece of advice from Chairman Mao!

After he finished discussing the details with the boatmen's delegates, Liang Pin asked them:

"The troops have a job to do in a hurry. We want to start crossing before dark. Do you think it can be done?"

"Sure! Of course it can!" was the cheerful reply.

The delegates returned to their boats, and with a light heart commissar Liang Pin went back on shore.

A great wind seemed to have swept the waterfront, blowing everything clean. The vehicles were drawn up in orderly lines. Most of the stragglers had been organized, and were helping carry lumber to repair the pier.

Liang Pin hurried over to the pier. The staff officer was in his shirtsleeves, working alongside the soldiers in the stifling heat, driving piles.

"Everything's under control with the boats!" Liang Pin shouted triumphantly. "How are you making out?"

The staff officer wiped the sweat from his eyes and grinned, "About a dozen more piles and we're finished."

Good. The confusion was ended. Liang Pin told the staff officer to turn the job over to the company commander, and to come along. As they climbed the bank, Liang Pin asked:

"Comrade, do you know what we rely on to beat the enemy?"

The staff officer wiped his damp forehead with his sleeve. He smiled but did not reply.

"This is what we rely on—" Liang Pin said, "class consciousness, leadership and organization. Have you read *The Bolshevik Sensitivity to New Developments*? Ho! If you don't recognize the existence of problems, if you don't analyze a new situation, you never untie the knots. . . ."

Division commander Chen, returning from the house where the radio section had set up a temporary station, met them on the path. He showed them the messages he had received from Corps and Army.

War consists of an endless series of changes, often quite unfathomable to the outsider. But the military man has a grasp of the laws governing these changes right from the beginning. All conditions keep changing. Depending on how force is brought into play either by the enemy or by us, some change in the circumstances is expedited, or the change never occurs.

Because after crossing the Yangtse the troops had driven on regardless of sun, rain, mountains or cliffs, because no matter what the difficulties they kept pushing forward, the enemy had been forced to retreat. Now, except for the individual units already destroyed during the course

of the chase, the main body of the enemy was finally trapped. The division ahead of Chen's, after a relentless pursuit, had caught and was attacking the enemy. The high tide of the campaign was approaching. The iron was cherry red in the grip of the pincers. It only remained for the hammer to strike! . . . The higher command was ordering this division of Chen's to swing in from the mountains for a flanking attack, to give the "hammer" blow.

Chen, Liang Pin and the staff officer shared the joy of this news together. The division had come a long way. They had been hungry, thirsty, they had endured all kinds of torments, but now at last the enemy was caught, caught, really and truly caught!

Old campaigners could spot the symptoms all around them—the front was undergoing a rapid change. More planes appeared in the sky. They were very active. In one afternoon, they flew over three times. But after circling for observation, they quickly disappeared again. This alone showed how frantic the enemy was becoming. They were terribly afraid that Chen's division would catch up.

Liang Pin cursed at the planes every time they came into sight. He looked up at them, stirred with contempt.

"You cowards!" he said. "Nothing you can do can stop us!"

That day, the bottleneck turned into a smoothly running fording operation. At five p.m., the troops began to cross the river. Orderly, in high spirits, the men filed into the boats and sailed out. Liang Pin had done an unusual amount of talking that afternoon. He took his seat quietly in the bobbing craft and looked at the red glaze the setting sun had painted on the surface of the water. Division commander Chen suddenly asked him:

"Liang Pin, old man, what's going to happen when the war is over?"

"We'll organize a strong army for national defense," Liang Pin replied promptly.

"And what about yourself?"

This time Liang Pin paused first before answering.

"That's hard to say."

"Why?" Chen was a little surprised.

The commissar answered carefully, weighing every word, "Whatever the Party decides for me to do, whatever the people want me to do, I'll do. We're going to build a new China, old Chen! I often think—in this new China there'll be all kinds of work to be done. Maybe the Party will assign me to a factory, maybe I'll be put in the diplomatic service. . . ."

"What will you do about it?"

"Why, I'll learn from the workers, from the engineers, from the other comrades." The commissar was rather excited. He raised his eyes and looked into the distance. "People learn everything in the front lines of a struggle, comrade. I didn't know anything about war at first either. . . . I used to be afraid of war. . . ."

"You don't like life in the army then?" Chen asked abruptly, as though bidding him farewell.

The commissar shook his head. "No, it isn't that. I'm used to it now. I'll probably have trouble getting accustomed to a new job. It's sure to be very hard, but if it's necessary—then I'll get used to it too!"

The rays of the setting sun were still dazzling to the eyes. As they reached the opposite shore, Liang Pin turned and looked at the multi-colored reflections on the water. Then he leaped from the boat and strode up the bank. The troops had immediately fallen into rank and were marching vigorously forward. Standing on the side, Liang Pin watched the men swinging past. They were burned black by the sun, thin, with large eyes. Their grass-green uniforms were faded and sweat-soaked into patches of light and dark. They were silent, but they held their heads high, and their eyes flashed. The army that had grown up in the sub-freezing temperatures of the north had been further tempered in the blazing heat of the drive south of the Yangtse. It was stronger and harder than ever now. All was still except for the tramp, tramp of marching feet. Liang Pin seemed to be hearing that sound for the first time. It gave him a feeling of deep and abiding pleasure. . . .

IX

After they crossed the river, the troops left the highway and headed west to get at the enemy's flank. The green paddy fields of the river valley were soon behind them and they began climbing again. High mountains reared up ahead, like huge waves rolling endlessly into the distance.

Leaning slightly forward, a rifle slung across his back, a scout walked across an open field at the foot of a mountain to an abandoned little primary school, shadowed by trees. Division commander Chen was sitting in the classroom, waiting for intelligence reports. His long legs, caked with mud from the knees down, were stretched out in front of him. He was fast asleep. The scout entered and shouted, "Report!" Chen woke with a start and jumped to his feet to find Old Hsia standing before him. Dark and thin, the old scout was again calm and easy-going, quite different from the state of mind he had been in the night he told Chen it was impossible to cross the flooded Tsushui River. Now he related that an enemy wing had passed through here two days ago; that they were sowing in the path behind them a string of spies, bandits and assassins.

"According to the local people, the enemy are very cocky," he concluded.

"Cocky?" Liang Pin had just come in, and he heard Old Hsia's last remark.

"They said—those clod-hoppers from the north plains will never get over these mountains; they'll all fall into the gorges and kill themselves!"

Liang Pin hurried out. Frowning, he looked at the gigantic mountains. They were turning dark purple in the late afternoon light. Sun rays shone like fiery arrows through the clouds, tinting them red and gold. The mountains beyond were blue; still further, they blended into a hazy grey. He knew the mountain country south of the Yangtse well. His army life had begun here. But he had been away for a long time. After more than ten years in the north he felt rather strange and out of touch with life in these parts.

Shortly afterwards, messengers mounted their horses at the door of temporary division headquarters and galloped to deliver the order to the different units:

"Continue the march to the mountains."

Fifteen minutes later, the troops were again in motion on the white winding road. From afar, the road looked like a riverbed along which a dark stream of men was flowing, flowing onward. Division headquarters command moved forward with them.

The scenery was beautiful; it filled Liang Pin's heart with joy. Stretching on both sides of the road were lush crops of cotton, hemp, ramie, sorghum, beans—green as far as the eye could see. In the distance, small groves of trees were a lovely kingfisher jade.

The road kept climbing. After passing through a small wood, the men began ascending the mountain itself. Trees blocked out the red glow of the setting sun. The road took another turn, and far behind the troops to the north the river they had recently crossed was lost from view.

It was still warm, but fresh breezes cooled the hot faces of the men. Tall stately cypresses rustled gently. Little brooks murmured beside the road, and the red earth was soft and springy beneath the feet. The soldiers were simple youngsters. They had cursed the broiling sun, but now that the heat of the day was past they forgot about it and were happy again. A sound began welling up all along the line of march—a bit here, a bit there, until it was welded into one—a gay, cheerful song! This singing had accompanied the men on the long trek from the Sungari River to the Yangtse. Then it was dissipated in the fierce sun and the storms, the gruelling marches, the tense pursuits and attacks. But now it blossomed forth again. It stirred Liang Pin to hear it, and he listened with pleasure. He knew the men were not worried about how many difficulties lay ahead. They were happy now; they could sing. Their whole army existence consisted of overcoming one hardship and going on to the next, then conquering that one too. Even after the sky was thick with stars, the singing still continued. . . .

They didn't know that the morrow would bring one of the most trying days of their lives.

The next morning, the sun rose shrouded in purple mist. The weather had changed. It was humid and sultry. The men's clothes stuck to their bodies. All signs pointed to an intensely hot day. Ahead,



CHI PAI-SHIH: Wind Blows from the Mountain

there was not a tree in sight—only bald whitish mountains. The troops dripped sweat like rain as soon as they began to ascend; their clothes became soaking wet. By noon the problem had reached serious proportions—the men were burning with thirst. Trudging up the mountains, fires seemed to rage in their stomachs, with the flames creeping up into their throats. Panting, their mouths agape, the men were dry beyond endurance. Their perspiration that had been gushing like freshets, after a while stopped running. It was as though their bodies were withering, turning to ashes. At the start of the ascent, there were occasional puddles along the road, and the men rushed to scoop up the water. None of the urgings of the officers would stop them. They even ignored flat orders.

Company political instructor Chun-ho had been wounded in the leg by a shell splinter when they stormed across the Yangtse, but he insisted on marching at the head of his men. When the men began drinking at the puddles, he had immediately ordered them back to their ranks. But the mountains became steeper and steeper, the sun was burning hotter and hotter. The men suddenly discovered and crowded around a small pool. He ran toward them, shouting. He saw Wang roughly shove others aside, then fall on his hands and knees, and with his backside sticking up, thrust his face into the water and drink avidly. Not a dozen yards away, a dead horse was lying, covered with swarms of buzzing flies—a sign that an artillery battery of the advance unit had passed through here not long before.

“Get up!” Chun-ho commanded.

Wang turned his head around. His face was a swath of scarlet running down into his neck. He stared at Chun-ho with wild unseeing eyes, then thrust his mouth back into the water and continued drinking. Chun-ho found himself looking with longing at the muddy stagnant pool. How he wanted to drop down beside it, and like Wang drink gulp after gulp! . . . But at once, he berated himself—What am I thinking? I’m a Communist, a political officer! Angrily, he shouted in a terrible voice:

“Stand up! Stand up! I order all of you to stand up! Get back to your ranks!”

The men at the pool came to their senses. Wang, water still dripping from his mouth, returned sheepishly to his place in the marching column.

Further down the road, they passed a couple of trees on one of which an arrow and a message were painted in whitewash: “Such-and-such Battalion will assemble at such-and-such a place. Hurry! We won’t wait for you!” This obviously had been written by the fleeing enemy. Beside it, on another tree, our own men had written: “Step on the gas, comrades! The enemy are just ahead!” Someone had drawn some comic pictures, and beneath them, another arrow. The latter seemed in close pursuit of the arrow drawn by the enemy.

The vanguard halted, stopping the whole line of march. Standing

in the open sun was somehow much worse than walking. The fierce rays beat down relentlessly on the men's heads. Everyone craved for a cool place to rest, but there was none. The men looked all around—even the brief shade of the grass was inviting, though it would hardly cover the tops of their shoes.

An artillery battery up ahead had caused the halt. The road rose in an eighty-degree grade, and no matter how it tried the battery couldn't roll its heavy caissons up the incline.

Lei Ying, the thin chief of the division's liaison section, came tearing down the road on horseback.

"Company Six! Company Six!" he shouted. "Move up!"

The company was wanted to help the artillery battery. With commander Chin and political instructor Chun-ho in the lead, the men of Company Six trotted toward the head of the line of march.

At the foot of the slope, the animals and caissons of the artillery battery were jammed together. A mule, pulling a heavy mortar, had struggled half-way up the incline. A young driver was pulling the mule forward by the reins, while a group of men behind urged the animal on with cries. The sleek sides of the big-bellied purple-colored mule were drenched with sweat. Her ears were cocked forward and she champed painfully at the bit, green froth bubbling from her mouth, her eyes rolling and bulging as she strained to climb. Time and again, she flicked her tail and threw her whole strength into the drive, her hoofs clapping in a frantic scramble. But after advancing one or two paces, she always slid back to her starting point. The battery commander, wearing dark glasses against the glare, was streaming perspiration. His face was brick-red, blue pulsing veins stood out on his forehead. His whole body strained with each effort of the mule, he ground his teeth; but every attempt ended in failure.

Just then, a forty-year-old driver came hurrying up the slope, cursing the soldiers as he ran. He snatched the reins from the young driver's hands.

"You're killing her! You're killing her!" he cried, practically weeping. "Are you all blind? Can't you see what kind of a slope this is? Try carrying that mortar up yourself!"

No one dared to stop him. They watched him lead the mule back to the foot of the mountain.

But the men were determined to get across, and they finally hit upon a plan—they would carry the big guns up, one by one, themselves. Then they would lead up the animals. Company Six arrived and helped the artillery battery until the last mule had reached the top of the pass.

Chun-ho had run up and down the slope five or six times. Wringing wet, he was going up again when suddenly he felt very ill. His head was spinning, all his blood seemed to be rushing upwards in a huge bubbling wave. Faint, he thrust out his hands as though to clutch at something, then he stood, swaying. The earth revolved rapidly beneath his feet,

and suddenly he fell unconscious to the ground. The little orderly who had been behind him, flew over and flung his arms around him. Wang, Feng-tung the machine-gunner, the company commander and Yang hurried over and picked Chun-ho up. Fortunately, there was a grove of trees on the top of the slope, and they carried him to the shade of the green leaves. Chun-ho lay quietly, his face crimson, the white of his eyeballs gleaming fearfully through the thin line opening of his lids. A pall of dust covered his face. He looked dead.

Company commander Chin swore at the weeping orderly, then, realizing he was wrong, ran off to search for water. As rear column troops continued mounting the slope, exhausted artillerymen ringed the prostrate form of Chun-ho. They were frantic with worry, feeling that the collapse of the political instructor was entirely due to his helping them move their guns and animals. Chin came rushing back from beyond the trees, knelt beside Chun-ho with a jug of cold water and sprinkled his face and head. The political instructor's chest began to move with a faint sound, and he slowly revived. A sigh of relief swept through the surrounding men.

When Liang Pin got the news—"A man has dropped from the heat up ahead!" he hurried forward, fanning himself vigorously with his hat. Chun-ho had just recovered when Liang Pin arrived, and was lying weakly on the ground. Liang Pin took one look, and immediately ordered that all troops should rest in the grove and be given water. He then called a meeting of all officers of battalion rank and above.

The meeting was short and grave. The first to arrive found Liang Pin pacing beneath the trees. When all the officers had assembled, the commissar approached them. Without looking at them, he said softly:

"Comrades, we're engaged in a pursuit of the enemy—a task of honor Chairman Mao has entrusted to us." He shot a determined glance at his auditors. "Now we've run into a new problem. When we were in the Northeast we won many victories. You remember the battle of Liaohsi, last year. The men said, 'We'll get to Mukden if we have to crawl there!' And we gave the enemy a smashing defeat. In the past few years we've become used to fighting on the northern plains, we've become used to fighting in the snowstorm in sub-zero weather. Now we've come back to the southern mountains of our old Red Army days. It's hot. We're bitten by mosquitoes and insects. It's easy enough to say 'The final victory will be the most glorious!' But the only way we'll achieve that glory is by ploughing through constant difficulties and hardships. That's not so easy. Comrades, over twenty years ago Chairman Mao led us forth from here to start the fight. Could anything be harder than those times? There are no difficulties ahead of us that we can't lick. We have to treat climbing mountains, fording rivers, standing heat as tactical problems. We have to do a good job of leading the comrades to win through tough situations. Our army has to be able to fight in the south as well as in the north. It has to be able to fight

in any part of the country. Then, no matter where the enemy come from, we can drive them back. Only when we have that kind of an army can we really consider ourselves the troops of Mao Tse-tung!"

Liang Pin raised his long arm, and all eyes were focused on that strong, steady hand.

"We want to develop in our men the three precious qualities of the Red Army—an ability to march! an ability to starve! an ability to fight! We're going to finish off the enemy, comrades! We're going to keep driving forward. Any place the enemy can get through, we can get through too!"

One by one, the officers rose to their feet. After hearing Liang Pin speak, one phrase kept repeating itself in their brains—There are no difficulties ahead of us that we can't lick. The officers returned to their units.

That night, things were even worse. It rained, and the steep mountain road turned into a glaze of slick mud on which the men kept slipping and falling. For the past few nights they had been camping in bamboo groves on the slopes, tormented by swarms of mosquitoes. You waved your hand, and the little demons still came bumping against your face, thick as ever. The men would jump up angrily and pace back and forth beside the fire. Very few people lived in the mountain fastness, and because the army transport line had been stretched too long to keep up with supplies, food too had become a problem. The only thing the food department could do was to issue each squad some unhusked grain. When they camped at night, the men took turns pushing small stone rollers to mill the grain. The previous night Wang and Feng-tung the machine-gunner had been on duty in their squad, and had milled grain till after midnight. Then they had a bite to eat and lay down on their piles of hay to do battle with the mosquitoes. Just as they were dozing off, the sky became light, and it was time to get up again. Now it was raining. No one seemed to know where they were going to make camp.

Wang had cut his leg on a sharp stone. He stumbled and fell several times in the pouring rain. He made no effort to bind the bleeding wound, but continued plodding ahead, leaning on a bamboo staff. His mind was very troubled that night. He vowed to himself that the next day nothing could make him march. He would lie and rest all day, even if it meant going without food.

The rain stopped. Before long the troops set up camp outside a small hamlet consisting of only three families. There was considerable shouting back and forth among the men, and soldiers' shadows leaped around the flickering campfires. Bullfrogs were croaking in the pond. On the road, some of the men were chatting loudly. Wang lay beside a campfire, brooding as he stared into the flames.

Quite some time later, when the soldiers were all sleeping soundly, a man leading a horse approached the campfire. He removed the saddle

and bridle, patted the horse affectionately, and tethered it to a small tree. Then the man walked away. In a little while, he returned, yawning constantly, his eyes running with water, and sat down. He searched a long time through a noisily rustling oilcloth-covered ration kit and finally produced a handful of popped rice. (It was then that Wang noticed him. Peering at him in the firelight, Wang recognized him as the driver who swore at the men for trying to force the mule up that steep incline.) About to eat, the man looked at the rice cupped in his hands, then turned his head and glanced at the horse. The animal was watching him with a pitiful expression. Thin, its mane scraggly, the horse was filthy. The man slowly stood up. He walked over to the horse and thrust the popped rice beneath its muzzle. When the animal had finished, it whinnied and looked at the man again. The man patted the beast, yawned, then suddenly made up his mind. After walking around in a circle a few minutes, he slipped off silently into the darkness, leaning forward. Wang continued staring at the fire. . . . Very much later, the driver returned. He dumped an armful of long grass on the ground, cursing the man who had borrowed his small sickle yesterday and lost it. Then, beside the fire, he began cutting the long green stalks into smaller segments with his fingernails. After a while, Wang raised his head and looked in the direction of the snapping of the crisp grass. All the man's fingers were bleeding with cuts from the sharp grass edges, but he didn't seem to mind the pain in the least. He carried the grass he had cut up, and threw it down before the horse, then watched with the greatest satisfaction while the animal gradually consumed it all.

Wang jumped up and took the driver by the hand.

"Doesn't it hurt?"

The driver looked at him, not in the least surprised, then lay down on the oil-cloth raincape he had spread on the ground.

Wang had been deeply impressed by the man's devotion to his job. Sitting beside him, Wang was trying to think of what to say. After a moment of silence, the driver spoke. He seemed to completely understand what was in Wang's heart.

"Go to sleep, *huochi*. Don't think so much. 'Birds fly south but their song remains.'—A man too ought to earn glory that lives after him. Not everyone gets a chance like us to be in on the final victory! Let's catch up with the enemy tomorrow and hit 'em hard, good and hard!"

Wang stretched out beside the driver. He fell asleep and dreamed he was running, fighting at the front. . . .

The next morning was very tense. Scouts had spotted a small body of the enemy up ahead. It seemed very possible that the enemy was planning to run for the mountains in the west. Division command decided to pursue at full speed and destroy whatever units it could catch first, then go after the main force of the enemy. By dawn, the troops

were in rapid motion again. But all day long, they never caught sight of the enemy. At nightfall, they had reached the famous Chew Grass Mountain. The local people said the name came from the Three Kingdoms period in the third century, when the horses of the great generals were so exhausted on reaching the mountain top that they lay down and ate grass instead of going forward into battle.

It was still a formidable climb. The most dangerous part was at a jagged cliff halfway up, which used to be scaled by means of a pole with rungs nailed to it to form a ladder. But when the troops were still coming through a cypress wood in a valley twenty *li* away, they could see black smoke swirling up at the cliff. Of course the ladder was being burned by enemy agents. The trees in the valley became more dense as the troops marched on. No sunlight penetrated its dark interior. Many ancient trees had fallen across the road, and the men and animals had to keep jumping over them to advance. As they neared the cliff, regiment commander Yung and commissar Tsai ran forward to take the lead. For a long time they examined the precipice. Above it, all that could be seen, aside from the smoke, was a few soaring birds. Yung decided to lean one of the fallen trees against the precipice to take the place of the burned ladder. That was the only way. By the time the tree was in position, the sun's red glow had left the cliff face.

Craning their necks, the men stood behind the division commander and division commissar, watching the first man start toward the cliff. The scene looked rather like the inauguration of some skyscraper building. The daredevil who was to make the attempt was none other than company commander Chin. He had been picked for the job by the commander and the commissar of the regiment. Chin advanced steadily until he reached the leaning tree. Then, grasping it with both hands and both feet, he began clambering up like a monkey. The watching men held their breaths. Chin kept on climbing, quickly, climbing till he reached the top. The men broke into a wild cheer that rocked the valley, a cheer that swept away all obstacles. Tying a rope to the top of the cliff, Chin threw down the other end. One by one, pulling themselves hand over hand with the aid of the rope and using the tree for a foothold, the troops all climbed to the top of the precipice.

The cliff had been conquered. But beyond this ridge lay more ridges, beyond the cliff were more cliffs. Regiment commander Yung called on the men to scale the mountain ahead before dark. It was still bathed in pale red, though the trees were beginning to cast deep shadows. Stirred by the sight of the regiment commander climbing vigorously upward, every man strove forward, competing to be the first to reach the top.

Wang had given up his decision of the night before that he would refuse to march. But he still was trying to think of a way to be left behind. Apathetically, he limped slowly on. . . . When the shouting, panting, perspiring men rushed past him to follow the regiment com-

mander up the mountain, Wang had been jostled to one side. Very annoyed, Wang had curses on the tip of his tongue. But then he noticed that even the artillerymen, who had been so far in the rear, had caught up. And suddenly he heard the voice of Chun-ho, the company political instructor. After Chun-ho was felled by the sun, he had been carried to the first reserves; yet here he was again with the artillerymen. Chun-ho knew Wang was troubled, and he took this chance to have a word with him. They had talked previously half a dozen times along the road. All Wang had said then was, "I'm all right," and nothing had been solved.

The artillerymen presented a strange sight. They had been forced to leave their horses at the foot of the cliff, but they had dismantled their mortars and heavy machineguns and were carrying them, piece by piece, up the mountain. Every driver toted six shells, each as thick as a man's arm. Only the driver who had camped with Wang the night before was different. He carried a horse's bridle and saddle.

Wang plucked at his sleeve, "Old *huochi*!" Wang was curious to know why this man had chosen a different burden from the other drivers. But the driver only glanced at him, brushed aside his hand, and marched on. It was at this moment that the political instructor came bounding up. Affectionately, he pulled Wang by the hand.

"Wang, old fellow, our company's not far ahead, is it? Come on, I'll help you carry your stuff." He insisted on taking Wang's rifle off his back. Then he noticed the driver walking ahead of them. "What a pity," he whispered to Wang sorrowfully. "This morning his horse slipped and fell off a twenty-foot cliff. Eight men carried it up again, but it died. He—he cried for a long time. His battery commander said he's been with that horse since the battle of the Sungari River in the summer of '47. . . ."

The two men chatted as they walked along. Wang didn't have much to say. From behind them, another man caught up. He was plodding with his head down, a light machinegun resting on his shoulders. Chun-ho thought the machinegun looked familiar, and as the man drew nearer, he recognized him too.

"Aiya!" cried Chun-ho, "isn't that Feng-tung's machinegun . . . and isn't that the division commander carrying it!"

Feng-tung had again been stricken with malaria. He had fallen by the roadside, shivering, his teeth chattering, but firmly clutching his gun. He was determined to go on as soon as the fit had passed. The division commander saw him, and left his orderly to look after him. "Give it to me, comrade," he had said to Feng-tung. "You know it's safe in my hands!" And he had lifted the gun on to his shoulders. Wang took one look, rushed over to Chen, and grabbed the handle of the machinegun.

"Commander, let me have it!" he insisted.

Chen reeked of sweat. His horse and baggage had been left behind

too, and he had been wearing the same uniform for days, through sun and rain. He turned to Wang with a grin.

"I heard that you hurt your leg, but you're still keeping up. Let me carry the gun. You soldiers have plenty of chance to carry things!"

He tramped ahead. Wherever he reached a group of men, they quickened their pace. As a result, before it was too dark to see the road, the troops had climbed another high mountain.

Night fell quickly, and the darkness was pitch black. All around they could hear the sighing and creaking of the cypress trees; but where the road was and where the precipices were, no one could distinguish. As luck would have it, at this point the road was twisting and turning up a cliffside. The troops kept slipping, skidding on stones, clumps of grass, mud. . . . They were able to proceed only by groping a step at a time. To make matters worse, it began to rain—so heavily that the men couldn't raise their heads or open their eyes. After a while, the rain stopped, but the muddy road made hard going.

Sweating profusely, the division commander stood among the soldiers. He could see that it was impossible to continue the march in this manner. He wanted to get to the head of the column to examine the situation. His mind was torn by an acute contradiction—He knew there were plenty of cypress branches around that could be used as torches, but he was afraid that the torchlight would be seen by the enemy. Yet without light the troops were unable to move another inch. Just then, up ahead, the silence was broken by a cry. A soldier carrying a torpedo bomb had dropped it off the cliff. They could hear the snapping of branches—then all was still. The troops stood, petrified. . . .

Chen hastily pushed his way to the front of the vanguard. Ahead was only impenetrable darkness. He made up his mind. They couldn't stop. If they stopped, the enemy would get away. They had to push on, stubbornly, letting nothing stand in their way! Chen issued the order:

"Light torches!"

Ten minutes later, thousands of thick branches sprang into flame. Wind blew the fires of the high-held torches streaming behind like countless fluttering red flags, bright and dazzling. The terror of the night had been dispelled. In the rear of the march, men raised their heads to see the scarlet flame, and marched boldly forward. A great shout burst forth from the chests of the soldiers:

"Fight on to Hunan! Fight on to Hunan!"

The sound rang out strong and clear, and its booming echoes reverberated through the mountains and valleys for a long, long time. . . .

X

It was a bright clear morning. Only in Hunan can you find so many beautiful swaths of cypress groves closely alternating with rice fields, shining unbelievably clean in the sunlight, like the charming green of peacock feathers.

Surging down from the lofty heights, the troops traversed a small hill to formally enter Hunan. They swept across the hill like a tidal wave. Division commander Chen and commissar Liang Pin arrived at the hill at exactly six in the morning. Every man, as he reached the provincial border, looked all around with a smile, and continued his march. The mood of the troops was different now. Passing the crest of the small green hill was like some kind of a ceremony.

Chen was particularly excited. During the past few days, as they kept drawing nearer to Hunan, his heart was alive with many emotions. He constantly stopped to talk with the peasants, to ask them about conditions in recent years. Now he made no attempt whatever to conceal his joy. Chen's personality was simple and open. With his first step into the native province he had departed from twenty years ago, his eyes began to shine. Walking beside Liang Pin, he happily pointed out tangerine trees—and there were tung oil trees growing beside the road, and wasn't that a fine rice paddy! Hunan. The crest of the small hill formed its boundary line, and south of that line the land was truly rich, beautiful. A fresh morning breeze blew against the men's faces. The rice was nearly ripe, stalks drooping under the weight of the dense full heads. Blooming lotus crowded the ponds dotting the landscape, and high tiled roofs rose from behind the trees, quite different from the little grass shacks of western Hupeh.

Time and again Chen halted to admire the rice paddies. Several times he snorted angrily:

"The soil is so fertile—and the people have nothing to eat! We have the Kuomintang to thank for that! It's all their doing!"

After climbing the mountain ridge, Wang finally had fallen behind. Someone had carried his rifle for him since the day before, but he still bore a burden on his mind—he couldn't march quickly. At first, some of the men had kept him company. Then he had to sit down and rest, and soon he was left alone. The troops were far ahead. Even the cloud of dust that trailed them had disappeared. Walking was really an agony for him. Wang felt miserable. Night was coming and he didn't dare remain where he was. He regretted having dropped out of the march, but it was too late now. Dancing fireflies began to appear in the trees. It was fearfully still. He got up and started to limp along the road. Suddenly, he thought he heard tramping feet coming behind him, and the sound of heavy breathing. Wang remembered hearing it said that this was a region of murderous bandits and Kuomintang agents. Frightened, without turning around, he quickened his pace, perspiring

freely. Soon he was sure that someone was coming behind him. There was a definite cadence to the footsteps. Wang made up his mind. He would go no further. He would stand and fight. Wang waited in the shadow of the roadside until a dark figure drew abreast of him, then leaped out and flung his arms around the man. Both fell and began to wrestle, rolling on the ground. An instant later, Wang was surrounded by bright torches. He struggled with all his might, but he was seized by many strong hands. He looked at his captors. They wore peasant clothing. Cartridge belts were slung across their chests and they carried rifles. Bandits, Wang thought to himself darkly. A man with a torch rushed up to him, then set up a joyful shouting. The man's thick Hunan accent made his words completely incomprehensible to Wang. Many other yelling, cheering men came running out from behind the trees, and crowded around him. The man with the torch, seeing Wang's expression, thought Wang didn't believe him. Making vigorous gestures, the man cried:

"We're your own people—we're guerillas! We saw you all alone here, comrade; we thought you were a Kuomintang spy!"

Only then did Wang let his breath out.

"Do you know Wei?" he asked.

"Of course. Old Wei is one of our men."

This was a small unit of the guerilla forces. They had just come through the forest in the east and hadn't seen the PLA troops going by. Spotting some stragglers in the distance, they mistook them for Kuomintang soldiers. Then they caught sight of Wang. On the dark, mountain road, meeting Wang, they were as thrilled and enthused as though they had run into the whole Army. He was the first PLA man the guerillas had ever met.

Wang had been gloomy when he was alone, but now, meeting the guerillas, his spirits soared. On learning that he had dropped out of ranks, the guerillas immediately decided to escort him by torchlight to catch up. In that way, they could see the troops at the same time.

As they walked through the night, one man after the next approached Wang to pepper him with questions. He did his best to understand them, and gave prompt answers. But the question that occupied his mind was one he himself wanted to ask—This is such a flourishing place. It looks even better than the Northeast. Is it possible the people really don't have enough to eat? . . .

Wang glanced at the man padding beside him in bare feet—a peasant of about forty. He had a red face and a thick powerful body. Wang asked him abruptly:

"Do you eat rice here?"

The peasant's eyes darkened. He shook his head.

"We can't get any. Beans and wild herbs are for us, comrade. Others get the rice."

Wang understood. The endless paddy fields he had seen that day

were full of good rice, but the poor had to live on the brink of starvation.

"Comrade guerilla," Wang said with deep emotion, "we also had only tears to eat in the old society!"

The peasant guerilla asked, "Have you divided the land in your part of the country?"

At this mention of land, the other guerillas crowded around to listen. Wang suddenly had the feeling that it was a great honor to come from an old liberated area. The words came pouring out of him:

"It's because our Communist Party and Chairman Mao are leading us so well. We've divided the land, knocked feudalism over. That winter of the big snow—we came with our rakes and hoes, we set up a red flag and divided the land! . . . How can I tell you! When, when I got my piece of land—I never had any land before—from my grandfather's time, we never had any. . . . We always used to be hungry. Once, when I was a kid, I went to old moneybags' fields to steal some beans. I was crawling there on my belly in the middle of the night. His watchman saw me, and shot me—here. I've been carrying the scar of that devil's haircut ever since. After I grew up, the Japanese invaders grabbed me and made me work for them. I ran away. I had a home but I didn't dare to come back. Only after the Japanese invaders surrendered in '45, could I come back, come back like a beggar to my own house. Now when I look out my door, I see the land, and it's mine! Think of it! I not only have land—I also got a horse for my share of what we took from the landlord. Are food and clothes any worry to us now? Then I thought—just knocking over feudalism in the villages isn't enough. The feudal chief Chiang Kai-shek and imperialism are still left. They're a big nest of trouble. So I took up my rifle, and here I am! . . ."

The guerillas eagerly interrupted to throw questions at Wang from all sides:

"In your place who decided how the land was to be divided? . . . Suppose they give you a bad piece of land, what can you do about it? . . . Pah! Do you think the landlords have anything to say about how their land is divided! . . . What I want to know is—after you get the land, what do you plant it with? . . . We've got no seeds. . . . We've got no implements. . . . You can't get sprouts from a dried melon! . . . You poor cluck! Once you get land, what have you got to worry about? Once you've got land, you can always manage! . . ."

Only the red-faced older peasant with the bare feet remained silent. Finally he spoke:

"We people here—they hacked us, murdered us, they squeezed down on us heavy! We had it good here for a while. We revolted, we followed the Communist Party, we divided up the land. But the last twenty years, comrade, for the poor it's been like living in a furnace. The blood of the poor is pretty near run dry. . . ."

The voice of the peasant—so tragic, so filled with hatred—cut into Wang's heart, word by word. An uncontrollable wave of bitterness rose in Wang's breast. But now bitterness, tears—those were all past. Times were different. Society was different. Soon the people here too, with hearty laughter, in the bright red glow of joyous torches, would be marching forward.

Happy, Wang forgot about the pain of bygone days, forgot that he was in the strange and distant south. Before long, they caught up with some troops. They could see several big carts. The horses turned their heads to look at the glare of the approaching torches. Wang was sure that these waggons were the ambulances of another unit, that his own division had joined with other forces which had followed the main highway. Crossing lakes and rivers, scaling mountainous heights, the division not only was forced to leave their big carts behind—even the division commander's horse was gone.

Wang rushed over to the PLA men, yelling for joy. The men in the carts looked at him.

"Have you seen my outfit?" he shouted.

"There are plenty of troops here, all walking with their feet pointing south. Who knows which outfit is yours?"

"What? You haven't seen them? Carrying mortars on the back of their necks?"

A young soldier stood up on one of the big carts, and called in a squeaky voice:

"I saw them! I saw them! They were carrying everything!"

"That's them! Where are they?"

"Not far beyond here. About four or five *li*. Say, big brother, did you fall behind because you can't walk?"

The youngster's kidding didn't bother Wang a bit. Head up, he marched on with a laugh:

"Can't walk? What are you doing on that cart, little cousin? Did you ride here all the way from the Northeast?"

Their torches dancing, the guerillas, laughing, passed cart after cart. Artillerymen were resting on the sides of the road, horses were munching grass, soldiers were moving forward. A dozen sick and wounded stragglers had hobbled and limped to join Wang and the guerillas during their march. Now they had caught up with the army at last.

While the troops halted by the roadside, officers were busy reconnoitering the terrain, studying the situation, making contact with brother units. All were waiting for the new orders.

Division commander Chen was sitting on the ground, sick. He was suffering a bad attack of malaria. The ailment had tormented him all afternoon, leaving him drained of strength. Now he turned and ordered his orderly to find out who was making such a racket in the rear.

"Tell them to be a little quieter!" he said with annoyance.

Liang Pin went personally to see what was going on, and when Wang saw him approaching, he stepped forward and saluted:

"Reporting to the commissar—these comrades are the Hunan guerillas!"

Liang Pin immediately strode over to these men dressed in every kind of peasant costume. As he grasped the hand of one of them, he noticed that the guerilla was weeping. From all sides, soldiers came running. The guerillas had arrived! Everyone looked at the commissar, standing tall amid the torches. He raised his hand:

"We've joined forces—comrades!"

The firelight gleamed in Liang Pin's eyes. His eyes were moist, but his voice was clarion bright. The soldiers applauded wildly. Division commander Chen and the chief of staff crowded in among the men. Liang Pin continued:

"Comrades—this meeting is of great historic significance. It was here in Hunan that Chairman Mao led the harvest uprisings. Today, Chairman Mao has sent us here—" For a moment, Liang Pin's words were drowned out by applause. ". . . Guerilla comrades, our People's Liberation Army began here. Afterwards, for the sake of winning victory for the revolution throughout the country, we had to leave you. You've been savagely oppressed, you had nothing to eat, you had no place to live. We know. Many people were arrested, many were slaughtered. We know. . . . Now we've met again. The bone and flesh of brothers have joined together again. Comrades! We'll never forget those who gave their lives! You've taught us, made us understand, that without the local people, without the workers' and peasants' guerillas, victory is impossible. It's our honor to carry out Chairman Mao's order to march south. We don't try to avoid difficulties, we're not afraid of hardships. We want to learn from you comrades in the guerillas, learn how you win through the toughest odds! For more than ten years, every day, the enemy slashed and murdered. But the people of China never surrender! Now the enemy is just ahead of us. Comrades, we're going to drive forward together! We're going to wipe them out once and for all!"

A tremendous storm of cheers rocked the little mountain valley. There was bitterness and hatred in their sound. But there was triumph too. They rang with the pain of the past—and they sang with the hope of the future.

The flames of hundreds of campfires brightened the twisting mountain road. By the roadside, the troops rested, ate, made camp.

Lei Ying, chief of the liaison section, who had been sent ahead to make contact with the other units, returned with a division chief of staff. Chen, Liang Pin and the staff officer then walked along the line of campfires to hold a meeting up front. The situation was as follows: That morning the enemy had been run to earth. An enemy division and two garrison regiments were concentrated in a city. They had been intending to run toward the west, in the direction of Yuanling and Kuchi, the

previous night. But we had dispatched strong forces to occupy a county-seat west of the city, and cut off that avenue of escape. The flanking attack originally planned for Chen's division was now no longer necessary. Instead, Corps was ordering the division to ready itself to take the lead in an assault on the city. Chen therefore decided to send the regiment under Yung and Tsai to strike from the rear flank, in co-ordination with part of another division. Between the regiment and its objective was the confluence of two rivers. The Tungting Lake was to the east. At night, from high ground, there were only misty white patches of water. The regiment would have to cross the rivers by boat and circle around the enemy. To avoid being spotted by enemy planes, they must cover five to ten li before daybreak.

Time was very short. It was going to be extremely difficult for the regiment to carry out its order, but Yung and Tsai were determined that it would be done. A number of guerillas were assigned to the attacking units to serve as guides into the city. The man attached to the regiment was none other than Wei, the guerilla who had swum across the Yangtse to meet them. As the first grey streaks of dawn became visible through the heavy fog, a line of boats spread out at a fixed distance from one another, was already moving across the river.

The river was at full flood. From the boats, the men could see many villages and trees completely inundated by the waters. What appeared to be barren groves in the dark distance, inhabited only by fireflies, on sailing near, proved to be submerged hamlets. Dogs barked fiercely at the boats. Some of the houses were half under water. Of others, only the roofs could be seen.

This was the first time the regiment had gone into battle with all its armament loaded on boats. It was a novel, exciting situation to the men. They kept up a stream of jokes and banter:

"We're sailors now! . . . In answer to the government's call, in 1950 a People's Navy will be established! . . ."

Only Wang's heart was still heavy. Company political instructor Chun-ho had talked with him the night before. He hadn't scolded Wang, he had encouraged him. But Wang couldn't forget the words of the peasant guerilla. Originally Wang had been in low spirits. He had considered the south a terrible place—hot, stinking, full of water and mosquitoes; he thought he'd die of heat if not of sickness. Slowly, he had lost his fighting determination. He had been unable to see any way out. Now, everything was different. He had found his own brothers. Their sufferings had made him recall something he had said when he was a peasant in a grievance-telling meeting in his village: "I know that all the oppressed people under the sun are the same!" How happy the guerillas had been to hear about land reform! They were still having a hard time, while he had already received his share of land. So he was bothered by the heat, eh? Well, when the army went into the Northeast, wasn't it bothered by the cold? He thought of the big campaigns in the

snowstorms and how they had given commissar Tsai rheumatism. Tsai was so thin. When it was cold, his bones ached. But now, sweat was pouring down Tsai's face too. Wasn't he suffering from the heat? Time and again our officers called on us to do a good job of this southern campaign, Wang said to himself. A dozen times the political instructor explained things to me, talked to me, tried to help me, but still I fell behind. . . . The more he thought, the worse he felt. . . . Soon the revolution will be won. There'll be a new China. All the comrades are tearing ahead. If I keep on this way, I'll end up out of the revolution! . . .

All morning, Wang lay in the boat, pondering, swearing at himself. Finally, he made up his mind to have a talk with the political instructor. Chun-ho went and sat with him on the prow.

"Instructor!" Wang blurted. "I've let my officers down! I've let the Party down! . . ." Tears rolled from his eyes.

Chun-ho knew well the virtues of the fighters. Their speech was always on the same level as their political consciousness. He comforted Wang:

"A man can get somewhere once he admits his mistakes. You've been sick the past few days, old man. You've not been used to the climate. It's been pretty rough."

"No, instructor. The trouble was that I couldn't think things out."

"How did you finally do it?"

An angry light flashed in Wang's eyes. "Listening to the guerilla comrades, instructor! I keep hearing people crying in the places that haven't been liberated yet. Those people are suffering—worse than we suffered in the 'Manchukuo' days. . . ."

Wang's words deepened Chun-ho's understanding. What commissar Liang Pin had told him on the north bank of the Yangtse had stimulated the vital, young political instructor greatly. Now this statement from a simple soldier, who had gone through torment to arrive at the truth, helped him see even more clearly the intimate relationship between the war of liberation and the stricken people.

Chun-ho and Wang had a long heart to heart talk. Finally, they turned to a discussion of the coming battle. They both agreed that, shoulder to shoulder with brother units, they had to make a smashing job of it. Both men were going to go all out.

"I want to do as well as I did in Liaohsi—" began Wang.

The political instructor sternly cut him short.

"Fighting well isn't a question of one man. Our whole company has to co-ordinate like clockwork. Our strength lies in our unity." Chun-ho raised a clenched fist.

"Don't worry, instructor," Wang said with a soft laugh. "I was backward when I couldn't figure things out. Now, just watch me!"

Chun-ho gripped Wang's hand in his, and grinned. They ended their chat.

Wang felt cleanly bathed, refreshed. His eyes sparkled, there was a lively expression on his face, his spine became straight and firm. . . . He went back from the prow to the hold.

Chun-ho remained seated on the prow, looking at the reflections of the clouds in the water. Difficult surroundings change a soldier, he mused. He knew Wang better than Wang knew himself. Wang was sincere, honest, courageous, but he had his faults. The Japanese had conscripted him into forced labor, he had run away and become a fugitive. He was mistreated, and he suffered. But he had stopped being a worker long ago. He had picked up many loafer's habits. As a result, though he had been decorated for valor in battle, the Party had not approved his application for membership. The branch secretary had felt that Wang's revolutionary standpoint still wasn't firm enough, that he still required a period of tempering. Now, he had been tested by rigorous circumstances, and he fought his way through. Nothing delighted Chun-ho more than to see such a change in a soldier at the front. . . . Chun-ho hoped that Wang would be a spark to make the already high-spirited company soar to even greater heights, to send it bursting into flame! In this battle, Chun-ho wanted to fight well beside his comrades. In this final campaign of annihilation, he would make the men never forget him, he would make them remember how a Party leader did his duty to the finish. . . .

As his boat drew near another one, Chun-ho leaped across. He started his political work—stirring up the men's fighting spirit.

Just as Chun-ho expected, Wang proved of real value at this vital juncture. After Wang finished talking to the political instructor, he sought out Yang. They had not spoken to one another for more than ten days, since their quarrel on the north bank of the Yangtse. Yang too had been gloomy and morose ever since. He sprawled sulking in the hold, still unwilling to be the first to speak. Ignoring his friend's manner, Wang addressed him apologetically:

"Yang, old fellow, we've each got our own ideas. But we have to team up during the battle."

"When was I ever against teamwork?" Yang retorted indolently.

"Old Yang, let's put it this way—I've got plenty of reason to criticize myself. I've let everyone down." Wang frowned. "You say your south is good, I say my Northeast is good. I still can't see anything that this place has over the Northeast. But that's not the question. We didn't come down south to have a good time. We came to do a job—to liberate all the people of China. Right? The things I've done wrong—I hope you won't hold them against me."

Yang just couldn't take talk like this. He leaped up and grasped both of Wang's hands. Speechless with emotion, it was a long time before he could wrench out:

"Old Wang, I was the one who was wrong!"

Both men were silent for a while, then Yang spoke again:

"I used to be backward. When we came south, I became a hard worker all right. I kept thinking that I was getting closer and closer to home, and I was happy. I didn't care how bad other people felt. All I wanted was to keep on talking about how wonderful everything seemed to me. I really didn't think about how tough it was going to be to win this final victory. That night we reached the Yangtse and you brought in the guerilla comrade, I listened to every word he said. I couldn't sleep well for a couple of nights after that. I began to worry—maybe everything wasn't so rosy, maybe the Kuomintang had wiped out my family long ago. . . . Old Wang—you're right! To liberate the people in the south—we've got to work together!"

Night was falling. The late sunset clouds reflected crimson in the lakes and rivers. This was to be their first big battle since they had crossed the Yangtse. Looking over the water, Wang recalled how they had crossed the Sungari River in the summer of 1947. The peasants who had just joined the army were thrilled. "We're crossing the big river!" How quickly the next two years had passed! Wang had taken a drink of the river water that day, and not long ago he had drunk again from the Yangtse, the biggest river in China.

"What river is this?" he asked Yang. "Son of a bitch, all these twists and turns! In the Northeast, our rivers run straight as an arrow!"

Yang pointed, "Look over there, east. The Tungting Lake—one of the greatest in our country!"

Wang reached his hands down to scoop up a taste of the lake water which flowed into the river. Yang became wrapped in thought. A little later, he asked:

"What do you think—will I be able to join the Party?"

"I think so," replied Wang. He too was wondering—will the political instructor take up my membership with the branch committee when we come back from this battle?

XI

After reaching front line command post, the division headquarters prepared all day for the attack to be launched at dawn. Everyone was busy and excited. Lei Ying, chief of the liaison section, was constantly going in and out of the door of command headquarters, located in a grove of bamboos. Younger, livelier, more cheerful than ever, he embodied the admirable qualities so characteristic of the men in the headquarters command. They were rushed, but they were happy and got things done. Their accomplishments were not due to enthusiasm and courage alone, however. What licked the enemy was the accuracy of their judgments, and the detailed, scientific way they prepared for a battle. Today, another factor was also making its influence felt—the longer and harder

the march, the more the men wanted to fight. From their hearts they longed for a battle "that would really be a battle!" instead of all this endless chasing. And so the preparatory work was being done with extreme thoroughness.

Only Chen, the division commander, was resting. He lay on a bamboo bed, several telephones placed on the table and chairs on either side of him. The lines led to the assault units, to the first reserves, to the various artillery positions. . . . Chen's siege of malaria was at its height. Last night, only with the support of his orderly and a staff officer was he able to get over a not particularly high mountain top. Now, at dusk, a medical orderly entered to announce that it was time to eat his quinine. Chen's face burned with fever, his eyes were dry and glittering. For the seventh time, he had asked a young staff officer to hold the military map before him. But Chen couldn't see clearly. The red arrows and blue arcs all blurred together. His nerves taut, Chen blinked his eyes hard several times, and his vision cleared. The map was no longer a drawing. It became a tactical panorama of military positions, waterways, forests, rolling land, cities, and well chosen break-through points, strong fire positions of the enemy and of us. . . . He seemed to see our troops moving along the lines he had personally selected. . . . He didn't hear the words of the orderly, but kept staring at the map until he fell back dazed by the high fever. Though Chen's head rested on the pillow, his mind was still active, contemplating the new deployment of one of the points of firepower. But he was unable to speak. Great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. After a long while, he finally asked in a low voice:

"Where's 307?" (Commissar Liang Pin's designation.)

"He hasn't come back from the assault regiment yet," said the staff officer.

As a matter of fact, Liang Pin was, at that moment, returning to division headquarters, the moving pre-battle declarations of the fighters still ringing in his ears. On the way, he stopped to inspect two important artillery positions. Because Chen was incapacitated by illness from taking command, Liang Pin was especially meticulous today.

In the trench beside the position, he talked with the pockmarked battery commander. The latter had been heart-broken ever since they crossed the Yangtse, because on that historic occasion there had been no call for him to bring his big guns into play. This time he had brought his battery down the main highway at full speed, and was beaming all over because they had caught up before the battle started.

"Commissar," he kept repeating, "we guarantee to knock a hole open in five minutes flat, commissar!"

The artillery position was a hive of activity. The ammunition men had opened the big cases and were carefully wiping each shell with a cloth; gunners walked back and forth; drivers were on all fours, their backsides

sticking up in the air, widening the position and planting camouflage branches. Liang Pin was well satisfied. The morale of the men was high.

As he approached command headquarters through the bamboo grove, the commissar began to walk on tiptoe. Leaning forward, he slowly entered the little house, now being filled with the fading twilight. Then he jumped with surprise—Chen was talking on the telephone.

"Orderly!" Liang Pin snapped angrily. "Is this how you take care of the commander!"

The medical orderly stood with his hands helplessly at his sides, his eyes fixed on Chen. He had nothing to say.

Chen put down the telephone like a mischievous child. "I told the assault regiment to change a firepower point," he said.

"306 (only when he was very grave did the commissar address Chen by this designation), you must rest! We can manage."

Liang Pin flung his sweat-soaked military tunic on a chair. His eyes flashed with excitement.

"They're doing quite well, old Chen! Don't underestimate them. The officers have all improved a lot. What firepower point do you mean?"

"Staff officer!" the division commander called. "Bring the map!"

"No, no," Liang Pin interjected hastily. "You don't have to bother. We can take care of it." His big frame tall and erect, the commissar hurried to the table and bent over the map.

Time was creeping forward, onward. . . .

The commissar made several telephone calls, then the small room became very quiet.

It was dark. The battle preparations had been completed with extreme thoroughness. All that remained now was to wait. When the time came, victory would follow.

Again Chen was gripped by malaria. The high fever made him lose consciousness. Dazed, he seemed to see thousands of tongues of flame leaping and dancing around him, burning him. Suddenly, he recovered for a moment, then his mind went blank again. He could vaguely remember that night on the cliff. He had decided that torches should be lit—many, many torches . . . bright red torches. . . . Tense, Chen abruptly sat up on the bed, only to fall back again weakly. "Fire . . ." he mumbled. "Fire. . . ."

Liang Pin watched him. After a gruelling march of more than three weeks, the commissar's own eyes were sunken and his face was pale. But the two lines on either side of his mouth were carved with deeper determination than ever.

The battle was about to start. Scouts had already made contact with the regiment that circled around down the river to the enemy's rear. They reported that it could send a battalion to make an assault landing at the appointed time.

Liang Pin cranked a direct line phone to the regiment that was to

launch the frontal attack. He questioned them on their preparations. Here too he received a satisfactory report, "Everything is going fine!"

Yes—everything is going fine. Standing with his hand resting on the leather case of the captured American field phone, Liang Pin lifted his head. He was thinking.

He was reflecting on the events of the past few weeks.

Ah, it hadn't been so simple. Some said this trek had been harder than the 25,000 *li* Long March. Still, after all, they had been advancing victoriously. He remembered there was a period during the campaigns in the Northeast that people said was really tough. But it too had passed, and we had triumphed. There had been so many trying periods in the past twenty-odd years, and we got through every one of them. Liang Pin could see his white-haired old mother, dry as a stick, leaning on his bosom, weeping, her shoulders shaking. Yet there had been fire in her eyes when she pointed at the place his father had been murdered and said firmly, "See, over there!" . . . He thought of the many comrades who gave their lives. His own brother was among them. . . . A tremendous tension and pressure were mounting in Liang Pin.

Just then, a copy of the newspaper published by the Army Political Department was delivered. Liang Pin certainly admired the comrades who could turn out a newspaper under such difficult circumstances. He asked the orderly to light another candle. It was Liang Pin's last and already was half consumed. He had been carrying it in his brief case. The candle burned with a cheerful glow as Liang Pin sat down beside it to avidly read the news. And there on the front page—a speech by Chairman Mao! The complete text of his talk at the preparatory meeting of the new Political Consultative Conference! Liang Pin was breathless with delight. He read the speech carefully. He felt his whole body grow tight as he reached the concluding paragraph:

Once China's destiny has been grasped in the people's own hands, the Chinese people will see China shining like the rising sun, casting its radiance over all the land and quickly drying up the muddy puddles left behind by the reactionary government. The wounds of war will be healed. We will build up an entirely new, strong, and prosperous People's Democratic Republic of China, not only in name but in fact.

Gravely, Liang Pin stood up. His brain had been racing as he read. Countless recollections again became fresh in his mind.

When he had travelled from the old revolutionary base in Kiangsi to the Northwest, and later from the Sungari River to the Yangtse, he had seen so many peasants turned into homeless wanderers, so many flame-gutted villages, so many destroyed bridges, so many railroad stations that had become heaps of rubble. . . . In the past twenty years, the enemy had wrought havoc throughout the country. Yet the people struggled forcefully to their feet to create their own world. He remembered one

clear morning at a little railroad station that resembled a piece of scorched earth. A temporary shack of mud bricks had been erected, and from here train after train was dispatched south. Day and night, the people labored to restore what had been ruined, to quickly get on with the war. "This is New China, our China!" he had said to himself. "Only today is the country ours. China has been severely wounded, deeply wounded. But we love this country, because our people have won it with their blood. China is ours now, ours for the first time!" Liang Pin's eyes had shone, and he looked affectionately out across the vast, limitless expanse. The word "ours" embraced all those thoughts and emotions he was, at that moment, unable to express. He seemed to have found a new understanding of the long bitter struggle. "Comrade," he had said to himself, "as long as the country belongs to us, we'll turn barren soil into gold!" Deep feeling had brought tears to his eyes. . . .

Still holding Chairman Mao's speech in his hands, Liang Pin was smiling happily. All of a sudden, the division commander sat bolt upright, his inflamed eyes staring, then lay down again, muttering thickly, "Fire! Fire!"

Shaken out of his reverie, the commissar looked at his wristwatch. A seemingly irrelevant reply sprang into his mind—"Comrade, the fires won't burn much longer!" What he actually meant was that although the enemy still had a foothold on the China mainland, and any place the enemy occupied was like a pool of fire for the people who lived there, now, we were going to quench those fires forever.

Lei Ying, the liaison section chief, and Chai Hao, swarthy pockmarked leader of the reconnaissance section came bursting in to report, "They've sent up the signal flares!" The regiment under Yung and Tsai had made its landing behind the enemy and had commenced the attack.

Liang Pin grabbed the direct line to the artillery positions.

"Hello, hello!" he roared. "Commence firing! *Huochi*, you dragged those shells over the mountains one at a time. Now, make sure you aim them straight. Make them drop on the heads of the enemy, on the heads of the reactionaries! Get started!"

Then, the three men swept out of the room like a tornado.

In the distance, the sound of machinegun fire could be heard. Suddenly, the air was shaken by a heavy vibration, as the first artillery volley boomed out across the sky toward the enemy. There were bursts of flame, followed by huge, thumping explosions. More flame sprang up in the enemy position, a whole string of fiercely licking fires. After Sze-ping-kai, Chinchou, Liaohsi, Tientsin and Peking, the deadly accurate People's Artillery was opening its first heavy barrage in the deep south below the Yangtse.

Liang Pin watched through his field glasses, chuckling.

Just then, division commander Chen bounded up from behind. He had immediately regained consciousness when the artillery started. Still

pale, he was both serious and happy. After standing beside the commissar for a moment, he said:

"Give them to me!" And he took the glasses from Liang Pin.

Chen's head stopped spinning. "Communications men!" he ordered urgently. "Move the telephones out here!" Chen was personally taking command of the attack.

About ten *li* from our frontal position, covering the rear flank of the enemy, was high ground and a river. It was on the bank of this river that Company Six, acting on orders from the regiment, made its landing. Chin, the company commander, and Chun-ho, the political instructor, both were gloomy because the job of spearheading the assault had been given to Company Seven. But they began encouraging their men as soon as they got ashore:

"When Seven knocks open a hole, Six has to pour through and fill it in!"

The commander and instructor stood waiting in the misty dawn. Then, both men raised their heads to watch six flares sail high into the sky and flicker brilliantly.

Wei, the guerilla, was looking upwards too. After over a dozen years in the dark misery of enemy rule, at last had come this day when he could see our own people, without the slightest concealment, openly signal an attack on the enemy. Wei wept for joy.

They could hear the tremendous barrage start to fall on the distant frontal position of the enemy, sounding like the earth and skies were splitting asunder. Wonderful! Artillery shells pelted like rain! As though a whole ammunition dump were exploding! Flames were leaping up against the dark backdrop of the sky—here, there, like the lighting of many little candles. Then, in a flash, all the little candles were burning together in one huge fierce blaze.

The sound of rifle fire became very intense. A messenger from regiment raced up with an order for the commander of Company Six. Chin swung his arm forward. Number Six promptly went into action.

Wang patted the breast pocket on the left side of his tunic to make sure his Certificate for Valor in Battle was still there. Then, he ran boldly ahead. As they were charging across a paddy field toward higher ground, in the light of the fires he got a glimpse of Yang running by, bent forward in a crouch. Clenching his teeth, Wang tore after him, caught up, and then passed him. Wang was the first man to leap into the enemy second line trenches. But as he jumped, the earth on the edge of the trench gave way and he fell. Yang leaped in right behind him to see an enemy soldier raising his bayonet to thrust it at the fallen Wang. The trench was narrow and Yang had no time to bring up his rifle. He flung himself on the enemy and grappled with him. At that instant there was the blinding explosion as a bursting shell shattered the air. Wang who had seen all this, scrambled to his feet with a shout:

"Old Yang!"

There was no answer. He could hear someone on the ground gasping for breath. He knelt down and groped for Yang's face. His hands came away sticky with blood. "Old Yang! Old Yang!" he cried. There was another burst of light. He could see Yang's colorless face, and a terrible gaping cut shining with bright blood that ran from his temple to his chin. Yang was dead. Grief-stricken, Wang held his friend's body tightly in his arms. He raised his eyes. Ahead the firing was heavy. Lines of black shadows—our own men—were rushing forward into the attack. Evidently, this enemy position had been wiped out and we were continuing to drive on.

He carried Yang and placed him beneath a tree. He made a careful note of its position, then, with tears in his eyes, ran after his comrades.

As Wang moved swiftly forward through the hole in the enemy line, through the flames that glowed like scarlet banners, he saw a man racing ahead with a flag. Wei, the guerilla, his head down, was pounding after the flag bearer. Wang knew that this must be the direction the attack was taking, and he increased his stride to catch up. Suddenly, there was a great blast. The man with the flag went down. Wang rushed over to him. It was the political instructor, Chun-ho, his chest ripped open by an artillery shell, his body covered with blood. He was still waving his hand forward, shouting:

"Communists! Keep going! We've won! Keep going! . . ."

Hot tears gushed from Wang's eyes. He took the red flag from the political instructor's hand and charged ahead. The extremely heavy fire indicated plainly that the enemy was being wiped out at the front. Day was breaking. . . .

Mrs. Shih Ching

Ai Wu

Just as on any other day, the morning sun spread its fine light over the wooded valley, until the dewy leaves and grass glistened with a dazzling brightness. But fine as the day was, Mrs. Shih Ching felt thoroughly dejected. Her face, crumpled in misery, looked like an overcast sky which threatened to rain at any moment.

Everything was topsyturvy. In the house, stools had been overturned and lamps broken. Footprints crisscrossed before the door and the spinach had been trampled in her vegetable garden. The tomatoes crushed into pools of red juice got on her nerves particularly. They looked so like the blood her husband had shed in his struggle with the *pao chang** the previous night.

After a bus had rumbled past, an unusual, ominous silence fell upon the highway on the hillside. In the sunlight the jagged rocks scattered over the hill looked as ugly as bald scabby heads. Viewed from a distance, the road was lost among the rocks. A strong atmosphere of primitive savageness hung over the place.

Mrs. Shih and her children lived in the only cottage in the valley; but she had never had such a fearful sense of loneliness when her husband was at home. The slope between the stream and the hill kept her busy day and night. With a blue kerchief round her head, she went there every day to dig, weed or pick vegetables. Even after the stars had come out, a light evening mist had swallowed up the woods and cottage, and the baby left by the door had begun to cry, she could still be found working in the fields, gathering melons, beans, egg-plants or peppers. Next morning she would sell them at the market five *li* away and buy some rice with the proceeds.

Now Shih Ching the master of the house had gone, perhaps never to return. She had cried and cried the previous night at his departure,

* Shortly after the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression Chiang Kai-shek started a civil war against the Chinese people. The peasants, then unwilling to serve in the army, were always taken away by force, generally at night, by the *pao chang*, head of a hundred households under the Kuomintang regime.

beating her breast and tearing her hair. And this morning found her standing on the bank of the stream, gazing disconsolately into the distance. In her despair, she had stretched out her hand for a rope to hang herself. But then a vision of her five children flashed across her mind, and their prattle seemed to be ringing in her ears. She took a fresh grip on herself.

Mrs. Shih knew she must live on for her children's sake, if not for her own. The *pao chang* had struck her in the arm the day before when she rushed to her husband's defence; but medicinal herbs could easily cure that. So long as she had the use of her hands, she was sure she could keep the slope in cultivation and bring up her children. The past nine years had shown that Shih Ching, as a school servant, could never earn enough to feed the whole family; and it had only been thanks to the vegetable plots into which she had put so much work that the family pot had been kept boiling.

So Mrs. Shih made up her mind to live on and open up more of the waste land. "Heaven bless my man and send him back safe and sound!" she prayed.

She spent her days hoping and toiling. As time passed her sun-tanned face grew thin and her eyes sad and dim. She seldom smiled, but when selling vegetables at the market often quarrelled with people over trifles.

When their family first came here nine years ago, it had been a barren place. Overgrown with brambles, twisted shrubs and weeds, it was rarely visited even by sheep or cattle. Few woodcutters or herdsmen cared to show up in this remote valley. All the year round, the only sign of life was the birds that flew above the woods. Hunters, it is true, came over once or twice; but they soon lost interest in the place because the brambles tore their trousers and made it hard to find the quarry.

However, to escape bombing during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, a state college from another province had been evacuated to the open ground on the other side of the valley; and Shih Ching, a school servant, had built a simple thatched cottage on this side for his mother and wife. The school grounds, including the valley where their cottage stood, had been requisitioned by the government and made over to the college. In the evening, groups of students would stroll and sing beside the stream, until the whole valley echoed to their songs. In summer they went rowing, the white of their uniforms flashing among the green reeds. Nobody could have called the valley lonely then.

The Shihs were not emigrants from some other province, who had moved here with the college. Their home, where Shih Ching had been a peasant working on rented land, was only a few days' journey from this valley. But, thinking that if he worked for a state organization the *pao chang* would be unable to plague him any more, Shih Ching had put down his hoe and moved over to the college. Since then his horny hands,

accustomed to tending young wheat and rice, had learned to serve the teachers and students.

Since farming was his second nature, he itched to plough the fertile dark slope the moment he set eyes on it. Besides, prices were rocketing, and he could not hope to support his family on his meagre wages and rice allowance. So he devoted his free time in the evenings and on Sundays to clearing away the shrubs, brambles and weeds on the slope.

His wife joined him with even greater enthusiasm. As soon as she had finished preparing the two meals of the day, you could see her sturdy figure in faded blue working away on the land, her patched sleeves rolled up over her elbows. Often she got her hands scratched and her clothes muddled, but she kept hard at it even when she was big with child. It was she, in fact, who did most of the work there; and her competence won her endless praise from the professors' wives who strolled that way.

The soil for its part did not disappoint them. It yielded them vegetables in spring and winter, wheat and rape in summer, and beans and gourds in autumn, all of which could be exchanged for rice. They raised chickens and pigs too. And a new baby arrived every other year, until the little cottage was teeming with life.

When Shih Ching's mother fell ill and died, they buried her at one end of the slope where her spirit could easily watch over the place to protect the family from evil. And at the spring and winter festivals each year, the whole family went solemnly to sweep her grave and offer sacrifice.

Since settling down in the valley, they had lived undisturbed. So far nobody had come to investigate them or to collect rents or taxes, and they were apparently in undisputed possession of the valley. The *pao chang* did indeed come once to look at the place; but even he dared not stir up any trouble after he learnt that Shih Ching was working for the college.

With a little money on hand, the Shihs started improving and enlarging the cottage to make of it a solid, permanent home. They planted orange and loquat trees around the house, and peach and plum trees on the bank of the stream. In spring the trees were bright with blossom, in autumn the branches were loaded with golden fruit—there was always something to delight the eyes of travellers looking out of the bus as it passed on the other side of the valley.

In those days Mrs. Shih was well content. Sometimes when a bus rumbled by, shaking the valley, she would raise her head to look at the passengers packed inside and the luggage piled on top. "What keeps folk always on the move?" she wondered. "Why don't they stay peacefully at home like us?"

As soon as the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression ended in victory, the college moved back to its original location. A native of Szechuan and head of a big family, Shih Ching could not afford to go so far with it. Nor did he like the idea of leaving the land he had cultivated

with his own hands for almost a decade. So he and his family stayed on alone in the valley.

The land requisitioned for the college was now given back to its original owner, Landlord Wu. And the school buildings were turned over to him as compensation for the use of his land. There was one big stone building, and into this the landlord moved. Bird cages were hung in the veranda outside the principal's office, while fowl ran in and out of the office door. The classrooms and dormitories, being flimsy, dilapidated structures, were left empty, soon to be filled with cobwebs.

Shih Ching lost both his job and the protection the college had given him. First of all the *pao chang* came to make trouble. Then he brought some thugs to Shih's cottage one night, to force him to join the Kuomintang army. They threatened him and shook their fists in his face. After a vain struggle, Shih Ching was taken away.

The place was deserted. No more songs echoed in the woods, and nobody strolled by the stream at dusk. A sombre silence settled upon the valley, broken only occasionally by the buses that rolled by. Mrs. Shih kept a stiff upper lip, and fought against her loneliness. All the company she had was the steep cliffs, the gently flowing stream, and the trees that whispered in the wind. Even her mother-in-law's grass-covered grave mound became a source of comfort. Above all there were the children, grown bigger now, who filled the place with their shouts and laughter. Gradually she grew accustomed to her loneliness, though sometimes, looking at the passing bus, she would murmur wistfully: "When will he come back to us?"

One day, four months after Shih Ching had left, three men swaggered up to the vegetable garden. Two of them, who were wearing jackets, started measuring it with a tape. Putting down the child at her breast, Mrs. Shih called out to them:

"Don't tread on the seeds I've just sown!"

But the men with the measuring lines went on tramping up and down, paying no attention to her at all.

"Are you deaf?" she sang out furiously. "Why don't you do as you're asked? Do you think seeds will grow after you've trampled them like that?"

The measurers threw her a casual glance, then went on as if this had nothing to do with them.

"What are you shouting about?" retorted the third man, dressed in a long gown, who was standing on the slope looking on contemptuously as he puffed slowly at a cigarette.

"This is my land!" she snapped, breathless with anger. "Haven't I the right to protest?"

"Your land, eh?" said the smoker with a sinister laugh.

"It's time she woke up," put in one of the measurers.

"Your land? When did you buy it?" went on the smoker huffily.

For a moment, the question put her out. But, being an intelligent woman, she found the answer a minute later.

"Of course it's mine! The school gave it me."

"Gave it you?" sneered the smoker. "The school'll get a lawsuit out of it."

By this time the two other men were measuring the plot of land surrounding the cottage. As they approached the house, Mrs. Shih's two dogs, which had been barking at them from a distance, closed in on them furiously. And she was so enraged that she wouldn't lift a finger to wave the dogs back. Bitterly angry, she went to inspect the damage they had done. In some places, cabbage which had just begun to sprout had been crushed out of existence; and her heart bled at the sight as if it were her own children that had been trampled upon. Loosening the soil around them to uncover the dead seedlings, she cursed:

"Damn you! The way you destroy things, you'll come to a bad end yourselves!"

When the intruders had left, the valley became quiet again. Leaves rustled lightly in the wind and woodpeckers tapped at tree trunks. Mrs. Shih sat down in the doorway to suckle her youngest again.

"Ma, who were those men?" the eldest child asked uneasily.

"That's none of your business," Mother snapped. "They're a gang of bandits."

She was appalled at the damage done. Of course, the seeds themselves hadn't cost much; but how many of them would come up now after all this trampling? Wasn't it as bad as open theft? However, she could do nothing but pray quietly:

"Heaven help us! Don't let people like that come again."

But Heaven proved as irresponsive as wood or stone. A day or two later the men turned up again. This time only the two men in short jackets had come. They marched right up to the cottage, shouting at the dogs that were barking at them. When Mrs. Shih saw them her face clouded.

"What do you want now?" she asked uneasily.

"Come to tell you something!" one of them yelled. "You've to pay Landlord Wu three hundred thousand yuan deposit for the four *mou* of land you've rented from him. The money'll be returned to you when you stop using the land." Producing a sheet of paper from his pocket, he continued, "It's time you got wise. This is Landlord Wu's land, not yours, you're tilling. He has the deed. You can't beat him in a lawsuit even if you have the county magistrate on your side."

Knowing that all this was put down in black and white, Mrs. Shih thought it would be useless to argue, and her face was a picture of despair. But bracing herself, she cried furiously, "I couldn't raise such a sum, even if I sold my children!"

"What are you shouting about?" was the scathing reply. "That's

only the deposit. You'll have to give the landlord another five *tou* of rice per year as rent."

"It just can't be done!" cried Mrs. Shih. "Look at this land—what rice can it grow? You must want to kill us, demanding all that rice!"

"Why are you bawling at me? Just to show you've a loud voice?" The man suddenly lashed himself into a fury. "If you don't want to pay, you can clear out. Nobody will stop you."

"That's right—better clear out," growled the other man, who all this time had been brandishing a stick at the dogs. "I've never seen such a place—a vixen of a woman, and regular savage dogs."

Thrusting the agreement at her, the two men made off without a glance behind. Too angry to speak, Mrs. Shih tore the paper to pieces and threw it after them. Then, looking at the slope behind the cottage, she said bitterly, "I'm not to be turned out of the valley that easy! For ten years we've toiled to get this place into shape. Our sweat during all those years would fill hundreds of buckets. Even if they come to drive me out, I'm not going."

Mrs. Shih was no longer haunted by a sense of loneliness and isolation. Her only fear now was that Landlord Wu might make more trouble. She was determined not to move from the valley, no matter what dirty tricks he might play. She couldn't afford to leave the place. During her ten years' stay here, she had come to know the hills, the woods and the little stream so well that she always thought of them as her own. Her heart warmed at the sight of the slope over which she walked barefooted from dawn to dusk, the green vegetables, ruddy oranges and yellow melons. Looking for firewood in the hills, she would pick only withered branches, but never had the heart to hack at the living wood; for these trees were her neighbours, and she loved to watch them grow.

The little stream was another of her favourites. Without its water, she knew she would have had difficulty in growing anything. Every New Year's Eve she would go to its bank, and in heartfelt gratitude burn incense and paper money there. When astonishment was expressed at the unusual size of the beans and tomatoes she took to market, she would say cheerfully, "It's good land over there. The soil is rich, and there's a stream nearby."

But then, afraid such a glowing picture of the valley might tempt other people to move in, she would frown and add with a sigh, "The only trouble is the weeds. If you leave them for three days, they choke the place up. We have to work twice as hard there as anywhere else, drat it! It's back-breaking work."

It is easy to understand Mrs. Shih's consternation when they threatened to drive her away. She felt she must hold on to this valley at all costs. Landlord Wu must have eyed this land greedily for some time; but it was only now that her husband had gone that he dared bully her.

"All right! They think they can get away with it because I'm a

woman. Well, I'll show them what a woman can do," she promised herself, nodding emphatically.

She put her hoe, scythe and axe right beside the door. If any one came to throw her out, she would seize one of these implements to show him that a woman like herself was not to be bullied. When working in the field, she would straighten up from time to time to see whether anybody was coming up the small path on the left side of the valley. Sometimes she even sent her children to play on the hill from which they could keep an eye on the entrance to the valley. She didn't want to be caught napping.

A few days later, an old man showed up. Armed with a club, Mrs. Shih stood guard at the cottage door, her eyes fixed on the approaching figure. Her face was grimly set. The dogs barked furiously. The atmosphere was so tense that the youngest child was frightened and started crying.

The old man halted before the door, his face flushed. He was thoroughly annoyed with Mrs. Shih for not calling off the dogs, greeting him or offering him a seat.

"Why stare at me like that? Think I'm a bandit?" he asked ironically. With nothing but a pipe in his hand, it did seem unlikely that he had come to use violence.

Mrs. Shih relaxed a little, but still asked uneasily, "Who are you?"

"I'm *chia chang*,"* he answered irritably, as if offended that she did not know who he was. "I've come about this land of Landlord Wu's. I know the rent's a little high. But just think—you've used his land a good ten years without paying him a single cent. Any other landlord would have come to collect rent long ago. He's really been very good to you. After I put in a word for you he agreed to reduce the deposit to 290,000 yuan and the annual rent to ten *tou* according to the new system of weights. Damn that dog!" He gave a shout, and shook his pipe at one of the dogs which had run up.

This time Mrs. Shih drove the dog away. But she had missed the end of the man's speech.

"Ten *tou*!" she sang out. "That's a strange reduction! He's raised it from five to ten."

"Can't you listen properly?" He glared at her. "I said ten *tou* according to the new system of weights. No wonder people call you unreasonable. You jump on a man without even hearing him through."

"I can't pay ten *tou*!" she retorted. "Just look at these children. Their Dad has been taken away by force, and I've the five of them to feed single-handed. What money have I for rent?"

"It can't be helped." Looking at the grimy, ragged children, the old man sighed and shook his head. "But as long as you're on his land you must pay Landlord Wu the deposit and rent. Who ever heard of getting land for nothing?"

* Head of ten households under the Kuomintang regime.

"Won't you talk to him, please? Beg him to have a heart. I'll pay him somehow when my husband comes home."

"What if he never comes back?"

"Mercy! How can you say such a thing?" Mrs. Shih groaned. "What'll become of us if he never comes back?"

"There's no telling what'll happen to a soldier on the battlefield," he said coldly, turning his face away. Then, feeling he had spoken too harshly, he struck a different note. "Maybe Heaven will preserve him and send him back to you some day."

"How I hope so!" the woman responded gratefully.

By now the old man had lost patience with Mrs. Shih. Shaking his pipe at her, he said, "To get back to the rent—I advise you to agree to Landlord Wu's terms. He won't press you right now; you can pay him at the end of the year. But that 290,000 yuan deposit has got to be paid right away." He took a look round, then suggested, "Why don't you sell your pig and chickens?"

"The pig is too small," replied Mrs. Shih in despair. "Even if I sold it, I couldn't raise enough."

"Don't you have any savings?" the *chia chang* asked, affecting surprise. "Didn't the school pay you something when it moved away?"

"Yes, it did," she confirmed angrily. "But since then my husband has had no job, and prices have been going up every day. It didn't take two months for that little sum to melt away. If I had any money left, my children wouldn't be so thin and ragged."

Again the old man sighed and shook his head.

Suddenly Mrs. Shih looked up, her eyes gleaming with hope. Pulling at his sleeve, she implored, "Please put in a good word for me. Ask Landlord Wu to have pity on us and cancel the deposit. As for rent, I'll give him whatever the land yields—pumpkins or potatoes, or whatever's in season."

"What an idea!" The man broke into a laugh. "Do you think with a great stock of fish and meat in his house he wants pumpkins and potatoes? He wouldn't even feed his pigs with them. His pigs get rice mixed with chaff. It's no use hoping for that. I wouldn't dare suggest it."

"He's asking for the impossible!" Mrs. Shih sighed in distress.

"He is too grasping," the old man agreed, experiencing a wave of righteous indignation. "His son's an officer in the army and sends him plenty of money every year. It wouldn't hurt him in the least to cancel the deposit."

"If he could only see it that way!" she exclaimed.

Disconcerted, the *chia chang* began to move off, sighing, "What am I to say to the landlord? I've really got a hard nut to crack."

"Just tell him you can't squeeze oil out of a bamboo," Mrs. Shih shouted after him.

"Why don't you go and tell him yourself? I don't care two straws about it!" the man yelled back angrily without a glance behind.

It was clear now that Landlord Wu had sent the *chia chang* as a messenger. So he wouldn't resort to force after all! This set her mind at ease, and she determined to tell any future messengers that she couldn't pay Landlord Wu the deposit but would let him have for rent whatever her fields yielded. Of course, she reflected, she must be more polite to future messengers and plead with them as best she could, so that when they went back they would put in a word for her. She should ask them in and give them a seat and a cup of tea, then open the rice bin to show them how short her family was running of food. After that, she would lead them to her fields and point out that the garlic wouldn't sprout for another month and the cabbages wouldn't be ready to eat until winter. At present all she had was potatoes, and she would gladly give the landlord a bushel of them if he wanted. It wouldn't be her fault if he turned down the offer. She must try to be reasonable, so that she would have nothing to fear even if the county magistrate took up the case himself.

For some time no one else turned up, and Mrs. Shih felt calmer. On the slope which she watered every day the green shoots of garlic and the emerald onions were ready for marketing. Her cabbages, which she carefully kept free from slugs, were growing daily greener. She would send some to Landlord Wu together with several crates of golden oranges and tangerines. If he were generous enough to stop pestering her for the rent and deposit, she knew how to show herself grateful.

Mrs. Shih knew that the rich cared little for pumpkins or potatoes. But they did like oranges and tangerines and fresh vegetables. Didn't they often send people to buy such things from the market? In addition, she meant to give the landlord a pair of fat hens as a New Year gift. While feeding her fowl, she made a careful study of them, comparing their merits and defects. The white ones were no good because they would bring bad luck,* while the black ones looked unclean. After much deliberation she chose a yellow pair with black spots, and resolved to send these to the landlord even if they turned out champion layers.

One night, woken by her dogs' furious barking, Mrs. Shih heard something crackling nearby and saw that the room was brightly lit and smoke was pouring in. Realizing with a shock that the kitchen must have caught fire, she rose and ran out barefooted. Her first thought was to fetch water from the stream; but the fire was spreading so fast that she must first rescue her children who were still sleeping soundly. One by one, she dragged them out, together with their bedding and clothes. Then the hens, let out of their coop, flapped away. In and out she ran to salvage her things until her hair caught fire.

Flames raged and roared over the thatched roof, leaping and cackling in an orgy of destruction. In less time than it takes for a meal, the whole

cottage was burnt to the ground. Even the branches of the orange trees beside it were badly scorched. Nothing was left but heaps of smouldering ashes.

Mrs. Shih broke down completely when she thought of the cottage she had built with her husband and repaired from year to year, the furniture she had slowly accumulated, and the pig now burnt to death. She cried and cried, as if to give vent to all the bitterness she had ever known.

Having put the children to sleep under an orange tree, she sat down beside them. She fixed her eyes dazedly on the smouldering ashes. "How did the fire start?" she wondered. The kitchen fire had gone out while she was washing up after supper, and as she was sweeping the ground she recalled putting the firewood a safe distance from the stove before she went to bed. How could the fire have started? The more she thought, the more suspicious it seemed. Finally she was convinced that somebody must have set fire to the house. Was this part of Landlord Wu's wicked plot to drive her out of the valley?

For a little while she dozed off beside her children. Then day broke. She burst into tears again at the sight of the dead pig and cracked pickle pots, the rice reduced to ashes and the furniture burnt to the semblance of charcoal. With her hoe, scythe and axe badly damaged, and the wooden water bucket gone, what had she left to work with? The loss of the building was not so serious—they could sleep under the trees. But what would become of them if she couldn't dig, scythe and water the vegetables? If the pig hadn't been burnt, she could have sold it to buy new tools. But the pig was dead and the chickens were too small to sell. Even a laying hen wouldn't fetch much. As for the vegetables, they wouldn't be marketable for two or three months. The potatoes which could have lasted the family half a year had been turned into cinders. The immediate problem was food. She shuddered from head to foot at the thought of the difficulties confronting her. She felt worse than when her husband had been taken away. For then she had still had the means to till the land and bring up the children. But now starvation stared her in the face.

Putting her eldest son on guard over the bedding she had salvaged the previous evening, Mrs. Shih went to the market, carrying her baby on her back. There, tears streaming down her sallow cheeks, she told people the terrible thing that had happened to her. A number of folk were sympathetic and gave her money, clothes or rice. One old woman, who knew her, even helped her to carry the things home.

On their way back, Mrs. Shih told her friend how Landlord Wu had sent the men to intimidate her and how she suspected him of being responsible for the fire. Looking round fearfully, the old woman tugged at her sleeve and whispered:

"You take my advice, and go away. You're the only family in this lonely spot. What if Wu. . . ."

* White used to be worn for mourning in China.

Mrs. Shih turned pale. It was some minutes before she managed to say, "What can we live on if we go away?"

"Yes, but think—do you want to be killed? A rich, powerful man like that—he wouldn't stop at anything!"

Anger and bitterness welled up in Mrs. Shih's breast. "I'll have it out with him even if it kills me," she said desperately.

"That would never do!" Her companion put out a restraining hand. "What chance has an egg against a rock? What'll happen to your children if you get killed?"

For a moment the old woman was deep in thought. Then, pulling at Mrs. Shih's jacket, she suggested, "Why don't you go back to your own parts? It's always easier to eke out a living in the place where you were born and bred."

"We've got no land there. It was because we couldn't make a living that we left. Otherwise we'd have gone back long ago."

"But you've still some of your folk there, haven't you?"

"We've been away more than ten years. Who knows whether they're still alive? Even if they are, a fat lot they'd care for beggars like us."

"At least they wouldn't bully you or do you in."

"But what would we live on? I wouldn't earn enough to feed my five children even if I could bring myself to leave them and go out to work."

The old woman fell silent. Sighing repeatedly she went away.

Once more Mrs. Shih made up her mind not to leave the valley under any circumstances. The strip of soft green along the slope somehow gave her consolation and strength. "Before long the vegetables will save us," she mused. But at the back of her mind lurked the fear—suppose he really means to do us in? "All right," she told herself. "I'll fight it out with him. This plot of land has given us so much all these years, I'd gladly lay my bones here."

Every day, a half-broken crock in hand, Mrs. Shih went to fetch water from the stream to the vegetable garden. At night she slept with her children under the orange trees. Exposed to the night air, all her children caught cold and developed coughs; and the baby's fever was so high that he refused her milk. The hens, left unprotected in the night, were carried off one after another by wild cats and weasels. Only the dogs were left.

The unhappy mother was beset by terrible anxiety. She prayed to Buddha to make her vegetables ripen overnight, so that she could sell them the next day and buy an axe, a saw and a scythe. Then she could saw bamboos and cut reeds to set up a shack for the family.

One night she was wakened again by her dogs' furious barking. Springing up, she gripped a stone which she kept by her, preparing to fight back if she was attacked. But no one came. The dogs were barking in the direction of the slope, and it occurred to her that somebody might be stealing her vegetables. But they were still too small to be worth

stealing. Perhaps some wild animals had come down from the hills. So instead of going over to the slope, clutching the stone tightly she stood bravely on guard over her five sleeping children.

Then the dogs stopped barking, and once more a sombre silence descended on the valley. Countless dim stars flickered in the black sky. Mrs. Shih lay down, but could not sleep. She was still afraid that wild animals might pounce out of the darkness to carry off her children. "If only my husband were here!" she thought. "I wouldn't mind going to the end of the earth to join him, if only I knew where he is. This place gives me the creeps."

The next morning Mrs. Shih hurried toward the slope, to see whether the tracks left on her vegetable plot were those of animals or men. But before she was near enough to make out any tracks, she saw that all her vegetables had been pulled up and scattered in all directions. Her heart bled at the sight. Gone now were her hopes that the vegetables might save them. She was speechless with anger. Realizing that Landlord Wu must be at the bottom of this, she threw caution to the winds and made straight for his house, beginning to curse as she ran.

But when she came to the end of the valley, the path between the cliff and the stream was blocked—a palisade had been built across it, and the gate in the palisade was firmly closed. Hard as she pushed, it would not budge. And it was so high that any attempt to climb over it was out of the question. She could do nothing but hammer on it with a stone.

Presently a man came up to the gate.

"What are you doing, pounding on the gate like this?" he shouted furiously.

"Open it, quick! I want to see Landlord Wu!" She stopped knocking.

"What for?" The man cocked his head on one side and planted his hands on his hips.

His haughty air infuriated Mrs. Shih.

"As if you didn't know! He's pulled up my vegetables and burnt down my cottage. I'm going to have it out with him!"

She hammered on the door again, screaming, "Open up! Open up!"

"You crazy bitch," the man thundered. Drawing a pistol from his belt, he threatened to fire if she didn't stop knocking.

"How do you know it was the landlord? Did you see him?"

The sight of the pistol frightened Mrs. Shih. She stopped pounding on the gate. But when he did not fire, she took courage again and said, "Who else could it be? He's the only man round here who'd do such a vile thing."

"Hold your tongue!" Then, lowering his voice: "He'll send you to jail if he hears you!"

"I'm not afraid even if he tries to kill me!" She started beating on the door again. "Open the door, or I'll smash it to pieces!"

"See if I don't kill you!" the man yelled, pointing his pistol at her breast.

"Go on! Shoot!" Mrs. Shih urged, leaning forward.

But the man lowered his pistol.

"Shooting's too good for you," he sneered. And with that he turned and made off.

"Why don't you open the door, you son of a bitch?"

She struck and struck until her hand began aching; but the door stood firm. Then she sat down beside it, panting in exhaustion.

After a good rest she realized that there was nothing she could do about the door. Besides, as the man had said, a quarrel with Wu would get her nowhere since she had no evidence against him. And it would be no use taking the case to court. She had come to fight the landlord in a fit of fury, but she hadn't been able to get at him; and now her good sense reasserted itself.

Her thoughts turned again to her children, and passionate mother love filled her whole being. She must never abandon them. She must find a way to bring them up.

She got up and went slowly home.

The slope looked lonelier now that the cottage had been burnt down and the vegetables torn up. They had no shelter from wind and rain nor hope of a living from the land; and the wicked landlord might be plotting further mischief. There was no alternative but to leave.

Mrs. Shih had no idea where to go. She knew only that if they stayed here her children would starve to death.

Having put together the things they must take with them, she went to have a last look at the orange, peach and plum trees, and was seized with a desire to hack them all down. She didn't want that accursed landlord to enjoy the fruit. But the fire had destroyed her axe and saw. She could only hope that eating her fruit would make him ill.

Last of all, she took her children to their grandmother's grave to bid her farewell. "Ma!" Mrs. Shih burst out crying. "We can't stay here with you. We've no choice but to go begging. May your spirit protect the children wherever we go!"

Then, their bedding on her back and the baby in her arms, she led them away. The two older girls carried a pot for boiling rice, while the little boys trudged along empty-handed—there was nothing else to carry. With the dogs at their heels, they made their way along the bank of the stream to the market.

The kindly folk who had already helped them out once found it difficult to give more; but she managed to get a bite of food for the children. They passed a miserable night in the open near the bus station. And the next morning, knowing no further help could be looked for here, they set out for the nearest town.

For the last time, their valley came into view. It was veiled in a light white mist. The golden rays of the morning sun had reached the pinewoods on the hill, but the fruit trees by the stream and the cultivated plot on the slope were still wrapped in the shadows of night.

The children saw it first, and shouted happily, "There's our home, Ma! Look! Down there!"

Mrs. Shih stole a glance at the valley, then lowered her head, fighting to keep back her tears.

"When shall we come back, Ma?" the children were asking.

"When the oranges are ripe," Mother said, swallowing her tears.

The children were satisfied. But presently one of them asked:

"Ma! Where are we going?"

The question staggered her. There was a long pause before she thought up an answer.

"To find Dad," she told them.

That made the children happier than ever. With shouts of laughter they started calling excitedly for their father.

Mrs. Shih broke down, big tears rolling down her cheeks.

After a good cry she felt better. The children's peals of laughter cheered her up. She took heart. Biting her lips, she reaffirmed her determination to defy all difficulties and bring her children up.

August, 1947

Night at Huangnikang

LO PIN-CHI

In the winter dusk, the great train of gravel-laden carts stopped on the side of the highway in the hamlet of Huangnikang, the horses snuffling, the mules hee-hawing loudly. There, the big cart entrance of the Ma Family Inn stood wide open. Inside the courtyard, pack donkeys brayed without pause, as though welcoming the new arrivals. Some of the donkeys carried salt for the supply and marketing co-operative. Others belonged to itinerant merchants and oil sellers.

Ma Lao-san, the innkeeper, was about sixty. Bald, with a pursed mouth, he looked like an old woman. His eyes were rather crafty. The apron around his waist, while not exactly black, certainly wasn't white. He was slicing meat on a wooden block when he heard the noise of the animals outside the inn entrance.

"Little Woo!" he roared. "The cart train is here. Hurry and sweep that west *kang* clean. And boil a pot of hot tea. Li Szu-hu is sure to want some the minute he sits down!"

As he gave his instructions, the innkeeper's eyes never left the slicing knife. His entire attention was concentrated on the business at hand. He was specially preparing the meat for the men of the cart train. The inn's other guests had eaten long ago. It took the cart train two days to make a round trip. After loading up with gravel at Mao Erh Hill, thirteen miles away, the carters usually reached the inn at nightfall. Unless Ma Lao-san prepared all the food in advance, he would be rushed to death when the carters came crowding in the door.

Little Woo, the waiter, was the innkeeper's son. Just turned sixteen, he was very fat, with a baby face and a body like a stout butcher. He always had a rag for wiping tables slung over one shoulder. To his father's summons he responded with a high, musical cry, "Coming—coming—" He was excited, happy to be busy. Two carters came into the courtyard, asking for a bucket with which they could water their animals.

"I've got enough to do in this inn without worrying about buckets for you!" Ma Lao-san said, his eyes still intent on the meat block.



CHEN CHU-CHUNG: Four Goats

"Why don't you ever carry your own?" Then he shouted, "Little Woo, bring a bucket for old man Wu!"

It was obvious that Li Szu-hu was the only guest for whom he had any respect. But the two carters didn't care a bit about the innkeeper being annoyed. Even before he called to Little Woo, they had picked up a bucket and gone out again. The carters stopped here frequently. They knew the innkeeper's disposition well.

As Ma Lao-san was cutting the last slice of meat, Li Szu-hu came limping in the door. Li was a big, powerful man of forty with deep, black eyes. A thick growth of beard framed his ruddy face. The front skirt of his cotton-padded gown was tucked up under the black sash that bound his waist. He wore the gown open, revealing a fur-lined jacket with round ornamental brass buttons. He carried a long whip in one hand.

"Ho! It's a cold day!" Li shouted cheerfully.

"It's the twelfth month already. Be a fine state of things if it weren't cold yet!" grinned the innkeeper, wiping his hands with the apron. "There's hot tea waiting for you on the west *kang*. Why are you so late today, *huochi*? Hard going on the lowland south of the little ridge?"

"The road's in rotten shape. The snow's practically melted into a river. There's mud all the way!"

As Li walked towards the *kang* reserved for him in an alcove at the western end of the long room, his eyes swept the *kang* lining the north and south walls, as though looking for a familiar face among the merchants sitting there. Actually, he wasn't doing anything of the sort. This was a habit of many years' standing that he had acquired when he was in the militia. They were warring with the landlords' mercenaries then, and he had learned to carefully observe his surroundings wherever he went. The guests were conscious of the sharpness of his scrutiny.

"Lots of people staying at the inn tonight," Li remarked. "Is tomorrow a market-day at Takuan Village?"

"Right!" answered a man on the south *kang*. "Sit here and have some tea," he invited.

"Market-days at Takuan are big affairs now." Seeming not to have noticed him, Li addressed his words to everyone present. "We've got two hundred thousand men digging the diversion channel of the dam alone. If our country wasn't building big water conservancy projects, there'd never be so much excitement in out-of-the-way mountain country like this! Why, on market-days merchants come all the way from Yishui to sell that good Tanfu tobacco."

"They're selling Tanfu tobacco at the Takuan market?" said a man, surprised. "Really, that's just like the temple fair on Sacrifice Banner Mountain!"

"There never were fifty thousand people going to the temple fair . . ."

Li began to say, when thirteen carters came swarming in, noisily talking

and shouting. The warmth of the room made them feel pleasantly relaxed. Everyone found himself a comfortable spot. Some sat on the table, others squatted on the *kang*, their chatter completely drowning out Li's words.

Li had been a famous militiaman in this area, within a ten or fifteen-mile radius. He was bold, quick-witted and a good shot. Years ago, when Kuomintang troops occupied both sides of the Yishui River, he had made frequent excursions into enemy territory, armed with only a pistol. Right under the enemy's nose, he dealt with the more bloodthirsty landlords, the kind who killed without batting an eye. Late one night, he scaled a wall and dropped into the courtyard of a landlord leader of a gang of thugs. He stepped on a small land mine the landlord had planted, and was badly injured. Even by the time the local militia were all incorporated into the regular People's Liberation Army, he was still laid up in an army hospital. When he recovered, one of his legs was permanently twisted. Of course, he had to be discharged from military service, but he was given charge of the public security work in his village. In 1950, he was elected representative of his township. Everyone thought very well of him.

Li belonged to his village's "mutual-aid team."* Recently the village decided to send the team's mule cart to do some hauling for a big dam construction project. As a member of the mutual-aid team and an experienced carter, Li naturally was chosen for the job. He was to receive ten work units per day—as much as could be earned in a full day's work on the farm. The mutual-aid team would pay for food and other incidental expenses. The village secretary of the Communist Party gave Li a few words of advice just before he left.

"This trip is to help on a national construction project. Whether you earn a little more or a little less on this job doesn't matter. It's important to take good care of the animals. Give them extra fodder at night. If they get too thin and tired, the other team members will have something to say."

Then, the secretary went on, "You're a Communist, and a people's representative besides. I'm sure you know this without my saying—we don't want anyone to feel we're self-satisfied. Be modest, think of the political impression you're making."

"I understand," said Li. And he thought to himself, "Does he have to tell me all this? I'm no kid."

Now he had been hauling for two weeks. Not only had he fed the mules fat and sleek, but he had earned so much over his wages that the mutual-aid team was able to buy a two-year-old bullock. This aroused the envy of all the peasants in the surrounding countryside. Many who

* Members of mutual-aid teams use their land as they wish, but farm work is done collectively. Many permanent or year-round mutual-aid teams take up subsidiary occupations in addition to farming, and accumulate a certain amount of common property.

had no carts went out and bought them. Some, who formerly used only an ox to draw their cart, added a donkey to make a pulling pair. Many members of mutual-aid teams, who previously contributed only labour, now finally invested their animals too, so as to be allowed to join the transportation job. Even well-to-do peasants and other independent operators began hauling for the project. Thus, the number of carts carrying gravel from Mao Erh Hill alone increased from seven to twenty-three. The carters chose Li to serve as transport leader.

When Li saw that all the carters were seated, smoking and chatting, he questioned the latest arrivals.

"Are all the carts here now?"

The loud conversations immediately stopped and the room became still. You could clearly hear the tinkling little bells on the mules and donkeys feeding in the courtyard and beside the highway. The carters looked around the crowded room. No one could say for sure whether anyone was missing.

"Old man Wu from East Hollow?"

"I'm over here!" called an elderly carter with a battered felt skull cap.

"You didn't bog down in the mud?"

"That doesn't happen to me so easy!"

"Where's the ox-cart from the Fuchia mutual-aid team?" Li peered around the room again. "Wasn't your cart behind his, old Wu?"

"I was behind him, all right," grinned the old man, "but he got stuck in the mud. Then my cart went in front of his!"

"Well, why didn't you say so just now? Not a word out of you—like nothing happened! How could you see him get stuck without giving him a hand? Only caring about yourself!"

The old man said the cart of the agricultural producers' co-operative* of Hsiaoliu Village was coming up right behind him then, with a team of mules. He figured they could pull the ox-cart out.

Someone else interrupted to say the co-op's driver was only a green youngster who held a whip like it was a fire poker. It would be a miracle if he didn't get bogged down himself. How could the old man expect him to be of any help to the Fuchia ox-cart?

"But he's from the agricultural producers' co-operative!" said the old man, blinking his eyes virtuously. "He should be an example to us all!"

"Birdshit!" snapped a thin swarthy young carter. "This is no hard-

* A peasants' organization in which socialist features are more developed than in the mutual-aid teams. In the co-op, land is pooled and placed under unified management, though each member still retains private ownership of his land. The income, after deducting certain amounts for investment and reserve funds and normal expenses of the co-op, is divided among the members in proportion to the work they do and the amount of land they invest. The most advanced form of the co-op is the collective farm, which is entirely socialist in nature.

surface automobile road, where good animals'll always get you by. Out here without the leadership to coddle him along, what the hell use is a kid like that!"

If the man making the remark had been an independent operator, Li would have criticized him for hostility to the Party's policy of encouraging mutual-aid teams and co-operatives. But the fellow was a member of the Willow Tree Village mutual-aid team; what's more, Li felt there was something in what he said. Li had never been able to see how the Hsiaoliu co-operative did any better than his own village's mutual-aid team, except for having better soil to begin with. Still, he was in charge of the carters, and this was the first day that the co-op's vehicle was taking part. He had to get everyone working in harmony, especially on the problem of the moment—getting Fuchia's ox-cart out of the mud. . . .

"No matter how good a carter may be," he said, "—even as good as you, old Wu—if he just looks out for himself, he won't be much use either."

"My dear *huochi*," sighed the old man. "You've seen that donkey of mine—skinny as a grasshopper. How could he help?" He rapped the ashes out of his pipe on the edge of the *kang*. The expression on his face seemed to say, "Whenever something goes wrong, the independent operators always get blamed. What's the use of my talking?"

Actually, the old man's cart was pulled by both a donkey and a bullock in teamed pair. Only an hour before, when he had been feeding them, he had patted the bullock's shoulder and said he wouldn't change him for a mule. "On the up-grades, he twists his tail like a snake. Then, with one heave, he pulls right to the top!" old Wu had boasted.

Now, Li said to him, "You're a fine one! You're no youngster, so I don't want to say anything! This kind of job isn't like working alone in the village. Here everybody has to climb hills and cross ditches. Think it over for yourself!"

It looked as though the cart of the Hsiaoliu co-op had fallen far behind, too, Li continued. If the two vehicles didn't show up by the time supper was over, he'd send out some animals to haul them in.

All the while Li was talking to him, old man Wu kept busily working on his pipe with his head down. He poked the stem through with a straw, then blew through it hard, then poked again. . . . At last he looked up.

"If anyone sends animals, I'll go out as driver," he volunteered.

"Make way! Make way!" Little Woo, the waiter, cheerfully bustled in, balancing five platters in his two hands.

The carters began wiping their chopsticks and winecups clean.

Li was in his usual high spirits as he drank two cups of strong wine before beginning his meal. Others ate to increase their thirst; he drank to improve his appetite. The men were talking about the difficulties of the mountain road over which they were transporting the gravel. This

reminded Li of the long trips he made to Tsingtao, years ago. Once, his cart had been in the middle of a train of vehicles, he said. He was young then, afraid of nothing. He liked to sleep, and they were travelling at night. As his animal plodded along, Li sat dozing on one of the shafts of the cart. But he still had his ears cocked. The sound of the hoofs of the mule of the cart ahead striking wood told him they were crossing a bridge. Originally, he hadn't intended to get down, but those hoof beats sounded a little off cadence to him. At once alert, he stopped his cart and went forward to take a look. Sure enough, one of the planks had slid from the beam supports off to one side, leaving quite an opening. If his ears hadn't been sharp, when his animal stepped into that hole, there would have been trouble.

Li told the story without the least boastfulness. It was only that the wine was good, with a fine taste, and he was pleasantly relaxed. At this point he paused, for he could hear the shouts of a mule driver coming from the level south of the small ridge. Naturally, when Li stopped talking, all the men around him listened too.

"That must be the Hsiaoliu co-op cart," said one of them. "He's gotten to the lowland where the Fuchia ox-cart is stuck in the mud!"

After listening a while, Li went on with his story. Needless to say, when those distant urgent shouts of the mule driver changed to a long drawn-out cry, he knew that the mules and the ox, pulling together, had dragged the cart out of the mud, and that they were now climbing the small ridge. Even more needless to say, although Li continued to talk with cheerful fluency, he was still thinking about that ox-cart.

When he finished his tale, someone asked, "Why didn't the mule of the cart in front of you fall into the hole?" Of course, all the carters were interested in the answer to this question.

Li's attention was fixed on a place far up the road. He could hear the clanging of the bell around the neck of the ox, the jingle of the necklace of little bells the mules wore, the rise and fall of a youthful voice singing. He could just picture the singer—young Liu of the co-operative. Because the moon was shining in the night sky and the road was level through wide open spaces, because this was the first time in his young life he had travelled far from home, the boy sang joyously. Soon the voice was gone; the bells of the animals were not audible either. But Li knew nothing had gone wrong with the big co-op cart. It hadn't stopped. The wind had only changed direction. Indeed, a few minutes later, the song came floating back again.

"Do you hear that?" Li asked his mates. "That kid's spirits are way up. You don't catch him cursing and groaning that the Fuchia cart held him back!"

He returned to his Tsingtao story. "You want to know about the cart ahead of mine? It's plain enough. The spikes had fallen out of the plank, but it was still in place. When his mule stepped on it, it edged over. His cart wheels just happened to catch it then and push it on top

of the plank in front. My cart was heading right for the hole.—But never mind about that. The Fuchia and co-op carts are coming. Who'll go out and give them a hail!"

The jangling of little bells could be heard growing louder and louder. No question about it—the cart pulled by the smartly ornamented team of mules was approaching the hamlet. Three carters got up and hurried out to greet it.

If the three men had not gone out to await the cart, it perhaps would not have stopped at the Ma Family Inn on the north side of the road. There were two inns in Huangnikang. One was run by the mutual-aid team of the hamlet, and was known as "The People's Hostel." The other was the Ma Family Inn, privately owned by Ma Lao-san. The People's Hostel hung up its signboard only after the dam project was started. The Ma Family Inn had been doing business for twenty years, except during the war period. Merchants and animal dealers from far and near all knew the Ma Family Inn in Huangnikang. This was not only because the inn had been in existence a long time. Mainly it was because Ma Lao-san was a skilled cook who knew how to slice meat and had a nice discretion with condiments. Steam, stew, fry or boil—he did them all beautifully. In The People's Hostel, members of the mutual-aid team took turns in the kitchen. Theirs was just home cooking, nothing fancy, but plentiful and cheap. They had many inexpensive dishes that the Ma Family Inn didn't serve.

For this reason, each inn had its own clientele. Well-to-do merchants who carried their wares on pack donkeys, and mutual-aid team members who were hauling gravel, always stopped at the Ma Family Inn. Petty traders who carried their merchandise slung from the ends of a pole, peasants selling grain at the market, independent operators transporting gravel on small carts with iron-rimmed wheels—these always stopped at The People's Hostel.

Of course, there were exceptions. Old man Wu, for instance. He was the kind who liked to have four ounces of strong wine with each meal, and he stayed at Ma Lao-san's place. The carter for the Fuchia mutual-aid team, because many of his friends and neighbors put up at The People's Hostel, stopped there too. Old man Wu always ate and drank alone, however, and paid only for himself. Li and the mutual-aid team carters at Ma Family Inn ate together, each man consuming his fill, with the bill being split evenly among all.

At the moment, young Liu with the help of the three carters, was unharnessing his mules and hitching them to the rear of his vehicle. Happily, he patted the neck of one of the mules.

"Rest a while, *huochi*, then have some water. Don't go swiping anyone else's feed!" To make sure, he tightened the halter rein a bit shorter. "The moonlight is bright as autumn festival time!" His high voice was filled with admiration. "Tomorrow's sure to be a fine day!"

Chatting with the three carters, he walked into the murky inn, making his appearance a moment later beneath the black smoking oil lamp.

Liu was just at the gawky stage. His legs were long and thin, like an egret's. His trousers were rolled up above his knees. A pair of thick-soled cloth shoes covered his stockingless feet, which apparently he had washed at the stream. But his trousers were still spattered with mud churned up by the wheels and his mules' hoofs. His face was ruddy and shining as though nipped by frost. Excitement and merriment gleamed in his large eyes.

Many of the carters hailed him, and commiserated on his hard trip. Even the carter from the Willow Tree Village mutual-aid team who had ridiculed him, now looked at him in a different light. The man said his singing wasn't bad at all, and insisted on inviting him to a drink.

"The transport leader is over there," someone urged young Liu. "Go on over!"

Sitting on the west *kang*, Li watched the boy from afar. When Liu came closer, Li said to him:

"Don't drink any wine—that's right. Drinking's no good for you. Have a bowl of hot tea!"

"What a dunce I am," young Liu said as he poured himself the tea. But his eyes weren't on the teapot at all. "When I reported for work this morning, all I knew was that you were the transport leader. I never even realized you were *that* Comrade Li Szu-hu."

Li's heart warmed at the sight of the apologetic smile on the boy's ruddy shining face. When they met for the first time that morning, it must be admitted he wasn't particularly taken by that face. Can a baby drive a cart? he had thought to himself. It didn't seem right that a man should have a complexion like a girl. But now the boy's face looked fine to him.

He asked young Liu how the carter of the Fuchia mutual-aid team was feeling, and said if Liu's cart hadn't been behind the ox-cart they were going to send out after it. Li also queried whether it wasn't beginning to blow up in the hills, whether there were any dark clouds in the sky. Liu replied that it was a little cloudy but the wind was quite strong.

"Then it's going to clear up!" Li remarked with satisfaction.

Finally, Li asked him, "Tell me, how did Hsiaoliu Village happen to pick you as their carter? Have you had any experience driving mules?"

Holding his bowl in both hands, the boy replied, "Ours is a very small village, all tenant farmers before liberation. Nobody ever had any big carts then. How could they! The only things we could handle were little donkey carts!" He went on, "Now our co-op is short of manpower. Everybody else is working on hoeing an extra time. Anyhow, I'm still putting in a day's work this way, and the co-op pays for the meals I eat outside. I'm no good at driving mules, but I'm learning!"

"You're hoeing all the co-op land again? Where did you people ever get enough money to pay out that much wages!"

"We earned it off our land! This year we're averaging a hundred catties more of millet per acre. Our co-op has got money."

Li turned to the men around him.

"What do you say? Can our mutual-aid teams hoe an extra time?"

"We can't compare with them," one of the men replied. "No team member ever wants any extra work done for him because he'd have to pay for it out of his own pocket!"

Li noticed Little Woo hovering near with the table wiper draped over his shoulder. "You must be hungry," Li said to young Liu. He got off the *kang* to make room for the boy, and went and sat on a low table. Hugging one knee against his chest, he addressed his comrades animatedly.

"How can our mutual-aid teams produce as much as the Hsiaoliu co-op? Did you hear what he said? Today, for the first time, I can see the advantages of a co-op!"

As Li talked, he heard Little Woo, the waiter, chuckle and say to young Liu, "Order a bowl of beancurd! There, you see, like that big bowl on the table over there. Those cheap vegetable stews they make in the inn across the way—we don't serve stuff like that here."

"In that case, I better go to the inn across the way!" Li heard Liu reply. He turned around to see the boy stare curiously at Little Woo, as though astonished that anyone could be so fat, then get up and walk toward the door.

Li wasn't exactly sure what had happened. He saw Ma Lao-san hurry over to Liu with an oily smile on his face.

"Your co-op is rich. Why are you so close-fisted? You get all in a sweat over spending a little money. Saving up to become a gentleman farmer?"

"How can you talk like that!" Young Liu's face suddenly became stern. He wheeled around to confront the laughing men and shouted, "Our money goes for making our co-op bigger and better! Are we supposed to waste it all on eating and drinking?" He strode quickly out of the room.

Like a veteran fighter at the sound of the first rifle shot, Li was galvanized into action. He promptly changed his position, paying no attention either to the bewildered innkeeper or to the shocked, no longer laughing, mutual-aid team members. In Liu's severe tone, Li's Communist instinct immediately spotted the fruits of Party education.

"Well!" he cried. "Who says a green kid can't be a leader? You never see any black crows flying out of a phoenix's nest!"

If Li hadn't shifted his position, he certainly would have been sniped at by the independent operators. Old man Wu had grinned at young Liu's outburst. He had been about to say, "What a stupid kid! I don't see it breaking anyone's heart to eat at the expense of his mutual-aid

team!" But Li's remark wiped the grin off his face. The mutual-aid team carters were all silent. Young Liu's whistling, as he watered his mules outside, could be heard distinctly.

A small trader who had come to attend the market at Takuan spoke up.

"What Comrade Li says is right. If everybody in the mutual-aid teams were like that young man and took as good care of his team's money as his own, who wouldn't want to join?"

"Birdshit!" said the man from the Willow Tree team. "You think anyone would go out driving a cart in the wind and rain if it weren't for getting food and drink free!"

"You're getting ten work units a day too," old man Wu reminded him.

"Couldn't I earn that staying at home weaving mats? Or doing a little peddling around the construction sites? I could keep everything I earned, and it wouldn't stop at ten units either."

"But aren't you on a mutual-aid team? When the job's over you get a share in the team's profits too, don't you?" Old man Wu wasn't looking at the man he was talking to. He was peering at Li out of the corner of his eye.

"Independents aren't the only ones who do mat weaving at home. Some of our team members are doing that work on their own, too. But when the transport job profits are split, they'll get their share just like the carters. After the pig's fattened up, they come in for the same slice of pork! And if the team buys a draught animal with the profits, it'll plough their land too!"

"You've got something there," another man put in. "With weaving mats or doing a little trading at the markets, the income is all yours. But everything you earn carting, you have to turn over to the team. It's not reasonable, getting only ten units a day!"

"But you're using the team's cart and the team's mule, aren't you?" objected one of the carters. His eyes also were fixed on Li. "Some people think it isn't easy to earn ten units a day. Especially in the winter time, like now, when there's not much work on the farm."

The argument went on, becoming more and more heated, because each mutual-aid team had its own way of calculating and dividing the transportation profits. It became plain to Li that the team members were mostly concerned about their personal income. They were not very interested in their team as an organization. But young Liu had opened the window and shown him the road to socialism. Li's eyes no longer had the grim look they bore when the first rifle cracked; they shone with the fresh clarity of the sky after rain.

"*Huochi*," he said, "if we don't all pull together, how can we raise our output? We want to drive on to socialism! We ought to think as a team!" And he continued, "When can we say we're getting a reasonable return for our work? When each member and the team as a whole

are satisfied—that's reasonable. And the way the Hsiaoliu agricultural producers' co-operative does it—that's more reasonable! They've got it all over our mutual-aid team methods! Right?"

"Right!" the men chorused.

Li got up and went out to feed his animals for the second time before going to sleep.

His chore completed, Li stood in the courtyard, watching the smoke from the kitchen chimney drifting up into the sky. He sighed contentedly.

"What are you looking at?" a voice asked.

"The northwest wind! That means tomorrow will be clear. We'll have to hitch up at the first cock's crow."

"So early!"

"We've got to cross a muddy stretch tomorrow. If we go early, we can cross it while it's still frozen hard. Some of our animals aren't much good at hauling through mud." Then Li saw that the man beside him was old Wu.

"Oh, so it's you! What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Me, I'm going to keep on playing it alone and see how things look."

"After New Year, when spring comes, you won't find them looking so good!"

"How come?"

"How come! You won't be able to go out carting. If you do, you won't be able to look after your farm. If you take care of your farm, you won't have any time for transport jobs!"

"Say, that's right!" Old Wu's eyes were big and startled. He stood there awkwardly.

"Better make up your mind soon!"

That night Li and the other carters went to bed early. But Li couldn't fall asleep. He was thinking about his village's mutual-aid team, he was thinking about the large crops the Hsiaoliu co-operative was producing, he was thinking about young Liu's ruddy shining face, his merry smile. For the first time Li had the feeling that he was getting on in years. . . .

Ma Lao-san didn't sleep well that night either. When Li had paid his bill, he had even settled for the small feed bills he had run up the last two times. The innkeeper felt a little uneasy.

By the second cock's crow, the gravel transport team set out.

Just as Ma Lao-san feared, young Liu had started something. From that day on, the gravel carters all stopped at The People's Hostel across the road. Business at the Ma Family Inn took a sudden drop. Only on market-days at Takuan did things pick up. Even Little Woo, the waiter, lost his former cheerfulness. He often dozed off, squatting lonely beside the kitchen stove.

First Snow

Lu Ling

One day, the transport company to which truck driver Liu Chiang and his assistant Wang Teh-kuei were attached, was ordered to pick up some Korean civilians. They had to be moved to the rear from an area near the battle line. These people had tenaciously continued living within range of the enemy's guns for a long time. Now, because of urgent military necessity, they had to be evacuated. Only after the local authorities pleaded with them repeatedly, and finally issued an order, did they consent to leave the homes over which artillery shells so frequently whistled.

Liu and Wang's truck was the last to set out. All their passengers were women, old and young, with a flock of children and a great assortment of bundles. In the dusk of a cold day at the end of November, Liu and Wang helped the women board the open truck, after first having loaded some of the large bundles for the older women and mothers with children to sit on. The men then began to cram in the rest of the packages. The sky would soon be dark. Fire from the big guns was intensifying, and the mountain valley reverberated with one huge booming echo after another.

Liu was touched by the sight of the simple household utensils that the women had brought. They brought to mind that period in 1937 when the Japanese invaders reached his native village not far from Shanghai. He was only seventeen then, working as an apprentice in an automobile spare parts factory. Much to his disgust, his mother and elder sister had carried with them their baskets, their jars and their bundles, as they climbed aboard a crowded truck. He couldn't imagine why they insisted on taking along those old useless things. His sister had even been hurt by another vehicle when she jumped down to rescue a bundle containing a few articles of children's used clothing. He hadn't understood how hard life was for people in those cruel times.

Now, in his motherland, he had a home of his own, and two children. In the seven or eight years before liberation, it had been difficult to get along. He could appreciate what these old bundles, these curtains, grass

mats, these platters and jars meant to the Korean women. And because the women had been living right under the roaring guns of the enemy in flimsy damp shelters, the odds and ends they brought with them seemed especially dear to Liu. He was deeply concerned about every one of them. They bespoke hardship and poverty; they bespoke the women's bitter struggle during the past two years. Cheerfully and patiently, he helped the women find places for their belongings.

"We'll think of a way to get them on," he kept saying. "We'll take them along if we can."

The women could see there wasn't much more room and were willing to leave them. Some even wanted to remove their things that were already on the truck, to make room for other people. One grey-haired old lady took off two old sleeping mats. The way she went about it, without a word, impressed Liu particularly. Any small thing he could squeeze on to the truck after that, seemed like a victory against the enemy.

Although the truck was nearly filled, there were still some bundles on the ground, and quite a few of the women had not yet got in. Liu continued lifting things into the truck and looking for space to put them. He asked the women who were already seated to stand up so that he could rearrange some of the bundles. At this point, young Wang became worried.

"You can't do it. If we wait any more, we won't be able to get through."

"We'll make it!" Liu's voice was loud and firm. "Come on, Wang," he urged cheerfully, "put this old mama's pack frame in the back. These two baskets go in the back too . . . that's right. They won't get crushed that way. Now we've got room for those two sleeping mats."

"What use are those old mats anyway!"

"Poor people have a use for everything they own. Suppose they are only old mats—are we going to leave them here to get blown to bits by some enemy shell?"

Liu's gay tone had suddenly turned severe, and he fixed Wang with a piercing glance. Although Liu seldom lost his temper, he had a very strong character. Wang, who had been about to say, "Shells blow up lots of things!" thought better of it.

"Say! There are a couple of chickens in this cage!" Liu was jaunty again. He shouted toward the truck, "These are fine chickens, Aunt!"

Two young women, who were waiting to get on board, laughed. One of them wore on her head a checked kerchief. Her bright eyes flashed beneath heavy black brows. With a rather startled naive expression, she stood motionless watching this enthusiastic brawny driver. "What a strange man! But how good!" she seemed to be saying. "How can he take so much trouble for us?"

Finally, all the bigger bundles were properly stored. Then the remaining women started getting into the truck, carrying the smaller

packages in their hands. Liu picked up a little girl of about seven, planted a kiss on her ice-cold face and lifted her into the vehicle. The child maintained her melancholy adult expression. She kept looking in the direction of the enemy artillery fire, where a white smoke screen was rising high in the twilight sky. What was this wise little youngster thinking? As he picked her up, Liu said to her in Korean:

"After we've won, you'll come back and we'll help you build a big house!"

The girl with the checked kerchief and heavy brows, who was about to climb into the truck, paused and said:

"Yung Ka, thank the driver." She frowned and added intensely, "Her father was killed here by Syngman Rhee!"

The little girl had hair combed over her forehead and cut straight across, above her eyebrows. She wore a red, high-buttoned jacket. With the same sad air, she continued staring at the place where the shells were falling. Her mother, a haggard middle-aged woman, dropped her head and pressed it against the little girl's shoulder. Liu could see that she was holding an infant in her bosom. The grey-haired old lady spoke up fiercely:

"It's not that we don't want to leave here. . . ." Her voice trailed off.

The women gazed at their ruined village and the fields they were leaving behind. None of it was very clear in the dusk.

Young Wang had already run forward and started the motor. He was very concerned because they were setting out late. They might run into a lot of traffic and not be able to get through the "blockade"—the section of the road against which the enemy directed their bombing in an attempt to stop the flow of supplies to the front. Liu began walking toward the cab, then stopped. A baby was crying in the rear of the truck.

He climbed in and looked around. The truck was really too crowded. The wailing infant was Yung Ka's baby brother. A big bundle on his mother's lap was squeezing him against her breast, and he squalled indignantly. His mother tried to nurse him, crooned to him, but still he cried. At first Liu thought of taking the bundle. Then he realized that wouldn't solve the entire problem. They had to travel several hundred kilometres and it would get much colder during the night. He offered to take the baby into the cab where it would be a little warmer. He said he and young Wang could take care of him. While the mother was still hesitating and looking questioningly at the other women around her, Liu had already picked up the baby.

"It's too much bother for you. Thank you . . ." the mother said gratefully.

"No bother at all! Hey, Wang!" shouted Liu. To reassure the mother, he called in a gay humorous voice, "Come on, young feller. We've found another job to do!"

"What!" Young Wang hurried to the back of the truck. He was amazed at Liu—fussy as an old mother hen!

"This job is mostly yours!" Liu said blithely. He hopped down from the truck and thrust the baby into Wang's arms.

"What am I supposed to do? I don't know how to take care of a baby!" protested the eighteen-year-old boy.

Liu shrugged off the overcoat draped over his shoulders, took off his padded jacket and wrapped it around the infant.

"Huh! It won't hurt you to act the mama this once. You'll have kids of your own some day. Hold him inside your overcoat. If he makes a mess, it'll be in my old jacket!"

Wang was highly displeased. Liu was too much of an old hen today. What would happen if all his pattering around kept them from making their run on schedule? Wang gave an embarrassed laugh, holding the baby awkwardly, like a basin of hot water. The women on the truck, although they couldn't understand much of what the Chinese comrades were saying, also began to laugh. The gloomy bitter atmosphere turned to merriment, the girl with the checked kerchief and thick brows laughing in brighter peals than all the rest. Wang was very annoyed and uncomfortable at this amusement.

Nevertheless, a few moments later, the door of the cab slammed shut and the truck headed into the north wind to join the battle of the highway.

Not long after they had left the mountain valley and were rolling along the big road, air raid watchers fired their rifles in warning. Vehicles, as far as the eye could see, extinguished their headlights. The truck was approaching the "blockade" zone, and Liu stopped to let the distance lengthen between his vehicle and the one ahead. He looked through the little window in the back of the cab to the rear of the truck, and listened. There wasn't a sound out of the passengers.

"Those women are all right!" said Liu. "Well, how are you getting along as a mama?"

"Quit your kidding. What's turned you into such an old mother hen today!"

Wang was unhappy. The baby was making him very tense. He was afraid of hurting it, afraid it would cry. If it cried, that girl with the checked kerchief and thick eyebrows would laugh at him. But the more Wang fretted, the more uneasy the baby became, until it burst into lusty wails.

"You dumb cluck, is that any way to hold him! Not so tight. Let him rest his head on your left arm. For a young feller, you really are thick!"

"I never held a baby before! I could carry a hundred catties easier than this kid!"

"Quit your groaning. You'll be all right. Look, precious—" From

behind the steering wheel Liu leaned close to the baby's face, and kissed it.

"Ah, little precious is a good little lamb," he crooned. "Don't cry, lamby, mama's right near. When you grow up, you can learn to drive a truck too. . . ."

Out of the corners of his eyes Wang stiffly watched the veteran truck driver. Could a man who used to be so tough actually behave like this? What was so wonderful about the little kid? For all you knew, he'd mess all over you!

Planes soared across the sky and flares came floating down. Liu's face froze grim and hard. The icy calm with which Wang was so familiar again glittered in Liu's eyes. Once more, Liu turned his head and listened toward the rear of the truck. Wang could tell from his expression that he was thinking—Stay here or try to break through?

"Push through!" said Wang.

"Hold on to the baby."

The truck rolled forward. Passing a vehicle that had halted by the roadside, they sped on like an arrow beneath the brilliant light of the flares. They caught up and triumphantly passed two trucks racing at breakneck speed. Far off in the distance to the left, bombs hit the ground and exploded. In the sky, as one batch of flares dimmed, another batch flamed into light—about seventy of them this time, illuminating over a dozen kilometres of road.

"Son of a bitch! We're right in it now!" said Liu. "That's really a good baby. He knows we're fighting the American invaders and he doesn't cry." As he talked, Liu never took his eyes from the shining road stretching ahead.

The area the enemy was trying to bomb out today seemed wider than usual. But at any time, this part of the road was always the major target in the enemy's "blockade." Though Liu couldn't hear the sound of the planes, he guessed they were probably flying very low to get beneath the overcast. The terrain here was flat and open.

Suddenly, a string of machinegun bullets mixed with tracer fire ripped into a field a few dozen metres to the right. Liu jammed on the brakes. Just as he stopped the truck, about a hundred metres ahead, a bomb exploded with a white glaring burst. They were after him, that was plain enough. If he hadn't stopped when he did, the truck would have run right into that one.

The enemy planes swung off, and Liu immediately set his vehicle in motion again. He passed the crater made by the bomb that had just exploded, then stepped on the gas. Only then did this veteran driver feel the grip of tension. Suppose the truck had been hit, he worried, how would he be able to face those Korean women? Although he couldn't see them, he could sense them quietly watching the road ahead, as though even a bomb hit wouldn't upset them. Those women—old and worn, or with young faces framed by checked kerchiefs, firm, with eyes

shining—they stirred him deeply. He wasn't driving the truck—it was flying by itself. The quiet, motionless self-control of the women gave it wings!

When the truck had stopped so abruptly, Wang had banged his head and it bled. But his only thought had been to hold the baby close, to save him from harm. He crouched instinctively over the child at the sound of the explosion that followed immediately. The baby was sleeping soundly; neither the lurch nor the bomb burst had awakened him. The truck was now racing through the brilliance of a wide ring of descending flares. It would be another fifteen minutes, even at this rate of speed, before they would be out of danger. In the flarelight, Wang looked full at the infant's round face for the first time, and he saw that it was beautiful. The fine lips of the baby's tightly closed mouth pouted adorably, his black eyelashes seemed pasted to his cheeks. A misty tenderness began to suffuse itself in Wang's excited heart.

Good, we'll make it this way! thought Wang. He was conscious of the fact that he was taking part in a heroic job. He was important, indispensable—to Liu, to the women in the back of the truck, to this baby here. Before long I'll be driving a truck myself, he thought.

A bomb burst not far ahead jolted him out of his reverie. He quickly held the baby to his chest. Another bomb went off with a savage flash to the right of the road—obviously much closer than the previous one. Wang immediately faced around toward the back of the seat, so that his body was between the baby and the door of the cab. The percussion of the blast rocked the truck, but it continued rolling forward.

"We'll get through if you keep aiming like that!" said Liu, calmly peering straight ahead.

Wang's tender mood expanded from the baby to include himself too. Nobody had been hurt, and they'd soon be out of danger. Holding the infant, he couldn't help imprinting a gentle kiss upon its face. At the same time, he stole a glance at Liu to see whether he was being observed. Laugh at me, do they? Those women! Who says I don't know how to hold a baby? Look at him—when I hold him he doesn't even cry! He kissed the child again, and the milky fragrance of its face tickled his nostrils.

"You shouldn't do that," Liu said suddenly. "You'll wake him up that way."

Funny. How could Liu see him when he was watching the road? Wang's face burned—his secret emotion had been discovered.

"I didn't move him," he retorted.

Liu made no reply. He concentrated on driving. They were well out of the ring of flares now. A few minutes later, after climbing a mountain slope, Liu stopped the truck in a sheltered place.

"What you mean—you didn't move him?" The moment the truck halted, Liu's voice boomed out gaily. "I saw you plain as could be. You weren't still for a second."

"All right then—you hold him!" Wang said angrily.

Liu didn't mind Wang's childish temper a bit. He took the baby, kissed it, opened the door and got out. Why can he do that and not me? Wang thought jealously. He became aware of the sticky clot of the wound on his temple. He felt it with his hand, then wiped it fiercely with a torn handkerchief. As he did so, he gave a scornful laugh, full of the martyrdom he was suffering on account of the baby. He got down from the cab, checked the truck over in the bitter wind, then walked down the slope to look for water.

Wang could hear Liu's cheerful voice asking the women how they were getting on, and urging them to come out of the truck and rest. He was calling the baby's mother to come out too, probably to nurse the child. The women climbed down. They spoke in soft grateful tones. Wang heard the girl with the checked kerchief laughing. Even though it was a quiet laugh, Wang could identify it as hers immediately. Is she laughing at me again? he wondered. He stood with the water can in his hand and gazed toward the hazy warm shadows of the women on the mountainside. Then another thought consoled him—It's very good. Not one of them was hurt. That old Liu really knows his stuff!

The place wasn't very safe to loiter in for long, and the truck was soon moving again. His eyes glued on the road, Liu was calculating the distance they had to travel. There were still three hundred kilometres. They had to arrive before dawn, which was now only six hours away. The truck followed closely behind a long string of other vehicles. Just as many were coming from the opposite direction. All moved in great clouds of billowing dust. They turned their lights on and off in response to the rifle signals of the plane watchers along the road. There was no end to the trucks. You could see their headlights blinking on the mountain ten kilometres ahead. But when Liu got to the other side of that mountain, traffic suddenly thinned out. Many of the vehicles had turned off at intersections. Ahead now there was only the dark plain through which cut the quiet shining highway.

The sky had become more overcast, and the wind, blowing in through the door and window frames, numbed the men's hands and feet. As they drove into the biting wind, frost began to form on the windshield. Cold and tired, Liu kept thinking of the women in the back of the truck. He knew them so well now. They're only wearing thin clothes, he fretted. This is going to be a hard night for them. . . . In his last letter from his wife she had written that she had already finished making cotton-padded winter clothes for herself and the children. But these women here, it seemed, had to get through the winter in ordinary garments. Travelling at night this way . . . at least if there were some sort of cover for the back of the truck it would be better. The best thing, of course, would be to have hot drinking water. . . . Liu had to smile at the way his mind was working. This was wartime. . . .

You've made padded clothes. Naturally, that's fine. But we can't

expect that sort of thing here, he mused, arguing with his wife. And she had no way of talking back! If there weren't a war going on, on a night like this, these women would feed their children and then they'd all be off to sweet slumber. Now, even their homes had been destroyed. Many of their menfolk and dear ones had been killed in this war; many were still at the front. Today, they were moving to the mountains in the rear, but they wouldn't be able to settle down peacefully right away. They would first have to take their hoes and dig the icy rock-like ground to level it, then build themselves flimsy little huts. And then could they relax? No. Screaming bombs would continue to menace them and their children. Just look—Liu was still mentally talking to his wife—just look at the things they've brought out from under the fire of the big guns! A few bits of clothing, a couple of sleeping mats, some hoes—they've even got two saws. There's sure to be a carpenter or two among them. They know how to do everything. One of their jars is filled with wheat seeds; there are vegetable seeds in another. . . . Next spring their new fields will be putting up sprouts!

"Look here," he said aloud, this time to young Wang. He remembered what they were arguing about before they set out from the women's village. "You think it's easy for poor peasants to set up housekeeping?"

Wang remained silent, as though he hadn't heard. To ward the baby against the cold, he had him wrapped inside his coat. Then he heard the shots of the warning rifles.

"Air raid!" he said.

Liu switched off his lights. After a while, far ahead, the headlights of a vehicle were turned on, and Liu followed suit. He continued the argument.

"What are you sore about?"

"I'm not a kid!"

"You *are* still young. You don't know what women have to go through in wartime. Take us men, for instance. We think—We're in the Volunteers shedding our blood, giving our lives at the front. All you women have to do is stay home. . . . Huh! It's easy enough to say!"

"Who says it's easy?" Wang was very annoyed with Liu always saying he was young. He thought this was picking on his weak point.

"We're proud to be soldiers in the Chinese People's Volunteers," Liu said seriously. "Of course it's an honour. But if that's how we think about the women, then we're wrong."

Wang didn't reply. The argument couldn't go on because, actually, Wang hadn't given the question any thought, one way or the other. Although Liu was very experienced, he didn't really know what was going through Wang's mind. Wang didn't like others considering him a child, and he was unhappy that he hadn't been able to perform some important, adult deed for all to see.

Beneath his reserved, nonchalant exterior, he was forever soaring

off on wild flights of fancy. Now he imagined himself driving his own truck, plunging through flares and machinegun fire, one hand holding the baby, the other gripping the steering wheel. Then, when he stopped the truck, the women would jump off the back, rush to the cab and fling open the door, to find him giving the baby a drink of water. They would laugh, and tease him that a man should actually know how to look after an infant. Women are always like that—even if you know how to take care of babies, they laugh at you. And that girl with the checked kerchief and thick eyebrows—she'd be standing behind the others, watching him without a sound. . . .

Another picture formed in Wang's imagination—how the baby, as soon as he took it in his arms, would immediately stop crying. When the truck reached its destination, the mother would come for her child. But the baby wouldn't want her, and cling, weeping, to him, Wang. Again, the women would laugh, and he would pat the infant on the head and say, "Go along, little fellow. I can't hold you forever, you know!" And when the baby grew up, he'd come to China to visit him, and then Wang would. . . .

He frowned and shook his head to drive out these fancies. Hah! They proved he hadn't grown up yet. A mature man of affairs wouldn't be going in for daydreams.

No more daydreams! he said to himself. He felt he should be thinking about the actual, serious situation that confronted them.

"We better pick up some more water for the radiator at the next air raid station," he remarked to Liu. "I'm afraid the water in the station is going to freeze. . . ."

Liu kept his eyes on the road and didn't answer. He was deep in his own thoughts.

Not long after, the truck rolled to a halt. Again Liu carried the baby out; again the women jumped down from the back of the truck, chattering volubly. Without a word, Wang strode off to the mat-covered air raid station at the side of the road to draw water. The weather was icy cold. The water can was so frigid, it seemed to burn his fingers. Bits of ice floated in the can. After he had drawn a fresh supply and was pouring water into the radiator, he heard voices nearby. He turned to see Liu seated on the ground, a cigarette in his hand, laughing and gesticulating as he talked to the women in Korean. Liu was obviously pleased with himself that he could speak so well.

Why shouldn't he speak well? He's been here two years, Wang thought. Then he caught a phrase that he understood, and it happened to be about himself. Probably the baby's mother had asked how old he was. Liu had answered that the young comrade was eighteen.

"Aiya," said the woman, speaking in Chinese, "he doesn't look it! He can't be more than sixteen!"

At that, several of the women gazed in Wang's direction. He could feel, rather than see, the tender smiles on their faces. His short stature

and baby face did make people take him for sixteen. He considered that a personal failing, though he knew his stunted growth was due to the bitter life he had led as a child. An orphan, he had tended sheep for a landlord, was always hungry, had been stricken with malaria for over a year. . . . It infuriated him to recall that life.

He stood up on the bumper. "I'm nineteen!" he shouted angrily.

"Nineteen?" chuckled the baby's mother. "Aiya, impossible!"

"What's impossible about it? Nineteen!" Wang insisted. He dashed to the ground the pieces of ice remaining in the can, and hopped off the bumper.

But his furious manner only evoked friendly laughter. The woman again said a few words in Korean.

"Hey, Wang," called Liu, "she wants to know how long you've been in Korea."

Wang had only arrived five months ago, and of this fact he was very ashamed. Instead of answering, he walked away. Brooding over his shortness, he was consumed with hatred for his past life. When he was in this mood he really did look older, mature, indifferent. He sat down on a rock and took out a cigarette. Those women sure are a lot of old hens! That was how he thought an adult, a veteran soldier should feel about them. He struck match after match, but was unable to light his cigarette. He stole a glance at the Korean women, and in spite of himself a warm affection crept into his heart. They seemed just like his dearest relatives.

The grey-haired old lady whose two old sleeping mats were on the truck walked over to him. He suddenly thought of his own mother whom the usurers had hounded to death. The old lady gazed at him lovingly for a long time, then leaned forward and stroked his head. With her face practically touching his, she whispered:

"How good you are!"

"No, I'm not," he replied, trying to maintain his nonchalant pose. He didn't want any one to dote on him as a child. But his voice, playing tricks with his resolution, trembled emotionally.

"Your *omoni*—your mama?"

"I haven't any." Again he assumed a casual air. Forcefully he struck a match, lit his cigarette and inhaled deeply. This was for the benefit of the girl with the checked kerchief and thick brows. He had spotted her watching him a short distance away. Laugh again, why don't you! Go ahead and laugh! he muttered to himself. But he couldn't prevent a feeling of intimate friendship from welling within him.

"Hey, Wang," Liu hailed him, "don't forget your job!" Laughing, the truck driver came up with the baby in his arms.

It was very peculiar. He was fond of the kid now. He felt they had suddenly become very close to one another. If nobody asked him to hold the baby, he'd be unhappy. He no longer had that vague, and rather distant, feeling of tenderness toward the infant. Now he loved the baby

ardently and with deep concern. Like a little mother, he straightened the baby's clothes, wiped its mouth, then carefully wrapped it inside his overcoat. It comforted him to think that the child was surely very comfortable, nestled against his chest.

"Liu, do you think this kid is two yet?"

"Two! Seven or eight months at most. Didn't you see his mother nursing him?"

"Oh, I don't understand that kind of stuff."

"He couldn't be two. When I left home to join the Volunteers, my second kid was two years old. He was running all over the place."

"When do they learn to walk?"

"Around one, usually."

"Hah, in another couple of months, this little comrade'll be running around too."

"He'll start knocking over all the jugs and jars then."

"Hm. It must be lots of trouble having a kid in the house."

The baby was no longer a subject for squabbling, but a topic of common interest. To have the right to discuss matters like this with Liu seemed to Wang eminently satisfactory.

After a while, the truck again drew near a section of the highway singled by the enemy out as a major target for bombing. About a dozen kilometres ahead, bursting flares and exploding bombs became visible. Their fierce glare made the surrounding darkness seem even blacker. Rifles of the air raid watchers cracked continuously. Liu switched off his headlights and kept rolling. But a little further on, he had to stop. The road was jammed. Wang handed the baby to Liu and got out to see what was wrong.

He trotted down the line of stalled vehicles till he reached a truck carrying some officers. He asked them what was going on. They said a bridge several kilometres ahead had been bombed out at dusk. Maybe it hadn't been repaired yet. Wang ran on a little further. Then some of the vehicles began to move, and he rushed back to his own truck. He told Liu what he had learned. Anyhow, they couldn't stay here, said Liu definitely. This spot was too dangerous. But just as they were about to start, the vehicles ahead halted again. They could hear irritated voices shouting and a raucous medley of horns. The only thing they could do was wait.

Again Wang turned over the baby to Liu and got out to look things over. But there wasn't anything to see. It was bitter cold. As he stood beside the truck, hopping to keep warm, he could feel the eyes of the women on him.

"Everything's all right," he said to them in Korean. It was one of the few phrases he knew.

"We're not afraid," said the girl with the checked kerchief and thick eyebrows.

"That's right. Don't be afraid!"

"It's hard for you," the girl said sincerely.

"No, it isn't anything," he replied in hasty agitation.

It was wonderful, he thought, to be able to do things for these women, to take responsibility in such a situation.

The enemy planes were quite near now. They were machinegunning only a few kilometres away. Then the savage explosion of bombing began. Liu burst out of the cab with the baby in his arms, shouting for the women to get off the truck—immediately—and take shelter. The women quickly jumped down and raced after Liu, who led them toward a nearby mountain slope. The veteran driver's judgment certainly was sharp—the whistle of bombs followed a few seconds later. Liu roared for everyone to lie down, and in the fields and on the slope, the women threw themselves flat. Liu lay with the baby wrapped in his overcoat against his chest, pressing close behind a mound of earth, sheltering the child with his body. Wang had helped the grey-haired old lady down from the truck and supported her as they ran. When the bombs began screaming down, he flung his arms around her and rolled with her into a ditch. Two bombs landed—one off a distance, the other next to the highway.

The old lady lay motionless beneath Wang. Both of them were covered with earth hurled by the exploding bomb. Wang quickly got to his knees and raised up the old lady. She had been shaken dizzy by the blast.

"*Omoni*, mama," he cried hoarsely.

Trembling, the old lady sighed faintly, and with her dry old fingers, patted Wang's icy cheek. Then she cupped his face in both her hands. . . .

At that moment, they heard the agitated voices of the other women. Liu had been wounded in the left shoulder by a bomb splinter, and the women were helping him apply a bandage. The hand of that girl with the checked kerchief had been hurt too. But she had ignored her own injury, and excitedly rushed over to Liu. The baby's mother ripped open the first-aid packet. She kept wiping her eyes, quickly, with the sleeve of her jacket, but her anxious tears continued to flow. A young woman, staring blankly into the distance, was holding the baby.

In the midst of all this stood Liu, tall, a little stout. He was watching them with a friendly, rather silly, grin. Wang raced up, looked him over, then flew to examine the baby. The baby was unhurt, sound asleep. Wang stretched out his arms, as though the baby was the only thing that mattered at the moment. The young woman handed over the child without any hesitation. She took Wang's possessiveness quite for granted. But then Liu called to him:

"Hey, Wang, check the truck over and back it up!"

He returned the baby to the woman and hurried to the truck.

Wang found the vehicle undamaged. Joyously, he leaped into the cab, started the motor and began backing the truck further away from

the vehicle ahead of it. He had full confidence in himself now, full confidence in the slight skill he had acquired in the past few months helping Liu. He felt he could do any job that was given him. Backing the truck down the slope, he saw the old lady by the side of the road. There was an overwrought expression on her face.

Liu climbed up to the roadside, shouted for him to stop, and clambered into the truck. Liu had decided that they should continue their trip at once. Wang relinquished the driver's seat to him. No sooner was Wang back in his own place than he remembered the baby. He hopped down and hurried over to take the child from its mother's bosom. . . . The women all got back into the truck. Liu set the vehicle in motion again.

"Can you drive alright?" Wang asked him.

"Yes." Liu snuffed out the cigarette he had just lit against the steering wheel post. "When we get past this stretch, you can take over."

Traffic wasn't so heavy here, and the enemy planes seemed to have gone. Swinging around a truck that had been hit, they rolled on steadily, gradually picking up speed. They passed more than a dozen vehicles, turning their lights off when the warning rifles sounded, putting them on again when the danger was over. Liu's eyes again shone with grim purpose.

Holding the baby, Wang could feel the cold wind seeping in. He noticed that the window of the door beside him had been broken by a bomb splinter. He wrapped the child tighter in his arms.

Soon after, they heard the sound of bombing nearby again. But the enemy was obviously aiming blindly, for there was a low heavy overcast which made flare bombs useless. The truck sped on, over ground that occasionally shook from explosions. From time to time, glaring bursts illuminated the underside of dirty grey clouds. The whole world was in ferment.

Liu stared fixedly ahead, his face a bit pale. His driving was masterly. On the winding mountain road, he passed many other vehicles, most of the time with his lights out. Wang watched him, very impressed. He noticed that the overcoat that Liu had draped over his shoulders had slipped back. Reaching his hand out to pull the coat up, he touched the left shoulder. It was soaked with blood.

"I'll drive."

"No. I can manage."

Again they ran into a traffic jam. They learned that the bridge which had been bombed out at dusk had just been repaired an hour before. A long line of vehicles had formed, waiting to go across. Liu pulled out and passed two trucks ahead of him, then followed a truck laden with lumber over a steep dangerous little side road, detouring around a whole string of vehicles halted on the main highway. He trailed the lumber truck to the river bank, where the little road turned and brought them to the crowded bridge entrance.

Enemy planes, looking for their target, were circling in the clouds.

Anti-aircraft guns and machineguns were firing from both banks of the river to protect the bridge. A fierce rapid cacophony filled the air; streams of red sparks flew into the low grey clouds. Bumper to bumper, vehicles were crawling toward the newly repaired bridge.

The officer in charge—the commander of the repair company—stopped Liu's truck. He told Liu to get back on the highway to his place in the line. Otherwise, he'd have to wait till the whole line had crossed.

Liu said he didn't know you had to line up; there had been a lot of trucks behind him—it would be difficult to get back into line now. Wang angrily demanded to know why no one had been stationed to prevent people from taking the side road, to tell them to get in line. It wasn't their fault. They couldn't go back. If they had to wait till all the other trucks had passed, even by dawn they still wouldn't be able to get across. . . .

Under such circumstances, it's always easy for people to think they're in the right. Wang felt the bridge was being managed very badly, that he had every reason to be indignant. But the officer was used to this sort of thing. Without paying much attention to Wang, he walked away.

"This is a fine spot to be in!" said Liu.

"I'll handle this," said Wang righteously. Carrying the baby, he opened the door and got out.

Liu sat annoyed in the cab. A moment later, he could hear Wang wrangling, but he couldn't make out the officer's replies. Wang kept on shouting for a long time, though his tone wasn't nearly so tough any more. They didn't understand the situation, he was saying. Their driver had been wounded. . . . Liu still couldn't hear the officer's answers. The man was trying to keep order under tense, harrowing circumstances, and he obviously wasn't going to be talked out of it. What's more, he was ringed by a number of other drivers, also demanding permission to cross out of turn. They were cutting into Wang's speech with pleas of their own.

Liu began to get upset. Wang's voice was painful to him and made him angry—though he couldn't tell whether he was angry at young Wang or at that methodical company commander. He got out of the cab. As soon as his feet touched the ground, he felt a little dizzy. He stood still a moment, then walked against the icy wind to where the men were gathered. He heard Wang saying:

"Just think a minute, comrade. We weren't trying to break the rules. Our driver's been wounded. Our one truck won't delay anybody. . . ."

"That's right," another driver put in. "One or two trucks. . . ."

Liu frowned. Again he heard the flat, exhausted voice of the officer:

"Disobeying the rules is just what causes delay. . . ."

Liu interrupted. "That's enough, Wang. Come on back. We'll get back into line!"

"But if we do that . . . we won't finish our job on time!" Wang's voice was no longer militantly righteous. It was hurt and worried; there seemed to be some tears in it.

"Come back," said Liu. "We've got to obey the rules!"

"Is that your driver?" the company commander asked, turning his flashlight on Liu. He was plainly surprised by Liu's stubborn self-respect.

Before Wang had a chance to answer, the baby he was carrying in his fleece-lined overcoat let out a howl and began to cry. Surprised, everyone turned to stare; two Volunteers came running over. A crying baby at this busy military bridge was the last thing anybody expected. Young Wang became frantic with embarrassment. Patting the child, he hissed:

"Don't cry. What have you got to cry about!" But in spite of himself his voice turned gentle. "Don't cry-ah, precious," he sang, patting the baby's bottom. "We're going to cross the bridge right away!"

Enemy planes had again appeared, and the ack-ack guns were throwing up an intense bombardment, but neither Wang nor the other men paid that any attention. The baby kept on crying.

"What's all this?" demanded the puzzled officer. "Where'd you pick up that kid?"

"Pick up?" Wang squawked resentfully. "You haven't seen—our truck is full of Korean women from the front area!" Again he patted the child's behind. "Don't cry-ah, little precious. If we can't cross the bridge, we'll just stay here."

After listening for a moment to make sure the enemy planes were gone, the officer turned his flashlight on the infant kicking and squalling in Wang's arms. The baby's face was full of tears, and he had made a great wet patch—though not with tears—on Wang's overcoat. In the glow of the flashlight, Liu could see a smile on the man's grimy face; an amused, bantering look came into the officer's eyes.

"Now I've seen everything!" he said sarcastically. He suddenly became filled with animation. "So that's how it is, eh—'Don't cry-ah, little precious. If we can't cross the bridge, we'll just stay here. . . .' Well, stay then!"

"That's what we're doing, isn't it?" yelled Wang.

The drivers and soldiers all crowded around to see the baby. Tired, cold, anxious to get on with the bridge crossing, yet their faces lit with smiles. When the threshing infant punched his little fist against Wang's cheek, the company commander grinned broadly. Everyone understood now why this clumsy young driver's helper had been making militant demands.

"You've got Korean women comrades in your truck?"

"That's right."

The officer turned on his light, walked over to the truck and flashed

his beam on it. Silent Korean women were gazing at the light—in a tight spot or bitter cold, they were sure to be calm and quiet. Wang trotted beside the company commander, all the while patting and admonishing the bawling infant:

"Dear precious, don't cry-ah. We're going to cross the bridge right away. Ah-ah!"

The officer and several of the other drivers had seen it—the Korean women were all wearing only thin cotton clothing.

"Comrade . . . we weren't trying to break the rules . . ." Wang began softly.

"Alright, alright. You don't have to sing it. Go on across," snapped the officer. But he couldn't resist grinning. ". . . 'Dear precious, don't cry. We're going to cross!'—You're a slick devil!"

"Be careful that kid doesn't mess all over you! Who ever taught you to hold a baby that way!" shouted a soldier.

Wang hooted happily and climbed into the cab. Then he stuck his head out of the window and yelled:

"Let's see you hold him a while. Hah!"

Liu started the truck, squeezed in at the head of the line and got on to the bridge. The officer and several of the drivers unconsciously walked after the truck a few paces. Then they stood in the icy wind, listening to the baby's crying and the cheerful crooning of the young driver's helper, wafted to them through the drone of motors. For a long while, their faces beamed with peaceful, satisfied smiles.

By the time Liu got to the other side of the bridge, he was having difficulty holding up. Clenching his lower lip between his teeth, he drove on silently. It was now three o'clock in the morning, and they still had one hundred and fifty kilometres to travel. To make speed and get out of the heavy traffic, Liu swung off into a secluded side road which he knew well. There were no air raid watchers along this road, and it meant traversing a high mountain, rearing up ahead. As they entered a valley, Liu stopped the truck and asked the women to listen for enemy planes. He told Wang to put some more gasoline in the tank. . . . Then they began jolting along the bumpy road.

Wang asked Liu to let him drive. Liu shook his head.

The truck's headlights bored through the darkness of the valley. All kinds of trees lined the road. Only rarely did they see any homes, and these one or two were immediately swallowed up by the night. They forded a dozen or more shallow rushing streams; they brushed past trees thrusting branches of withered leaves into the road. A bitter wind screamed piercingly through the valley, as though furious that this truck should dare to enter its domain. The men's hands and feet were frozen numb. As the road began winding up the mountain, the women beat on the roof of the cab. They said they could hear planes. Liu turned off his lights, drove on a short distance, stopped and listened, then switched the lights on again.

When the women pounded on the cab, Liu became intensely aware of what a close intimate bond there was between him and them. The criticalness of the situation shook him out of his pain and exhaustion. He seemed to see the faces of the women—blue with cold—and their urgently expectant eyes. He was conscious of the child in Wang's arms. A scene flashed into his mind: His own children, sleeping deeply in a brightly lit room, their small heads resting on their pillows. Nearby, their new padded jackets of red flowered cloth are hanging—Grandma made them for them herself. The long room is filled with many things, all belonging to the old lady, including a wooden chest she brought when she married Liu's father many years ago. The room has an odour of age about it. . . .

These memories soothed and comforted Liu. Another picture appeared in his mind—even clearer than the previous one: He sees the interior of the textile mill, bright and noisy. His wife is standing at a weaving machine. She's a little pale, and perspiration stands out on her forehead. She's thinking of something as she works. Suddenly someone comes up to her and shouts over the noise of the machines, "It sure is cold outside. Below zero." Startled, she raises her head and asks, "Is it snowing?" Then she sees the snow on the person's shoulders, still unmelted, and she thinks—It's snowing. How is he getting along? Has he put on his padded clothes yet? The wretch, still no mail from him! . . .

Women are always remembering things like padded clothes, Liu mused. Can't you see? I'm doing fine here. I'm going up a mountain. . . . He smiled. She's right, too. I haven't written her for two months. But what the hell is there to write about? Padded clothes? . . .

Again the women drummed on the roof, and he switched off the lights. In the gloomy fastness of the mountain height, the truck pushed on against the savage icy wind. Sometimes they travelled with the headlights on; sometimes they groped through the darkness. Slowly, they neared the top of the mountain. Their lights now shone on steep cliff-sides plunging down, now on arrow-straight poplar trees rearing high into the sky. The women sat in complete silence. Young Wang held the sleeping baby in his arms. All of them were joined together, with all their minds, with all their hearts, to win this struggle.

When they reached the other side of the mountain, a vast indistinct panorama spread before them. They were coming down on to the plain. In the distance, earth and sky seemed to blend together, but on the plain itself tiny headlights flashed here and there like fireflies, confirming that this broad misty area was teeming with life. Here the world had awakened; it was bustling. Neither enemy planes nor bitter cold could subdue it. Liu had viewed this kind of scene hundreds of times in the past two years, but it never failed to thrill him. Wherever headlights flashed on the wide plain, there were his comrades. They could see his

lights too, darting high up on this mountain. And still further north, out of sight, was China, their native land.

Liu took a deep breath. He turned on his full brights to illuminate the valley below. Little bits of white began falling from the black sky, glistening, softly dancing as they passed through the broad beam of the headlights. Gradually, these tiny fragile white particles became denser until, whirling silently, they seemed to flow through the lights in solid mass.

"It's snowing," Wang said happily. "This is the first snow of the year."

Snow, thought Liu. She guessed right. It really is snowing. He felt fine, peaceful. His heart was dancing with the snowflakes. They fell lightly against the windshield, and accumulated on the glass without melting. The road was quickly turning white.

He seemed to hear his wife again: It's snowing. How is he getting along? . . . A tired gentle smile suffused his frozen face. They had come down from the mountain now. Liu stopped the truck, leaned his head against the steering wheel, and fainted. Wang called to him. He slowly revived.

"Aiya, I'm dizzy as hell."

He said it cheerfully. The road was very still, his headlights were out. He thought he could hear the soft falling of the snow.

"Come on. I'll play mama for a while. This stretch of road is yours."

Liu took the baby, and Wang, looking excited but severe, slid over into the driver's seat.

"There won't be any enemy planes out in this snowstorm," murmured Liu hazily. "Turn on the brights!"

The truck rolled forward.

Holding the baby, Liu couldn't keep his eyes open. He felt very faint. But his mind was still clear. Those women, he thought, especially that old lady—they'll freeze. . . . He woke with a start.

"Wang, give my overcoat to that old mama."

Wang gave him a compliant glance and immediately applied his brakes, opened the door and got out. A few moments later, covered with snow, he leaped back into the cab. He had given his own coat to the old lady. Liu didn't say anything. The truck started again.

"Liu, how are you?"

"I was a little dopey for a while. It's not serious. . . . I was thinking. You're going to be a very good driver some day."

"Don't worry about a thing. I can manage." Wang's voice was trembling. There were happy tears in his eyes.

You're going to be a very good driver!—What a compliment! Wang tried going a little faster. Everything was fine. His turns were very steady too. His eyes fixed on the road, filled with solemn joy, Wang was conscious of participating in a great cause. He felt he could take



YEN HAN: Chinese People's Volunteers Help the Koreans at Harvest Time

responsibility now, that he could do his share—could any other bliss be more satisfying?

In the beam of the headlights, the white snowy road appeared to be flowing backward beneath them like a river. The truck didn't seem to be moving at all; rather it was the highway that was racing to the rear. Wang was delighted by the road's fresh spotless snow. The snow-mantled cypress trees that shot past by the sides of the road delighted him too. One round-pated cypress, wearing a soft white hat, gleamed in the headlights as it came dancing toward him, then gave him a little bow and disappeared into the night. When he was small, it was on snowy days like this that he used to climb trees after birds' nests. Those childish tricks were really too silly. . . . Another cypress bent under the weight of a soft white snow hat came prancing toward him. It bowed too, and was swallowed up in the darkness. In the gleaming headlights, the road, cleaner and whiter by the minute, surged toward him merrily.

Liu didn't utter another word. He was obviously better, but his eyes stared fixedly ahead, and he held the child tightly in his bosom. Wang saw him bend his head and kiss the baby. This time it wasn't one of those half in jest, half in earnest, playful kind of kisses. There was real feeling in it. Liu's expression was thoughtful, serious. He looked at the baby's tranquil little face for a long time. Then he lightly wiped its mouth and kissed it again.

Wang was highly embarrassed to witness such a performance. Liu, a bold gay fellow in his thirties too! Wang pretended not to have seen anything. But then he remembered how he felt when the bombs were falling all around them, and he couldn't help wishing for another whiff of that sweet milky fragrance himself.

The baby began to cry. Liu wrapped him in his overcoat.

"Don't cry, dear," sang Liu gravely, gently patting him. "It's cold, it's snowing. But spring is coming; your mama's wheat will sprout!"

There was already three inches of snow on the road. The truck sped forward smoothly.

Snow whirled and flew. . . . The sky was turning light. The headlights shown yellow on the snow. The surrounding country, snow-covered mounds and fields, isolated houses with blackly gaping doors, dark branches stubbornly righting themselves under their burdens of snow—these were now becoming dimly visible.

They were only about ten kilometres from their destination. The women were all awake now. Wrapped in quilts and old clothes, silently enduring the snow and cold, they gazed at the countryside. They were approaching their new home. A young woman began to sing; others joined in. Soon every one of them, including the grey-haired old lady and the seven-year-old little girl, were all singing.

There hadn't been a sound out of the frozen, exhausted women the whole night while they staunchly withstood enemy planes and bitter cold.

But now they were singing. They were coming to their new home. They welcomed the snow—the first snow of the year, falling gently on their land. Listening to the baby crying in the driver's cab, they sang. And at once the whole vehicle burst out of the pall that hardship and gloom had settled upon it. It throbbed with a springtime atmosphere, festive, triumphant. The remaining few kilometres flew by on wings of song.

Rolling past a few low houses and crumbling walls covered with snow, the truck pulled up to the door of the local government office and stopped. People came running out of the office, including two girls dressed in Korean People's Army uniforms. The singing on the truck was still going strong.

The women started coming down off the truck. Standing in the snow, the two Army girls were very moved by the singing. They tightly embraced the first two women who climbed down. The young women on the truck continued singing. It was then that the door of the cab opened, and the driver and his helper emerged, smiling through the blur of falling snow. In the arms of the driver, a baby was sound asleep.

They all stood silent in the whirling snowflakes. Wang took the baby and lifted him high. Everyone looked at the infant, then at Liu's blood-stained overcoat and his pale, smiling face. The baby's mother flew over to take her child. Tears gushing from her eyes, she grasped Wang's hand and buried her face against his shoulder. Then she rushed over to Liu and rested her head against his uninjured right arm.

The girl with the checked kerchief and thick eyebrows, herself wounded, was deeply stirred.

"It's been very hard for you, comrades," she cried.

"Oh, no! It wasn't anything!" Wang hastened to reply. He was thrilled, extremely happy, only worried that he would again do something childish before the women. He brought out a cigarette with a hand that shook a bit. Then, suddenly, he walked up to the infant's mother and asked:

"Omoni, what's the baby's name?"

Before the woman had a chance to answer, several voices replied, saying the baby was called Kim Kui Yung.

"Kim Kui Yung, I'll remember that!" said Wang, his face crimson.

"Goodbye, Kim Kui Yung," said Liu. With that serious, thoughtful, fatherly expression Wang had observed before, Liu bent down and kissed the baby cradled in its mother's arms.

The women stood quietly. Two long dark wheel tracks stretching behind the truck were quickly obliterated by the silent, thickly falling snow.

Stories for Children

We publish here four stories for children. The two stories by Yeh Sheng-tao were written over twenty years ago, just after the May Fourth Movement of 1919 which was against imperialism and feudalism. Chinese writing at that time vigorously opposed autocracy and advocated democracy, and children's stories were no exception. The two stories by Chang Tien-yi, written during the last two years, represent a new approach to stories for children in a new society.

YEH SHENG-TAO

Statue of an Ancient Hero

To commemorate a hero of ancient times, a sculptor was asked to carve a statue.

The sculptor accepted the task, and straightway set about reading all the histories that dealt with this hero, in order to visualize what he looked like, and what sort of character and vision he had. He thought it would be better to carve no statue at all rather than carve one carelessly. Since he had undertaken this work, he should produce a living likeness of the hero, so that all who saw the statue might know and understand this hero and hence respect him the more.

Success often follows single-minded effort. By looking up references and using his imagination, the sculptor was gradually able to make the conception of the statue take clear shape in his mind. He decided what its attitude and expression should be, and had all the details taped out right down to its little fingers and the last hair on its head. Only by realizing this conception could he produce the real living hero, not just a dead statue.

The sculptor went up the mountain to choose a great stone, and

then set to work. He had the completed model in his mind, and as he looked at the stone he knew quite clearly what should be left and what chipped away. His chisel rose and fell, his knife cut again and again, and big and small chips of stone fell to the ground. Like an apparition manifesting itself first dimly then clearly, the hero's statue finally stood before the sculptor. Not a line too much, not a hair too little—exactly like the image in his mind's eye.

The statue's raised head and eyes gazing steadily into the distance expressed a strong, far-reaching vision. Its lips were parted as if in a shout, its left arm flung forward in a strong curve as if embracing the masses below. Its clenched right hand was outstretched, the muscles on the arm standing out like the knots in an old tree, as much as to show that any enemy who tried to take the least advantage of it would feel the strength of its fist.

There was a square in the middle of the town, and the people had this new statue set up in the centre of the square. Stone chips were used for the base of the statue—the chips of various sizes that the sculptor had chiselled off when he was carving the statue. This was a new form of artistic construction, which the sculptor claimed was much better than using one square block of stone as a plinth. The base was unusually high, so that this statue was the first thing anyone saw on approaching the city, just as the first thing you see when you approach Paris is the Eiffel Tower.

After this the sculptor became famous. He had succeeded in making a statue of the ancient hero that satisfied everybody.

A great memorial meeting was held to celebrate the completion of the statue. The citizens saluted before it, shouted for joy, sang and danced. Several thousand casks of wine were drunk, several hundred people had their clothes torn, and quite a few fell down and bruised their knees and foreheads. From that day on, the hero was always in their thoughts, and they went about their tasks with a new zest. Whoever passed the statue would pause and bow his head in respect before going on.

Pride is common to all who are not sages or fools. Since the stone from which the hero had been cut was neither a sage nor a fool, only a stone, the adoration of so many people naturally could not check its pride.

"See how wonderful I am! I have a unique position, above everything else. All the citizens bow and salute before me, and I know not a single one is insincere. This is a rare honour, which no single spirit or fairy can equal! . . ."

This speech was not addressed to the drifting white clouds, because the clouds have no heart and would be unable to understand; nor was it addressed to the swaying forest, for the trees were murmuring to each other and had no time to listen. It was addressed to the stone chips of various sizes at its feet. It was airing its pride before its

mates, which is a common practice in this world. However, it kept its head raised and its eyes fixed steadily on the horizon, not lowering its head the least bit to draw closer to its companions—a sure sign of excessive pride. It did not think it worth its while to approach its mates or look at them again. Of course, what it was on the tip of its tongue to say was: "You, packed at my feet, what do you amount to!"

"Hullo, you up there, what's got into you? You've forgotten the past!" said a small chip of stone slowly from one corner of the base, speaking every word clearly and emphatically, as if to wake up a drunkard.

"What?" The stone on top was taken aback, but unwilling to relinquish its proud tone.

"In the past weren't you one with us? There was no you, and no us—we were one single block."

"Right, we used to be one single block. But after the sculptor worked on us, we separated. As the chisel rose and fell, and the blade cut deeper and deeper, you fell off in separate pieces. I was left alone, exalted and eminent, a statue worshipped by all the citizens. It is right and proper that I should have this unique position. And that you should be piled beneath me as a base is quite in keeping with your character too. You are hardly my equals, are you? If you are equal to me, then heaven and earth must be equal!"

Another stone chip could not help laughing.

"What are you laughing at? Ill-mannered scrap!"

"You've not only forgotten the past, you've forgotten the present too."

"What about the present?"

"You're not actually separated from us now. We're still one whole, we've only changed our form. Just look, from the tip of your head down to our bottom-most layer, aren't we fixed together? Besides, this change to our present form means that your position is very precarious. You're standing on us, and if we choose to let you down, you won't be so high and mighty any more. . . ."

"And are you the only stone chips in the world?"

"It's no use your looking for other stone chips. If ever you fall, that will be the end of you! You'll be smashed into smithereens exactly like us."

"Ill-mannered scrap! Stop talking nonsense to scare people!" The stone on top was angry and, thinking it must not lose its dignity, deliberately shouted as loudly as it could, as if addressing criminals and slaves.

"He doesn't believe us," said all the stone chips together. "Let's show him right away! We'll let him down this very minute."

The stone on top was so frightened, it forgot to be angry, and forgot its dignity. It raised its voice to say beseechingly: "Steady on!"

Steady on! We're all friends, all friends together—why quarrel like this! I believe everything you say. Don't, for goodness' sake, let me down!"

"You believe us, do you?" They roared with laughter.

"Yes, I do, I believe everything."

The danger had passed. But pride is like the root of grasses that grow year after year—as soon as winter is over, fresh blades appear. The stone on top deliberately kept its voice down, as it said rather tentatively: "I keep feeling I'm superior to you, because I represent a hero, a hero famed in history."

"And is history entirely reliable?" asked one stone chip with a sarcastic laugh. "How can the historians know and write down what people who lived a thousand years ago really thought? Do you think we can believe everything in history?"

"Especially when it comes to heroes," put in another stone chip. "They may have been fools or rogues, but well-fed historians take it into their heads to make heroes out of them. And nobody can disprove what happened all those years ago. What's even more amusing is that sometimes when there's no such person—when it's an obvious fake—they still produce a hero. Aren't there many such heroes who, although they are characters in novels, yet live in men's imaginations? It proves there is not much to choose between fiction and history."

"You don't think the hero I represent is a fake, do you?" The stone on top was rather alarmed, and in an attempt to reassure itself, said: "Look how the citizens commemorate and respect him. He must be one of history's real heroes."

"You can't be sure!" replied six or seven chips together.

"The thing most citizens are cleverest at," chimed in a perky little chip, "is commemorating and worshipping a fake!"

The stone on top was very put out and muttered to itself: "Then I've been taken in. That sculptor's made me represent a fake, and raised me up so high, as if to give me a position of honour and dignity. I didn't understand at first, and thought it was something to be proud of. I've been taken in!"

Many of the stone chips at the base started muttering too: "And haven't we been taken in too! To spend all our days piled up at the foot of a fake—what's the point of that?"

Nobody said any more, each busy with his own thoughts.

In the middle of the night, the statue suddenly fell, like a swimmer jumping into the water from a height. Being so high, it crashed down heavily and broke into a thousand pieces, so that it was smashed out of all recognition. At the same time the base scattered and rolled out on the ground—big and small stone chips as before.

The next morning, when the citizens prepared to bow respectfully as they passed the statue, they found the centre of the square filled with chunks of stone and rubble, while the statue had disappeared. They gaped at each other, and found not a word to say. Half their energy

seemed to have been drained away, and they went about their work lazily and apathetically.

The sculptor went up to the heap of stones and wept bitterly, mourning for his masterpiece. He vowed that he would never carve a statue again. And he was as good as his word.

The disorderly heap of stones in the middle of the square was a nuisance, and someone's proposal that it should be used to build a road north from the city was generally approved. After the new road was built, the people were able to travel about easily, and were so pleased that they held another meeting of celebration.

As the clear, beautiful sunlight lit up the new road, each stone showed a smiling face. One after the other they congratulated themselves, saying:

"We're really equal now!"

"Nothing fake about us."

"We're all gathered together to make a real road, so that people can go where they please."

The Emperor's New Clothes

Many people must have read Hans Andersen's story *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

The story is about an emperor who loved to wear new clothes, and was cheated by two swindlers. These swindlers said they could make him the most beautiful new clothes imaginable, which would, moreover, have the magic property of being invisible to anyone who wasn't fit for his post or who was a fool. First they pretended to weave the material, then to cut it out and sew it. The emperor sent his chief ministers several times to watch. The ministers could see nothing, but they didn't want to be considered fools or—what was worse—as unfit for their jobs; so when they came back they all said they had seen the clothes, and they really were extremely beautiful.

The day that the new clothes were said to be ready, the emperor was to hold a grand ceremony, and he decided to wear them for the occasion. The two swindlers asked the emperor to take off all his old clothes, and went through the motions of dressing him in his new robes. Nobody there wanted to be thought a fool, much less unfit for his job, accordingly they burst into a chorus of praise. The emperor expressed himself as satisfied, and marched out naked.

The people lining the road also praised the emperor's new clothes, as if they could see them quite clearly. However, a child remarked truthfully: "That man hasn't got anything on!"

When the crowd heard this, they passed the word round, until everybody was shouting: "The emperor really hasn't got anything on!"

The emperor was taken aback, realizing that this was the truth. But since he had pretended to put on his new clothes to come out, he couldn't very well go back to change. He had to draw himself up and go through with it.

What happened after? Hans Andersen didn't say. But actually there was a lot more.

The emperor marched along, forcing himself to look as if nothing was wrong, holding himself so straight that his shoulders and spine ached. The chamberlains who were holding up the train of his non-existent robes knew they were taking part in a comedy, and wanted to laugh, but dared not. They had to bite their tongues to keep from laughing. And every single guard kept his eyes fixed on his own nose, not daring to glance sideways at his companions, for fear that if they caught each other's eye and shared the knowledge of what a ridiculous emperor they were guarding they would burst out laughing.

The people, however, were more straightforward. It didn't occur to them to bite their tongues or keep their eyes on their own noses. And since the fact that the emperor was wearing nothing had been blurted out, laughter naturally followed.

"Look at the emperor who goes about naked!" chuckled one.

"He must be out of his mind!" guffawed another.

"Scraggy, ugly creature!" jeered a third.

"He's got shoulders and thighs like a chicken!" put in a fourth.

These remarks made the emperor feel humiliated and angry. He stopped and snapped at his ministers: "Did you hear those fools and disloyal subjects wagging their tongues over there? My new clothes are the most beautiful imaginable, wearing them adds to my royal dignity—isn't that what you've all said? In future I'm never going to wear anything else. People who say I'm wearing nothing or spread other lies are obviously thoroughly depraved. Off with their heads! My kingdom doesn't want such wicked people! This is my new law. Have it proclaimed at once."

The ministers dared not delay. They ordered the heralds to blow their trumpets, and proclaim the new law at the top of their voices. Thus for a time, to be sure, the jeering stopped. The emperor, mollified, resumed his triumphal progress.

However, he had not gone many yards, when laughter and gibes burst out like fireworks again.

"Not a stitch on him!"

"Nasty, pasty skin!"

"Look at his ribs sticking out!"

"What wonderful new clothes!"

Each remark was punctuated by laughter.

The emperor lost patience again. He glared at his ministers with a face like thunder, and bellowed: "Did you hear that?"

"We heard!" quavered the ministers.

"Do you remember the new law I just made?"

Without waiting to reply, the ministers ordered the soldiers to seize all who had talked or laughed.

Confusion followed. The soldiers rushed hither and thither, using their spears to round up those who were trying to escape. Many people fell down; and screams and sobs took the place of the jeers and laughter that had just been heard, as forty to fifty people were seized. The emperor ordered them to be executed then and there, to show his subjects that his was an iron law.

After that, of course, the emperor couldn't wear anything. Whether in the inner palace or the court, he went about naked, from time to time going through the motions of smoothing out the wrinkles in his clothes. His concubines and courtiers gradually learned to keep a straight face, as if nothing were the matter, when they saw the scraggy, pasty creature putting on this act. They stopped finding it at all strange, as if he really were wearing clothes. This ability was absolutely essential for the concubines and courtiers, for without it they ran the risk of losing their posts, or even their lives.

Even so, a moment's carelessness brought some of them to a bad end.

One was the emperor's favourite concubine. One day she was keeping the emperor company while he drank, and to please him she poured a cup of red wine and put it to his lips. "Do drink this," she said dotingly, "and may you live forever!"

The emperor was pleased, and drained the cup. But he must have drunk too quickly, for he had a fit of coughing, and spat out a lot of the wine onto his chest.

"Oh dear, you've wetted your chest!"

"What! My chest!"

The favourite concubine's pretty face turned pale when she realized what she had done. "No," she corrected herself, in a voice that trembled. "You've wetted your clothes."

"You said I'd wetted my chest. Wasn't that the same as saying I wasn't wearing any clothes? Fool! You're disloyal! And you've broken my law!" Then he ordered his attendants: "Take her to the executioner."

Another was a very learned courtier. Although he had forced himself to acquire the same skill as the others, whenever he saw the emperor he couldn't help feeling it was too unlike an emperor the way he sat there naked on the throne. If you called him a hairless monkey, that would be closer to the mark. He went in fear that one day he might slip up and laugh or let fall a remark that would at once cause his ruin. And so, on the pretext that he wanted to go home to look after his old mother, he asked the emperor to release him from his post.

"You're a good son," said the emperor. "I grant your request."

The courtier thanked him and turned to leave, feeling as light-hearted as if he had just been freed from heavy chains. Unconsciously he muttered: "After this, I shan't have to see that naked emperor every day."

The emperor didn't quite catch this remark. "What did he say?" he asked his ministers.

Unable to make up anything on the spur of the moment, the ministers told the truth.

"So it was because you didn't want to see me every day that you asked to resign!" roared the emperor. "And as you were leaving, you broke my law! Well, I shall never let you go now!" Then he ordered his executioner: "Take him out and kill him!"

So in the inner palace and the court, they were all as careful as could be.

But the ordinary people hadn't learned the skill of the concubines and courtiers. Whenever the emperor came out and they saw his posturing and how cadaverous he looked, they couldn't resist pointing, passing remarks and laughing. Then cruel executions would follow. The day that the emperor sacrificed to heaven, three hundred people were killed. The day that he reviewed his troops, five hundred were killed; while during the imperial progress through the capital more than a thousand were killed—that was because the emperor passed through so many streets, there were more people to comment and laugh at him.

A kind old courtier felt these large-scale executions were too cruel, and they ought to be stopped. But the emperor would never admit he had been in the wrong, and anyone who said the emperor had made a mistake was making a very very big mistake himself. The old courtier thought if only a way could be found to get the emperor to wear clothes again, there would be an end to the talk and laughter, and thus there would be no more executions. He spent several sleepless nights, trying to think of the best and safest way to do this.

Finally he hit on a plan. He went to the court to see the emperor, and said: "As a loyal subject, I have a suggestion which I hope Your Majesty will consider. You have always liked new clothes, and with good reason. Because when you put on new robes, and they shed splendour on all sides, your glory and dignity are the better displayed. Recently, however, you haven't had any new clothes made. Probably you've been so busy with affairs of state that it slipped your mind. The robes you have on now are rather worn. Why don't you order the tailors to have new ones made quickly, so that you can change?"

"Worn, did you say?" The emperor looked at his chest and thighs, then passed his hand over his body. "Nonsense! These are magic clothes—they can never wear out. Didn't you hear me say I was never going to wear anything else? If you want me to take them off, you must want me to become ugly and unlucky. In view of your past loyalty

and your age, I won't kill you. But you'll spend the rest of your days in jail!"

The old courtier had been to such pains all for nothing—the executions continued as before. Moreover, the fact that there was no end to the people who laughed at him got on the emperor's nerves, and he issued another, harsher law. He decreed that when the emperor passed, the people must let no sound pass their lips. It didn't matter what was said, any sound at all was a crime, and the offender would be seized and killed.

After this law was proclaimed, most honest people felt this was going too far. Of course it was wrong to laugh at the emperor, but why should men be put to death for talking about other things? They banded together and came to the palace, where they knelt down, saying they had a request to make to the emperor.

Rather alarmed, the emperor came out and blustered: "What have all you people come for? This isn't a revolt, is it?"

The honest citizens dared not raise their heads, as they replied hastily: "Oh no. No, no. It would be a great crime even to think of the word Your Majesty has just used."

Reassured, the emperor assumed a sterner and more lordly air, as he smoothed his non-existent clothes, and asked: "What have you come for then?"

"We beg Your Majesty to allow us to talk and laugh freely, for how can human beings keep quiet? So we ask you to repeal the new law."

"What freedom can you have?" demanded the emperor with a grin. "If you want freedom, you can't be my subjects. If you want to be my subjects, you must keep my laws. Mine are iron laws. Repeal them? Bah—it's not so easy!" Having said this, he stalked back into the palace.

The honest citizens dared say no more. By and by a few of them raised their heads a fraction, and when they saw the emperor had gone, they knew there was nothing to be done, they had better go home. They warned each other, in future when the emperor came out, everybody had better sit at home behind closed doors, and on no account go out to look. If anyone went out to look and was careless enough to let out a sound, he would pay for it with his life. It was no laughing matter.

• One day the emperor set out with his ministers and guards for his chateau. All the road along which they passed was deserted. The doors of the houses on both sides were closed. The only sound to be heard was the tramp of feet, as they passed silently along like a night patrol.

Suddenly the emperor stopped, and pricked up his ears. "Hear that?" he roared at his ministers.

The ministers listened carefully, then answered:

"Yes, there's a child crying."

"There's a woman singing over here."

"The people over there must be drunk—they're laughing so oddly."

When the emperor saw his ministers take the matter so calmly, as if they were just out for a stroll, he grew even more angry. "Have you forgotten the law I made?" he bellowed.

The ministers caught on. They ordered the guards to break into the houses. Old and young, men and women, no matter whether they were laughing, crying or singing—everybody who had made any sound must be seized.

Then something quite unforeseen happened. When the soldiers broke open the doors from behind which sounds could be heard, and went in to arrest the people, a crowd of men, women and children rushed out from each house. They charged at the emperor and raised their hands to tear at him, with shouts of "Off with those non-existent clothes! Off with those non-existent clothes!"

It was a scene of laughable confusion. Women drummed with their plump white hands on the emperor's pasty chest. Old men's grizzled beards brushed against his naked bony back. Two children climbed onto his shoulders, to tear off the collar that wasn't there; while two other children pushed their way up to him, and raised their little hands to pluck at the hair under his armpits. With all these people milling around him, the emperor had no way of escaping. He tried to squat down, to curl up like a hedgehog; but that too was impossible. He was tickled and tugged at till it was more than he could stand. All he could do was huddle his head between his shoulders, frown, wrinkle his nose, screw up his mouth and make all sorts of ugly faces.

When the soldiers came out of the different houses, they saw the figure the emperor was cutting—like a monkey driven frantic by hornets. They were used to an awe-inspiring emperor, and had never dreamed he could lose his dignity so completely. It struck them as a good joke, and dragging their spears they started roaring with laughter.

While they were laughing, it suddenly occurred to them—wasn't this against the law? The emperor really was ridiculous—why should it be a crime to laugh at him? So the soldiers decided they might as well mingle in the crowd around the emperor, and they joined in the shouts of "Off with your non-existent clothes! Off with your non-existent clothes!"

When the ministers saw this, they felt rather embarrassed, and stealthily slipped away during the confusion.

Do you know what happened to the emperor? When he saw the soldiers breaking his law too and the ministers deserting him, it was as if a great iron hammer had hit him on the head. He fell senseless to the ground.

CHANG TIEN-YI

How Lo Wen-ying Became a Young Pioneer

The sixth-grade pupils had made friends with some People's Liberation Army uncles and often corresponded with them. Once the Young Pioneers of the Second Troop wrote a letter in which they referred to Lo Wen-ying. Here is how the letter ran:

Dear PLA Uncles,

You wrote in your letter, "It's great news to hear that Wen-ying has pulled himself up and joined the Young Pioneers. This is the best present you youngsters have given us."

When we read to this point, we were so happy that we hoisted Wen-ying on to our shoulders. Wen-ying laughed and his eyes brimmed with tears.

The last time we met with you armymen, Uncle Liu asked Wen-ying why he hadn't joined the Young Pioneers. Wen-ying's face burned with embarrassment. He had made an application to join, but it had not been approved because he was falling behind in his studies.

Actually, Wen-ying already cherished an ideal of becoming a PLA fighter just like you uncles. But we, his classmates, criticized him saying: "Wen-ying, didn't the PLA uncles say: 'Now your job is to listen to the teacher, study well, and also build up a strong, healthy body!'"

Wen-ying glanced around at us and thought to himself:

"Just wait—you'll see!"

What he meant was that he'd show us he could do his studies well and build himself up physically! But to-day—to-day's already Saturday. Why start getting busy just before the holiday weekend? Better start Monday.

When Monday came around, Wen-ying hurried home right after classes were over. He had made up his mind not to dilly-dally as usual for four or five hours before going home, then thinking up alibis to avoid his mother's scolding while eating the supper that had been kept warm for him. To-day he would get home promptly and then he would make full use of his time after supper! On the way, Wen-ying worked it all out like this: "I'm going to solve all the arithmetic problems and write the answers out neatly in my copybook. Then, on Sunday I'll take it to show to the PLA uncles and ask them, 'Do you think I can learn to become an artilleryman?' And they'll say 'of course!' That's how it's going to be!"

He got into such high spirits that he stuck his chest out and walked with big strides, and, without being conscious of it, straight into the bazaar.

He spent more than two hours in the bazaar. He had a busy time visiting many stores, even making a careful inspection of the chinaware shops. At one of the vendor's stalls he stopped before a display of pocket knives. He had to try the knives out to see whether they were as keen as the one his pal Chao Chia-ling had. And what he spent most time examining was a basinful of little turtles in front of a toy shop!

"Must talk Mama into buying one for Sis. Have to take care of my baby sister, you know!"

But Wen-ying suddenly became conscious of a sharp change in the appearance of the bazaar. He gave a start, looked up from the basin of turtles and saw that the lights had been turned on all over the bazaar.

"Oh, my goodness, how awful!" He sprang up and hurried off. "Late again to-day!"

As he turned into the lane, Wen-ying walked faster and faster. He was keen on doing a good job of his homework.

"The PLA uncles are so concerned about me. I'm going to make myself eligible for membership in the Young Pioneers. I must. . . ."

All of a sudden he heard a loud sharp "pa ta."

"Mm, who's playing pellet billiards?" Wen-ying peered through the window of a confectioner's store, but not being satisfied with the view, decided he might just as well stop and go inside for a look.

Ah, but what could one do about it? It was just impossible for Wen-ying not to see this one through, because in the corner of the board was one of those real tricky shots that only an expert could handle properly! The big fellow who was playing made a hard lunge with his billiard pole—missed! Wen-ying waited until it came to the big fellow's turn again—no good, he missed again.

Wen-ying itched with impatience. Bother! Here a fellow's got to rush home to have supper and then do eight arithmetic problems and a page of brush-writing—and this big hulk of a player can't shoot straight in five tries! On the sixth try, the big fellow abandoned the corner shot and aimed at something else. Wen-ying saw no way out but to go on waiting. He often found himself faced with impossible dilemmas of this sort.

In this manner, he whiled away the time and got home very late. For supper, he contented himself with gulping down a few mouthfuls. He wasn't in the least worried whether this was a healthful way to eat and was anxious only to save time for his homework.

"Where are you off to now?" his mother demanded in astonishment when she saw him put down his chopsticks and start out through the door.

"I'm going to buy an exercise book."

"Why didn't you buy it right after school, on your way home?"
"I didn't have time, Mama."

That Monday it was the same as ever. Come bedtime, Wen-ying was still staring at the second arithmetic problem, tired out and worried. Better leave it till tomorrow morning, he decided. Thus, what with dividing his time between a bit of reading picture magazines and a bit of brush-writing, it was eleven o'clock before he climbed into bed. The next morning he got up late. But he still hadn't had enough sleep and dozed through his classes.

"Just look at you!" his mother scolded. "Who told you to be so greedy for play?"

"Greedy for play?" Wen-ying got red in the face and pouted. "Maybe you think I had a good time? I was sore as anything!"

True enough, Wen-ying hadn't enjoyed himself even at play.

We used to tell him: "All you think of is becoming a PLA fighter, but you don't try a bit to prepare yourself now. Day after day slips by and you waste a lot of time. Do you think that'll do?"

"Who said it'll do?" He bent his head and his hands played with the corners of a jacket. "Our teacher, Miss Chou, told me that time is precious and that we must count the very minutes and seconds to make the best use of them. That I know. But, seems that—I don't know why—the moment I don't watch my step, I'm back in the old rut again."

We all decided to help him out.

"Wen-ying, let's do our homework together. Let all five of us go to Li Hsiao-ching's home to do our arithmetic problems. What do you say?"

"Let's begin next week."

"No. To-day."

"All right, so let's make it to-day. Agreed!"

Everybody was in high spirits. Wen-ying also snapped out of his depression.

That day, after classes were out, we sent Chia-ling to take Wen-ying straight home. When they parted, Chia-ling even sounded a reminder:

"Remember! Before half past six!"

"I know, I know."

"Wen-ying," Chia-ling said, turning back after a few steps, "start right after supper, will you? And don't go elsewhere. . . ."

Wen-ying felt that Chia-ling was fine in every respect except that he was a bit of a chatterbox.

"My goodness, what a fussy one you are! I give you my word—not a minute late. Good enough?"

Right after supper, Wen-ying got his books and other things neatly together. He knew his mother was watching him, every now and then glancing at him with a pleased look on her face. He pretended he hadn't

noticed her watching. Nor did he tell her that he had joined the little home study group. He was afraid that his mother would say, "Fine, now that's what I call a good boy!" or some such thing, which would make his face turn a deep red.

He kept his head down, absorbed in what he was doing, put the arithmetic exercise book in his school bag, and then, reflecting a moment, took it out again. He decided not to carry the school bag out. If I did, he thought, people meeting me in the street might think, "Ah, see, this lad is just coming home after playing around for hours!"

Wen-ying found an old newspaper and began wrapping his things in it. Suddenly his little sister came running in on bare feet, gingerly holding a picture magazine in her hands. It had just arrived in the mail from Wen-ying's dad.

"Wrap this too, Brother. Wrap this too!"

Well, what a coincidence! Seems as though daddy knew that he was going to take part in the home study group to-day! Just in time to take the picture magazine to Hsiao-ching's home, for everybody to read together whenever they wanted to take a respite. Afterwards, he would turn the magazine over to the study group as the group's property.

"Fine, that's a good child." Wen-ying took the picture magazine from his little sister, glanced at its cover and unwrapped his paper bundle to put the magazine in. Then he paused, looking at the cover again.

"Who's this?" he asked himself. "Maybe a model worker?"

He was about to put the magazine in the bundle, then again hesitated. Ah, who could it be? The face in the cover picture seemed familiar to him.

Wen-ying couldn't help but flip over to the table of contents. But once he had started, he couldn't resist thumbing through the whole magazine to get an idea of its contents.

"I'll just take one look through. That won't hurt." He looked, first at this, then at that picture. "Mm, what's this one about?"

For the answer, he had to read the caption beneath. Wen-ying read it word for word. Then he looked at the picture again, as if to see whether the caption was correctly written. That set him reading a few more lines. All this while, he was hurrying himself:

"Enough, enough. Better be off now! . . . Look at this peasant uncle! What a physique!"

But time doesn't wait on people. Suddenly, Wen-ying looked at the clock, threw aside the magazine, and jumped up.

Six forty-two!

"Mama, isn't our clock fast?"

"No, I just checked it by telephone to-day!"

A fine fix! Wen-ying grabbed the paper bundle, put it under his

arm, and was about to go after a word with his mother. But he had an afterthought.

"Wen-ying! Why are you late?"

"Wen-ying! How come you're back to your old tricks?" his classmates would be sure to ask.

He stared at the paper package, uncertain what to do, for it would be embarrassing to go to Hsiao-ching's house now. He felt so bad that the tears came.

"Go, go. Never mind, as long as you really change from now on," a voice inside him said.

But who knows how his classmates would act towards him now? If he went, would they even bother to speak to him? He had broken faith! He had gone back on his own word as if it were nothing! The others would surely tell Miss Chou, and most certainly the PLA uncles too. Oh dear, how could he face his PLA uncles!

"Uncle Liu, won't you still be friends with me?"

The thought brought two tears rolling down Wen-ying's face.

If only it were still not yet half past six. . . . But the hours and minutes would never come back! There was no way to snatch back wasted time.

He was quite ready to own up to his mistake before his classmates, to bear their criticism, if only they would still be willing to remain his friends and let him stay in the home study group and help him study. Hereafter, he'd never be late again!

Time was slipping by and it was getting later and later. Wen-ying felt sorrier than ever, and angrier and angrier with himself.

All of a sudden, he gave a start. He thought he had heard someone calling his name.

He pricked up an ear to listen, but all he could hear was his little sister singing off-key some scattered verses from *The Little Mouse on the Lamp Stand*, with a bit of prompting from mama.

"Who'd still come looking for me?"

But, Wen-ying, how wrong you were! How could the Young Pioneers throw you aside and leave you on your own? Listen, what was that?

There really *were* people calling his name. He knew that voice—it was Chia-ling. Then that other high-pitched voice belonged to none other than their little group leader Hsiao-ching. She also had come looking for him. What more was there to be said now? Of course, Wen-ying would run out to meet them, shouting, "Coming, coming!" and then go off with them to do their homework together.

But Wen-ying, to his own embarrassment, did no such thing. When Hsiao-ching and Chia-ling came in, he wanted to hide, but could not. He bent over the picture magazine and pretended to be reading.

"Wen-ying," Hsiao-ching shouted as she burst into the room, "why haven't you come to study with us?"

Wen-ying felt both happy and embarrassed at the same time. He turned aside to avoid looking at his two friends.

"What's the matter?" Hsiao-ching stood at the door, staring at him. She lightened her footsteps and approached him slowly. "Are you ill?"

"No."

"Then let's go." Chia-ling put his hands on Wen-ying's shoulders and exchanged glances with the girl.

Wen-ying bit his lower lip hard for fear he would burst into tears in another moment. After a long while, he barely controlled himself enough to say, in a voice you could scarcely hear: "I'm not going. . . . I'm busy."

"Busy? How's it you're busy enough to read the picture magazine?" Hsiao-ching pulled him on to his feet. "Come on, let's go. Everybody's waiting for you."

So his classmates were waiting for him after all? Hsiao-ching never told fibs.

Chia-ling further told him:

"If we hadn't found you at home, we would have gone looking for you in the bazaar. And if you weren't there, we would have searched the streets and even asked the policemen to help us find you. We were to find you by hook or by crook to get you to come studying with us. That's what our little group decided."

In that case, let's hurry! Not a second must be lost!

The schoolmates said goodbye to Wen-ying's mother, who was so delighted that she grasped Hsiao-ching's hand and said, "This is fine, fine. . . ."

Wen-ying's face was burning. He pulled Hsiao-ching away and ran out the door. Then, as suddenly, he rushed back, grabbed the picture magazine and flew out again in big, bounding strides.

The three friends went off together, laughing and shouting all the way.

Not a bad evening's work that day! There was even time for a lot of good fun after the homework was done. And Wen-ying hadn't been so happy for a long time.

"Now I really must buckle down," Wen-ying made up his mind, "and never waste my time again."

He often recalled to mind what the PLA uncles had written to him in their letters: "We hope you will learn to manage yourself."

He raised an objection with Hsiao-ching.

"From now on, you don't need to send anyone to take me home after school. You'd have to go so far out of your way and waste so much time. I can manage myself well enough."

"All right," Hsiao-ching replied after a moment's thought. "Our little group will trust you to keep your word."

And Wen-ying kept his word. He also did better and better in his studies.

"But it sure wasn't any lark at first," Wen-ying says to himself when he thinks back to those days. "The first two days went off well, all right. There was no one from our group to escort me home and I managed to discipline myself into going straight home. But the third day wasn't such smooth sailing. . . ."

On the third day, a high wind blew up. After classes, he went by the entrance to the bazaar and couldn't help worrying over that basinful of turtles. Wonder how they're doing on a cold day like this—are they as lively as usual in the water?

"Really, can reptiles catch cold?" he asked himself. "Why not go take a look, eh? . . . But hold on there!"

He took a few steps, itching with curiosity. Just a look at the turtles only, absolutely nothing else—nothing wrong with that, eh? Surely one can make allowances for a little matter like that?

Hey, not so fast! Think it over.

"No!" Wen-ying got control of himself.

As for that confectioner's store in the lane—well, no one was playing pellet billiards but there were three people there playing skip-checkers—he could see that at a glance. What he couldn't see was whether they were playing well, and who was winning.

How about it? Just one tiny-peek—only one, quick, tiny-peak. Eh?

"Just a little, tiny. . . ? Uh-uh, it's *still* No!"

He let out a disappointed sigh. Really, you know, skip-checkers isn't like pellet billiards. If I only take one look to-day, I'm determined to lay off beginning tomorrow—surely that doesn't matter?

He suddenly thought of Uncle Liu and the other PLA uncles. If they knew what thoughts were going through his mind at this moment, what would they say?

"Humph, back to his old tricks!"

Wen-ying set his face straight ahead, and without turning, firmly headed for home.

After that it was much better. For instance, one day he noticed a date on the ground. He only paused to examine the matter briefly: "Hmm, was it dropped by the date vendor or someone eating dates?" Then he sent the date flying into the distance with a kick.

"Where did it go?" Never mind! He had other things to do. Had he followed his old habits, he would not have given up until he had found it.

But that strange date soon came bouncing by itself all the way back to him. You see, a short distance off, another boy had given it a kick. Wen-ying promptly sent it back with another kick. The other boy blocked the rolling date as if it were a soccer ball. Then he gleefully waved to Wen-ying and shouted:

"Come on, I'll play goalie! You kick!"

Wen-ying hesitated, but for only a couple of seconds. Then he said:

"I don't have time. It's not playtime now." He made a gesture with his hand as he hurried off. "You better go home soon too, pal."

All this Wen-ying had reported to Miss Chou and to his home study group.

Dear uncles in the PLA, you see how Wen-ying is trying his best to follow your examples. That's how he turned over a new leaf.

And now, Wen-ying has already formed new habits. When it's not time to play, you couldn't tempt him to play. He'd just pay no attention to you. He studies, does his chores, exercises, plays and goes to bed at regular hours, never again wasting time. He now has time to help his mother around the house and to take care of baby sister. Here's what he said of himself:

"Before I never could manage to save time, and simply couldn't find enough time to do everything. I love baby sister. She falls down sometimes, but never cries, only shouts: 'Brother, pick up me!' It took me some time to make out what she meant. Another time she said, 'My goo'ness, I got cold in my button.' What do you think she meant by that? She can't say she wants to blow her nose, only says, 'I got bee-bee on my nose!' . . ."

"Wen-ying," Miss Chou interrupted him, "we can talk about your little sister's misuse of grammar and composition some other time. We must also pay attention, you know, to economy in our speaking and writing. One must speak more to the point, and not go chattering on about everything under the sun that comes to mind."

Well, that's all we'll say for now.

Our respectful salutes!

(Signed)

They and We

The Young Pioneers in Troop One had gone to the normal school to take part in an evening performance for disabled veterans and army dependents.

Troop Two had other duties. They were to put out an extra big special number of the wall bulletin.

The chief editor of the wall bulletin was Yang Hsing-min. He was trying to figure out how to do the best possible job of it. Of course, the

bulletin's editorial team was tops. They could turn out as brilliant a job as they pleased. But that was on ordinary days. This evening—well, seems you can't be so sure. Maybe some of the fellows will start beefing: "Fine thing! The kids in Troop One can go meet the uncles and aunties and put on a show and get all the applause—and we? We get a raw deal sitting here working quietly away at the bulletin! Think we couldn't put on a good show too? We've got Li Hsiao-chin right here in our editorial team—she's head and shoulders above the best singer in the whole school. . . ."

So Hsing-min gave a little pep talk, with good results. The upshot was, he summed up everybody's feelings on the matter in a slogan: "Do a good job, do a quick job, and mum's the word."

That very night, without giving anyone the slightest hint of what was going on, they were to finish the bulletin and have it posted on the wall. The next morning, everybody would be dumbfounded. My goodness, where'd that bulletin pop up from—and such a big and nifty job? Who did it?

Then, they would casually toss them the answer:

"Who else? Troop Two, of course."

That's how it would be, just like that.

Right after supper, Hsing-min and his little group slipped into the school one by one and started working in the Young Pioneers' office, putting everything they had into their task.

The school was very quiet and no one came to disturb them. Towards eight o'clock, they had just about finished the bulletin, Hsiao-chin having completed the make-up and Hsing-min having proof-read everything. That left only the posting to be done. At that very moment, the telephone in the adjoining room rang.

Hsing-min started for the phone, but Chao Chia-ling, in a few long strides, reached it ahead of him.

"Hello, hello!"

At the other end of the wire, several children were chattering away all at the same time. It was the Young Pioneers of Troop One calling from the normal school.

"Please let me speak to our teacher Miss Chou."

"Miss Chou is at a meeting and isn't back yet," Chia-ling shouted into the telephone, afraid he would not be heard at the other end. "Hello, hello! Still—not—back—yet! Got that? What? Can't make out what you're saying! Don't all of you talk at once! Appoint a spokesman!"

"Golly, even wants us to appoint a spokesman! . . . Say, who are you?"

"Never mind who I am! What? What? Speak louder!"

"What kind of a fellow have we got on the line?" came the query from the other end. "Must be a deaf one!"

Chia-ling got angry. "It's you who are deaf!"

"Oh, it's Chia-ling!"

Chia-ling flushed to the roots of his hair with annoyance.

"Give it to me, give it to me," Hsing-min came over and took over the receiver. "Hello! . . . What? I'm not Chia-ling. . . . Never mind, anyway I'm not Chia-ling! What? You want him?" Hsing-min hesitated a moment. "Well, I guess he's here all right."

Chia-ling reached out a right arm blotched with patches of black and red ink and closed his fist tightly over the mouthpiece of the telephone.

"Are we going to let them know we're here?"

"Can't bother with such little worries now." Hsing-min leaned over the table and brought his ear next to the receiver which Chia-ling was holding in his hand. "It must be something more important they're calling about. Talk to them seriously. Better not stir up any bad feelings."

Someone else must have taken over at the other end. This time, the voice came through the receiver so distinctly that even Hsing-min nearby could hear every word. He stared in surprise at Chia-ling.

"What? They want a skirt?"

But Chia-ling had no time to reply because the other party on the wire kept talking away:

"Hello, Chia-ling! I say, please, for goodness' sake, don't forget. If Miss Chou returns, ask her to borrow a skirt for us somehow—a long one. Do you hear? We must have it!"

"A Korean skirt?" Hsing-min immediately guessed, and he could not help pressing near the receiver and putting in his bit.

His sister had just the thing—a long, pale green skirt which a Korean woman comrade had presented to her for a keepsake.

"Right! That's exactly what we need!" The chorus of voices was chiming in again at the other end. "The sooner the better. . . . I say, will you tell Miss Chou that we have to use it at nine o'clock?"

Chia-ling was one of those who believed in handling things in a thorough, businesslike way. Fearing they might hang up the receiver, he shouted at the top of his voice:

"But, but—hello! No telling when Miss Chou will be back, you know. . . . That's right, can't say for sure. . . ."

Hsing-min had a thought. He whispered to Chia-ling:

"Ask them what they want it for."

At this point, the receiver crackled with the noise of many voices. Obviously, at the other end, they were discussing something. In the background could be heard the occasional sound of applause. Must be quite a show!

At this end, the two Young Pioneers eyed each other expectantly and waited tensely.

"I say, Chia-ling! We might as well let you in on it. We're going to put on an extra special number—it's something we thought up on the

spur of the moment. . . . But we're lost without that skirt. What can we do? . . . Eh? Yes, it's a very important number. . . ."

"Humph, and I thought it was something important they were calling about!" Hsing-min's face fell. "It's only for their old stage show!"

Chia-ling was still shouting away. "What kind of a number? Who's in it?" But the others were no longer willing to divulge any more secrets.

"I'll bet anything it's Hsu Hua who'll perform. You'll see!" Hsing-min ventured.

So they need a Korean skirt. There's one to be had, all right. If our own Troop Two were giving the performance, if our Hsiao-chin were to play the part, no question about solving that little problem, of course. But for Hsu Hua. . . .

Hsu Hua was regarded as the "talent" of Troop One. She was the pride and joy of some of the Young Pioneers in that troop, who were always boasting that "Hsu Hua sings better than Hsiao-chin," etc. Always blowing their own horn!

Who knows what kind of programme they were putting on tonight, or what this sudden "important" addition to the programme was like? There were so many uncles and aunties at the performance that, without question, no matter what you put on or whether you really sing best, they'd all approve and clap vigorously anyway, and shout "Encore!" There might even be folks who would think: "Troop One puts on such an excellent show. It must, after all, be better than the others."

And what about us in Troop Two? Nobody even suspects what talent we've got. Unless we took the bulletin and paraded it right through the streets straight into the hall where the performance was being given. . . .

At this point in his thoughts, Hsing-min bit his lips.

But now—well, let's see what they'll use to put over their "extra special number"! So they lack a costume, eh?

"Turn off the light," Chia-ling said, as he turned and left the room.

Deep in his own thoughts, Hsing-min had not noticed that the telephone conversation had long been concluded.

When he got back to the Young Pioneers' office, everyone was already surrounding Chia-ling, busily talking things over.

Suddenly, Hsiao-chin was heard above the hubbub of voices.

"I've got an idea!"

Hsing-min started in surprise.

"What?"

The room suddenly fell silent.

"I can get a skirt!" There was a sparkle of excitement in Hsiao-chin's eyes. "Give me an hour's leave. I'll go now!"

Hsing-min jumped up and held her back.

"Where do you think you're going to dig one up? It's not just any ordinary skirt they want. It's. . . ."

"I know, I know! Of course, a Korean skirt!"

"Who would have a Korean skirt?" Hsing-min's eyes grew round.

Hsiao-chin quickly replied: "I'm going to my aunt's. . . . No! I mean, the place where my aunt works. . . ."

The more excited she got, the more confused her torrent of words became.

Actually it was really quite simple. There was a nurse in her aunt's office, a Miss Cheng, whose very good friend and old schoolmate Miss Liu had a younger sister, the younger Miss Liu that is, who studied dancing. It was she—the younger Miss Liu, who owned just such a Korean skirt—Hsiao-chin had seen it herself.

"Now, do you understand?"

"It's quite a way to your aunt's place," someone ventured.

True, it was fifteen minutes by bus, then another half mile on foot.

"But it's not far from there to the normal school," Hsiao-chin explained in another tumble of words. "I'll take it there as soon as I get it. I can walk fast. I won't be late."

"You're going all alone at night . . .?"

"I'll go with her!" Chia-ling swiftly fished a piece of paper from the wastepaper basket and rubbed his hands hard to remove the grime. "Give me an hour's leave too!"

But Hsing-min barred Hsiao-chin's way.

"You're off on a wild goose chase! What makes you so sure you can get it after going through all that rigmarole?"

"But what else can we do? The show's on in an hour. . . ."

"My goodness, you're so anxious! After all, who's putting on the show, anyway, they or we?"

"What do you mean by 'they' and 'we'?" Hsiao-chin was taken aback. "Isn't it all the same for our uncles and aunties to enjoy? If the show's good, isn't it all the same to the credit of our Young Pioneers? Chia-ling, let's go!"

"Right, right!" the others chorused. "Hurry, be off! . . . Have you got change for carfare?"

"Yes!" The pair dashed out the door.

Hsing-min stared blankly for a moment, as if he had just shaken himself awake. He said to himself:

"Whew! What a foolish boner I almost pulled!"

He sprang up, flew out the door, and caught up with the two at the school gate. Seizing them by the arms, he said:

"Never mind, you needn't go! I'll go!"

"You go? You don't know them."

"No, no!" Hsing-min was so worked up he nearly burst into tears. "There's no need to go as far as you were going. I've got one right in my own home. . . . I—I wasn't willing to solve their problem for them, that's all. . . . I was wrong. . . ."

Listening to Hsing-min's stuttering pronouncement, the other two finally caught on that his sister herself owned a genuine Korean skirt.

They promptly decided that Chia-ling should accompany Hsing-min home. After getting the skirt, he was to take it to the normal school. Chia-ling had suggested:

"I can take it there by myself. It's only a few steps from the tram stop. Don't worry. Now you can hurry back to finish up the bulletin."

Hsing-min escorted Chia-ling to the tram and then went back to the school. Twenty minutes later, Chia-ling called up on the telephone.

"Hello, Hsing-min? Say, I've brought the skirt here safely. The kids in Troop One were so happy they jumped for joy. Everybody says to thank you, and they even suggest you should be commended."

"What!" Hsing-min's face flushed hotly. "I say, didn't you tell them? Didn't you explain that—that business?"

"What business?"

"That business of. . . . I mean, exactly how it came about. . . . Didn't you talk about it?"

"I didn't go into detail—haven't had time. . . ."

"Oh, fine thing!" Hsing-min was agitated. "Well, get down to facts and tell them exactly how it all happened. It's Hsiao-chin who ought to be commended, not me! Don't get things balled up!"

TING LING

LIFE AND CREATIVE WRITING

Literary creation is a complex form of labour. A writer must make all-round efforts and fulfil many conditions before he can produce good literary works. In the scope of this article it is impossible for me to treat with any thoroughness all the problems confronting our present-day literature; I shall take up only what I believe to be the most important.

"Experience in life" is a favourite topic with us. A number of writers, I feel, tend to overstress the importance of analysing and studying experience, mechanically separating that from life itself. This tendency has affected a section of young writers. Several young comrades told me recently that their trouble lay not in lack of experience but mainly in lack of ability to analyse and understand life. Other writers, they maintained, produced good works after going out to experience life for four or five months, while they themselves failed to achieve anything after staying with the masses for a year or two. Hence this conclusion they have reached about themselves.

Frankly, I do not agree with them. I admit we must analyse and study experience, but I do not think we have accumulated enough of it, or that our sole task now is to study Marxism-Leninism and the Party's policies in order to be able to interpret it. I have the impression that that erroneous view is even "infecting" many people and tends to shake their faith in the fundamental principle of "going deep into life."

To explain my stand on the question, I would like to refer to what some comrades told me the other day. Tolstoy, Chekhov and Tsao Hsueh-chin (c. 1723-1763),* they said, produced masterpieces partly because they were all men of genius, learned and cultured, partly because they enjoyed the advantage of depicting the people in whose midst they lived. They could easily model their characters after their cousins, first or second, who had been living with them since their childhood. They knew their cousins so well that they could write about them intimately and effortlessly.

"Whom does the present-day author write about?" these comrades

* Author of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, a popular novel.

asked. Workers, peasants and soldiers, heroes and heroines who are so remote from his life that he must go out into their midst in order to see them and hear them talk. He usually finds himself forced to look for models the moment he has to start writing. During his short stay with the masses, he may come to know their faces, but never too well. The people around him are mostly intellectuals of petty-bourgeois origin. He maintains hardly any ties with his relatives, and has few friends. As for friends and relatives of the elder generation, most of them can hardly be taken as models of new personalities and heroes typical of our age.

All this I can well understand. It means that quite a few, if not the majority, of our writers today work in an extremely limited sphere, shutting their eyes to the vast world before them and leading a desperately dull life in spite of all the splendid things happening around them. With little experience to draw upon, they are forced to sit back in their arm-chairs and indulge in idle talk, in the attempt to fill the emptiness of their life. There are writers, I believe, who have few, if any, distinct characters in their minds while they expatiate on the creation of typical characters. There are others who, with little knowledge of the struggle waged by the masses, constantly harp on contradictions inherent in it or on the essence of it. A writer who lives such a monotonous and colourless life in a narrow circle can never create characters or types true to the life of the people.

To us writers, experience in life is all important. We have often been told this, yet it still constitutes a serious problem. I think it is an ideological question which many people are unable or even unwilling to straighten out immediately, though sooner or later they must do so.

To illustrate the importance of real experience, let us take as an example Hsu Kuang-yao's *The Plains Are Ablaze*. This is a good novel. Yet when Hsu was working on it, he was not the accomplished writer he is today. For more than ten years he had participated in guerilla warfare on the plains of Central Hopei. The stirring life of the guerillas and the vivid characters that flashed across his mind cried out for literary expression. So he set about depicting them as he knew them. With so many events and characters to describe, all he had to do was to control his feelings and his pen, cutting out a bit here and there, to make his writing terse and succinct. We can say, without denying its author's literary talent, that *The Plains Are Ablaze* is a product of living experience. Improved in literary craftsmanship and the understanding of Marxism-Leninism, Hsu later spent a year in Korea, coming back with several short stories. None of them, however, can be compared with his former book, for he is not so familiar with life in Korea as he was with life in China during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. It is for this reason that I told him not to be in a hurry to write but to learn more of life. His recent studies will help him to get more out of life, though he will never be able to produce anything good if he undertakes studies without going out to experience life.

To throw further light on the problem under discussion, I should like to touch upon some of the concepts we know so well.

"Experiencing life" is a term that is frequently used. We often meet people who are ready to go out to study life in the factories or armed forces, or who have just acquired such experience. When asked what they have really experienced, they are at a loss for an answer. They either give you a detailed account of some trivialities they happen to have noticed in factory production or army work, or sing vague and sentimental praises of the greatness of the toiling people. These things, however, can be found in newspapers. Such writers cling to the idea of experiencing life even before they have plunged into it. They stand on the brink of life or skim over its surface, looking on idly or listening to reports, speeches and talks, jotting down brief notes which they consider excellent material for literary creation.

"Experiencing life" like this is nevertheless better, and very much better, than sitting idly in Peking. But for a writer, this superficial approach to life will never do. To experience life, as I understand it, a man must go into the midst of the masses, advance with them, and share their struggle against the old forces, old systems, old ideas and backward people that impede the progress of the new forces. He must not be an idle spectator in life, talking lightly or blowing his own trumpet, or a man who speaks about the life of the masses simply to show off. On the contrary, he should work, fight and think hard, and be prepared to suffer and to tackle difficulties, to struggle against himself, to weep when sad and laugh when happy. He should run the whole gamut of human feelings. To carry on life's battles, he must sum up his experiences from time to time and continue to acquire experience in life even after he has improved himself ideologically. If he happens to be a writer, he must, at the end of a certain period, think over and review his experiences. Such a review will strengthen his impressions and deepen the understanding of his experiences, and he will finally realize that he has gained something new. Therefore, one cannot experience life unless one plunges into it and takes part in struggles. One must not live only for the sake of experience or attempt to acquire real experience by running about and casting casual glances here and there.

"Go out to experience life" is an oft-used phrase. Why should we do this? Because we live away from the masses and yet we want to write about them. Hence our practice of going out to experience life for a few months before we start writing. This practice, however, proves that we are determined to stay where we are for a long time to come and that we go to the masses only temporarily in order to get what we want. Moreover, we go either to the factories or villages as our whims dictate, attempting to learn everything. What makes us stick to our present mode of living without any desire to change it is ultimately the view that a writer should hide himself comfortably forever in a small corner devoid of active life, and live passively like a caged bird. Only when it becomes

necessary to write does he go out to make superficial observations of life, to find out facts which he can draw upon as material for literary creation.

I do not believe this was the way of great authors like Tsao Hsueh-chin, Shih Nai-an,* Tolstoy and Gorky. They lived with the greatest zest and summed up the feelings and experiences they had accumulated in the course of several decades by portraying the most significant characters and events they had met or lived through. They adopted the literary form of expression because they wanted to propagate effectively the truths they had discovered or confirmed. They never wrote for fame, never searched for themes merely for the sake of writing, never collected materials after chancing on a theme.

We, however, do just the opposite; for while we desire to produce great works, portray heroic characters and create new types, we nevertheless feel we cannot afford to live among the masses for any lengthy period. Though we clearly realize that we are not familiar with the people whom we intend to depict, yet we do not want to get to know them well. Unwilling to describe the intellectuals of petty-bourgeois origin who are leading a rather dull life around us, we are satisfied with our surroundings and indulge in empty talk.

If we really wish to create new characters and produce good books, we must settle down among the masses and establish close and friendly relations with the people around us. We must share their joys and sorrows, help them, and win their confidence so that they will tell us frankly what is uppermost in their minds and think of us when they are happy and when they are sad. We must be responsible, conscientious, enthusiastic and understanding, and what is most important, selfless. Only if the masses see that we are giving them generous and courageous support will they share with us their rich and varied emotions. When all this is done, we shall no longer worry about lack of material for literary creation. With a whole panorama of the colourful and stirring life of today and the subtle workings of the human mind unfolding before us, we shall see that there are innumerable things to write about and that we can do so effortlessly and intimately.

In this matter of acquiring experience, we should not be too complacent. Some writers boast about their understanding of and friendship with workers after they become acquainted with a few of them or exchange one or two letters with them. Of course, such meetings and correspondence are good, but they are only the beginning of a long process. We must, above all, live in the midst of the masses honestly and earnestly.

Now, a few comments on the claim "I have rich experience." We often hear young comrades from the rural areas or armed forces say "I have experienced a great deal but I do not know how to write about it." True, they may have stayed for some time in the country or with the armed forces, know something about the life there, and be relatively

* Author of *Water Margin*, a popular classical novel.

familiar with the masses. In spite of that, their knowledge of life is usually rather simple and superficial. All they know is the life of some small corner of the countryside, a few village cadres or the general progress of certain undertakings or movements. As they fail to sum up such undertakings or movements from time to time, the experience they gain is naturally crude and stereotyped. It must be admitted that they cannot analyse or sum up well because they lack experience and have a low political and theoretical level. They see only the general phenomena of life or, at best, what others have already noticed. Sometimes, their low ideological level may even lead them to praise relatively backward elements. These comrades, in my opinion, cannot yet claim to possess sufficient experience of life, for they have only a fragmentary knowledge of reality and do not understand life in its rich, ever-changing entirety. Although they often mix with all sorts of people, yet they actually live in a narrow circle and have limited experience. Under such circumstances, they should not deceive themselves by thinking that their trouble lies in lack of writing technique and not in lack of experience.

How then can a person develop his power of analysis? He can do that only by plunging into life and linking up theory with practice. In order to accumulate a rich store of experience and become the master of life, he must study the Party's policies, sum up his experiences and make correct judgements. He should analyse and criticize life while living it. Of course, he can summarize his experiences on his return from his visits to the factories or villages, but he can never do that without first going out to experience life.

Such being the case, the present-day writer should stop living in a narrow circle. He ought to break out of it on his own initiative. He is free to choose and change his environment and determine his own life. All this depends largely on his decision and initiative. Here, to take the initiative means to make up one's mind, map out one's plans and take the necessary steps. It also implies persistence in the struggle against one's own mental inertia. We know that in war one must strive to gain the initiative in order not to suffer defeat. How can a writer remain passive or lethargic before the equally tremendous task of literary creation?

Our experience proves that the world often looks fresher after we have gone out to experience life. Interesting people of all sorts attract us and we are seized with a desire to stay with them and trace their development, to write about or comment on them. Having shown zest for life, let us give a free rein to its development! Having also shown that we understand life, let us grasp it more firmly!

A writer should not drift like a tiny boat in a storm, passing the day at one port and stopping for the night at another. He should, on the contrary, try to discover a new continent in the life of the masses, strike roots there and devote himself to its cultivation. He ought to find suitable surroundings to live in for a relatively long period, surroundings which will show him the life he wants to describe,

If a writer does not have such surroundings at present, it is all the more necessary for him to find them. That is, he must stay longer with the masses and probe deeper into the life he intends to describe, gradually broadening his understanding of the people along with the expansion of the surroundings. To depict the co-operatives, for example, he must not only probe deep into one co-operative, but study a number of others as well and get to know the various kinds of people connected with them, so that all his experience may be integrated and utilized. The fact that a writer cannot model all the characters of a work after one type makes it necessary for him to live in a wide circle. The richer his life, the deeper becomes his understanding of people and the keener his observation. This mental enrichment will afford him great pleasure and will promote rather than arrest his growth as a writer.

A writer told me recently that too much work stifled his inspiration. I do not think that is true. To live is not a dull routine. Nobody wants you to plod away day and night. To live is to create and a writer is, in fact, creating all the time. People other than writers are often seized with a creative impulse to describe the impressions and poetic feelings that come to them in their daily life and work. They often come to us, lamenting their inability to write about their sentiments because they are not well acquainted with literary forms. Sometimes they even ask for advice on the method of literary expression. This proves that an active life, instead of stifling one's poetic sentiments, gives one material for creation and inspires one to write. How indeed could life, the very source of creative inspiration, be an obstacle to creative activity? It will be so only when there is so much work that a writer will find no time to use his pen or organize his creative activity with greater care. But then the problem will no longer be one of life killing creative inspiration but that of finding time to write.

The present-day writer is provided with excellent conditions and a broad path to literary creation. Wherever he goes, he is welcome. Leading government workers all over the country know the importance of literature and are only too glad to help him understand life and policies, to provide him with the best working conditions. The masses around him, anxiously hoping that he will write a good book about them and for them, expect him to stay long with them and tell him everything he wants to know. When his work is finally published, they forgive him for his defects and generously reward him for his merits and encourage him. Never before have writers enjoyed such facilities and prestige.

Living in this heroic era of ours, we writers should develop lofty ideals and boldly strive for their fulfilment. Every writer should aspire to produce books that are written well and not carelessly, that are excellent both ideologically and artistically, that will be not only appreciated by himself and praised by a few of his friends, but read and re-read with deep interest by thousands and thousands of ordinary readers; books

that will be remembered for ever and constantly quoted, books that will be not only popular among his contemporaries but legacies to posterity, books that will not only instruct the readers of today but enlighten the generations to come.

We must learn from great works like *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Water Margin* and *Lives of the Scholars*,* and strive to achieve the level set by them as well as by the works of Lu Hsun. Let us regard our past work as literary exercises, and fit ourselves in future to produce better works! Whatever the result, we must set up an ideal and strive, I repeat it, to change our surroundings, advance into a broader world and embark upon a new life. We shall lose nothing in leaving the small circle we used to live in, for everything that can elevate us—theories, policies, technique, creative methods, works of literature—is open to everybody and may be found everywhere so long as we persevere in our search for it. Neither hidden away nor monopolized by a few, these things may be discovered and mastered. So I call upon all our writers, particularly the young, to settle down among the masses.

* A satirical novel written by Wu Ching-tzu (1701-1754).

GIVE THE CREATIVE ARTS A BROAD PERSPECTIVE

TSAI JO-HUNG

As the people of our nation bend their efforts to speed our country's advance to socialism, those of us who work in the sphere of art must ask ourselves some pertinent questions: Do we fully realise that our arts, which should correspond to the socialist economic basis, are faced with the momentous task of helping this basis to take shape and consolidate itself? Have we taken up this task seriously or does our work suffer from an attitude which would make it merely a passive reflection of the historical process? How shall we consolidate our achievements and rectify our shortcomings? Such questions will inevitably confront all artists as they discuss their place and work in the historic times in which we live. But in discussing these questions we should not confine ourselves to matters of principle only. We should broaden the discussion to consider the application of these principles to questions of creative outlook, to the development of the creative arts and to the criticism of specific artistic works. Only by arriving at concrete solutions of these questions will we advance our ideological level and practical activity in the production of works of art.

As a first step to promoting their development and improving the quality of our work we should therefore make a brief assessment of the general situation in the creative arts at the present time in the light of the aims and requirements of socialist realism. In the following pages I have endeavoured to make such an assessment and draw some conclusions.

What is the present situation in the creative arts? Our creative artists are, it is true, becoming more prolific each year. But, their works are narrow and limited in scope, both in content and form. Many subjects and forms of presentation have gradually vanished from our art. Many works repeat the same themes and follow the same manner of presentation, while others undertake tasks which are inappropriate to the means of the representational arts. These are the most serious shortcomings in our fine arts at the present time.

The existence of these shortcomings shows that our creative methods do not fully conform with the principles of socialist realism and in some cases are even at variance with those principles. Many works aim to educate the people, but they are often deficient both in content and form. Since the artistic creations of socialist realism must be firmly based on a knowledge of human life and must depict the many facets of the dynamic social forces which impel life forward, they must utilize all suitable forms and genres of artistic presentation, all suitable means. In other words, richness and breadth of content and form are prerequisites for the creation of socialist realist art before it can meet the ever-advancing needs of the labouring people, reflect the various aspects of reality and fully project the spirit of our great era.

This means therefore that we are faced with the urgent task of improving the present situation in the creative arts. We must open up a broad road for their development by correcting the erroneous ideas that hamper their growth and distract them from their true purposes. We must systematically create conditions of work favourable for artistic creation. Only by doing this can we lay a solid foundation for the development of socialist realist art.

I believe that at the moment the central ideological problem seriously hampering the flourishing growth of the creative arts is the lack of a correct understanding of the specific function of the representational arts, that is, the distinctive feature and role of imagery in the representational arts.

The fine arts are called representational arts because their subject matter is the world of material form, and visual imagery is their medium of representation. Herein also lie their limitations. The potentialities of visual imagery should be fully exploited but care should be taken not to attempt to exact from it what goes beyond its potentialities—this is a principle which should be perfectly clear and acceptable to all.

However, in many recently-produced works we find an attempt being made to force visual imagery to play the part of language.

When we say a work of art tries to make visual imagery perform the function of language, we mean that it tries to force visual imagery to speak and reason or even to enunciate a series of political conclusions. Visual imagery, of course, has no voice; it can express ideas and emotions but it cannot reason or draw conclusions even though the artist tries to force it "to reason" or "draw conclusions." The only result of such forced substitution is that the artist draws "preaching" images with moralizing titles tacked on to them. It not seldom happens that though neither title nor image are notable expressions of anything, artist, editor and publisher are all quite satisfied that they have made the visual image in question fulfil its propagandist mission. And with this they summarily dispense with the essential and specific qualities of a realistic work of art.

When visual imagery is forced to deputize for written language, the latter in fact replaces the former. When an artist uses visual imagery as a substitute for written language rather than trying to make full use of the potentialities of visual imagery, he produces those kinds of paintings which are plastered all over with slogans, captions and explanations, or pictures which can only be understood by reading the explanations which accompany them. The attempt to use visual imagery to express ideas which are more suitably expressed in written language is the same as using imagery to express ideas more suitably expressed in speech. It means, on occasion, forcing visual imagery to "verbally" formulate political ideas. In so far as imagery is unable to do this, the written language is used in its stead, and this must inevitably lead to the disappearance of the concrete and convincing qualities of artistic imagery.

It is clear that the attempt to impose on artistic imagery functions which are proper to language and logical exposition lies at the root of this problem. This attempt is evidently made for the purpose of "educating the people." But can artistic works of socialist realism robbed of their essential and specific qualities still carry out the function of "educating the people" ideologically and effectively in the spirit of socialism? The answer must surely be: No. Artistic works in which visual imagery is forced to assume the role of the spoken or written language cannot perform that educative function effectively. Nor can those other works, whose educational function is for the most part limited to imparting not the spirit of socialism but technical knowledge, experiences, methods and so on, effectively educate the people ideologically.

The attempt to force artistic imagery to assume the role of language and logical exposition is clearly illogical, while the attempt to force artistic imagery to assume the role of a lecturer on technique is a grave error.

We should not allow such extraneous demands to continue to fetter the development of artistic imagery; we should enable it to develop to the utmost within the limits of its own capabilities.

Although artistic imagery cannot speak and reason with people, it can, solely through the power of its imagery, affect people's sentiments and feelings and arouse their emotions.

The artist does not paint landscapes to provide data for the study of the soil or plant species; nor does the sculptor chisel a bust of a man to depict a certain physiological feature or merely designate his profession or social position. This is not to say that the artist should not strive to make his image true to life or that a mound of sand should be drawn looking like a rock or an old man like a young girl. This means only that an image created by an artist should fulfil its educative function through the medium of visual perception passing into rational understanding rather than by direct, rationalized lecturing. That is to say, while artistic imagery can only represent the outward appearance of men and things, its function is to enable people to get an understanding of the internal relations, the specific nature of men or things through an initial aware-

ness of their external relations and appearance. In a word, the process is from an initiating perception to a rational conception.

The artist is like a gardener. His mission is to cultivate exquisite flowers in man's moral world. Through imagery, the artist portrays human qualities in order to elevate them; he stimulates human thought and emotions in order to shape them. The visual image is the artist's exclusive medium. Therefore, in shaping an image, the artist should bear in mind that he is also shaping human sentiments. Herein is the specific function of artistic imagery. Here also lies the unique fascination of the representational arts. This is why the artist is called an "engineer of the human soul." Here also lies the political function of art.

Therefore, when we, as artists, take a workers' emulation drive as our subject matter, it is not correct to concentrate our attention exclusively on the machines, lathes, prizes, red banners and output figures that go with that movement and disregard the portrayal of the outstanding moral qualities of the working class.

In the same way, when we take as our subject matter the movement of the peasants for mutual aid and co-operation, it is wrong to emphasize production processes and details of production techniques to the neglect of the advanced thought and action that arises from the spirit of collectivism.

The spirit of socialism should not be reduced to a narrow dogma. It should embrace all that enhances man's moral strength and stimulates human thought and action. No attempt should be made to force the representational arts to operate, as a medium of education, beyond the sphere of ideology, because it is only in this sphere that they can influence people most effectively. The description of production processes, the teaching of production techniques, the summing-up of production experiences and reporting on production achievements, these are the business of experts and managerial personnel. Art in its applied forms has a part to play in such work. But artists who try to make such work the primary purpose of their creative art, will either fail in their purpose or frustrate the true mission of art.

By clarifying the function of the representational arts and distinguishing the mission of artists from that of other specialists we do not diminish the scope of artistic creation but, on the contrary, broaden it.

At this point, it is necessary to compare the representational arts with their sister arts.

The imagery of the representational arts is static and immobile; therefore, it cannot represent changes of scene or a chain of events. Herein lies its difference from the imagery of drama, ballet and film, or the imagery of the novel presented through written language. However, immobile imagery has an advantage: it is not limited by time. It can ensure an independent existence in a work of art to a particular, fleeting

scene, one of a myriad in human life. The limitations set by the lack of continuity in immobile imagery at the same time determine the immense scope of its field of representation. This is borne out by the example of works of fine art, both ancient and modern. So, if we seriously share the life of the masses and closely study the significance of artistic imagery, we shall find that the world of imagery is as diversified and boundless as the world itself.

But there is a school of thought which sees no difference between the representational arts on the one hand and the drama, film and novel on the other, and which maintains that artistic imagery must present man and the way he lives or else fail to exert an educational effect on human beings.

Of course, it is extremely important for the development of our fine arts to stress the portrayal of man and his life. But, this school of thought to a greater or lesser extent effaces the relation between a concrete picture of human life and its spiritual aspects; this leads to the isolation of man from his environment and the divorcing of human life from all the things that have a bearing on it. Under the influence of this school of thought two anomalies will certainly arise: one is to produce numerous works which only portray the conditions of man's life in neglect of man's spiritual qualities; the other is to drive landscape, still-life and even portrait painting out of the realm of creative art.

It must be acknowledged that there are two kinds of imagery in life and art which are capable of evoking an aesthetic response. One directly reflects man's spiritual activities and the other only reflects things that have an indirect bearing on man's spiritual activities.

A small dandelion does not usually occupy any prominent place in the heart of man. But in early spring the sight of a small yellow dandelion at the foot of a snow-clad mountain in the neighbourhood of Yen-an will surely evoke a poetic response and association of ideas in man. A thatched hamlet with smoke curling from its chimneys does not normally attract attention. But how heartening is the sight of a hamlet and smoke to a traveller struggling amid lofty mountains at dusk! The image itself is unchanged. But when it has forged organic ties with life, when it is represented in artistic form, it then evokes an aesthetic response and influences man's actions.

Why should we make light of landscape painting? When people see the sluice gates of the Huai River or the Kuanting Reservoir standing as a barrier to calamitous floods, when they see the smoke-stacks of factories rising against the sky or the green walls of shelter belts protecting our vast countryside, is it possible for them not to be moved?

A friend of mine once visited the home of a newly-married disabled armyman who had been honoured with an award. He gave me a vivid description of the young couple's room: "On the wall hung a testimonial of distinguished service. On the sideboard stood an alarm-clock and a small plaster bust of Chairman Mao Tse-tung. Two scarlet silk flowers

lay side by side on some textbooks. . . ." Through his description I pictured to myself a still-life painting. It contained no human being, but through the various articles enumerated I could clearly visualise a young couple of a new type.

Why should we make light of still-life painting? We can do so only if we shut ourselves up in a studio, and pay no attention to the rich imagery of life around us, only if we ignore every new phenomenon in society, only if we think that still-life painting means nothing more than the representation of grapes and apples.

The representational arts have their own world of activity—a world by no means small, a world where thousands of troops may march and tens of thousands of horses may gallop. Therefore, we need not force the representational arts to play the part of such a versatile medium as the novel, for by so doing we are just imprisoning painters on the islet of "serial pictorial tales."

Like the man who in emptying the bath-tub threw away the baby together with the water, so we, in criticising an artistic ideology or the contents of a work of art, often throw away legitimate forms of artistic creation, and forms and ways of presentation.

Why do we no longer see the cartoons of *Mr. Wang* and *The Three-haired Boy*?* It is said that this is because the ideology of old "Mr. Wang" and "The Three-haired Boy" was questionable. But this is throwing away the form of the strip cartoon together with the ideology of the characters.

Why are woodcuts suddenly out of fashion? Two woodcut artists have told me that since the large-scale use of offset-printing and photo-gravure there is no longer any need for the old method of wood-block printing. This means that in discarding a "backward technique" we have thrown away the by no means backward art of the woodcut.

Why are there no more lyrical sketches? It is said that this is because the "public" considers that lyricism is befitting only to a leisured class, and is of no interest to the labouring people. It is clear that we are throwing away "lyricism" and "lyrical sketches" together with certain unwholesome sentiments.

These are not the only useful things which have been thrown away. Stress is laid on using certain folk forms based on outline drawings and completely disregarding depictions utilizing light and shade; likewise, stress is laid on *Kungpi* painting with minutely executed line drawing, while *Hsiehyi*, water-and-ink (wash) painting, is disregarded. And as regards forms of painting people now only recognise the vertical or horizontal "golden rule" and have thrown overboard all the old Chinese forms such as the "hanging scroll," the "hand scroll," the "vertical strip," the "set of four scrolls" and so on. Where tools of art are concerned many

* Two strip cartoon characters who were popular before the liberation.

people have hastily discarded the pencil, pen, and chalk but have not yet seriously taken up the brush.

Indifference to the needs of the masses, motives of personal idiosyncrasy and subjectivism, the unquestioning pursuit of vogue and fashion—these are some of the reasons why artists throw away this and discard that. But the general root cause lies in the view that there can be only one form, one style and one manner in art. This attitude is most vividly expressed in the approach to our national artistic heritage. Some artists often importune art critics to give them a sample of national form as if from time immemorial artistic form were a single unique child, and all the artist has to do is to hold it in his arms.

If there were but one kind of flower, it would be called by a proper name rather than "flower." And so it is also with forms of art. There are many and varied kinds of representational art. This variety exists as much to express the varied needs of content as to provide for the varied tastes of the people. The artist should choose his mode of artistic expression in accordance with the needs of the content of his work of art as well as the needs of the people. From now on, artists should not only retrieve what they have so casually discarded in the past but also, in conformity with the development of creative art, boldly create forms and styles which can win the people's love. In the realm of socialist art there can be no such thing as the flourishing of an art which is rich in content but monotonous in form.

The arts cannot thrive on lifeless soil. Therefore, we must improve the basic conditions for the growth of creative art.

There does not exist a single successful work which is not made out of rich raw material. No artist can produce many works of art, who has no experience of life, who is not artistically cultured and who makes no preparation for artistic creation.

A painter who produces only one or two works in a year while devoting most of his time to preparation for artistic creation is irreproachable. But if a painter produces only one or two works a year and spends very little time in artistic creation or preparation, then we may consider whether we should not work out a method—not through administrative orders, but by inculcating a sense of personal responsibility towards work—a method which would not require artists to fulfil a definite quota within a certain period of time like a machine but would require every artist to devote a certain amount of time every day or month to preparations for artistic creation. This method should also apply to those "prolific" artists who are always producing works and seemingly need neither artistic cultivation nor preparation. This lack of preparation is dangerous to the artist. It is exactly this lack of preparation that accounts for the pale and lifeless images which now exist in large numbers in our creative art.

It is a mistaken idea now common among artists that preparation for artistic creation means nothing more than a basic training in the fine

arts and life-classes in the studio. It is understandable that in the works of the classic artists of Europe who derived their subject matter from Greek mythology and the like, the human figure occupied an important place. And, since our artists must also be familiar with the anatomy and movement of the human body, the life-class is an indispensable part of their basic technical training. However, in our present stage of artistic creation, we should not regard the sketching of the human figure in the studio as a final objective in itself, nor should we in our compositions substitute the images of studio models for real characters. The stiff and lifeless human figures found in certain works are due to the fact that artists do not seek models outside of the studio.

In a broad sense, preparation for artistic creation means the accumulation of living images, without which there can be no creation of imagery. Therefore, we must plunge into real life outside the studio, we must constantly make sketches from life with the understanding that the sketching of living images is the very basis of our artistic creation. Our present lack of such a basis is responsible for the lack of conviction in our imagery, in our representation of life and in our art. It is the lack of this very basis that gives rise to stereotyped images, to formalist designs and to the impoverishment of the contents of our work. We must put an end to the undesirable fact that painters do not carry their sketch-books about with them. In my opinion, an essential criterion of a realist artist is how many sketch-books he has filled, because without the accumulation of living images achieved thereby, there can be no firm basis for rendering life, nor any basis for concrete, realistic expression. An artist should always be engaged in the rich struggles of life, he should be constantly observing and experiencing life and preparing himself for artistic creation. The artistic life of an artist who educates the people in the spirit of socialism must, first of all, be imbued with the spirit of socialism.

LIU PAI-YU

ABOUT "FLAMES AHEAD"

I take great pleasure in availing myself of the opportunity offered me by the editor of *Chinese Literature* to say a few words about *Flames Ahead* which appears in this issue. It gives me infinite joy to be able to give, through this story, a picture of our people to the readers of this journal. In range and scope, our lives are as vast and immense as the boundless oceans; the portrayal of our struggle for the cause of peace, independence and liberation is, indeed, an important task for our writers. *Flames Ahead* depicts only a chapter of this great struggle: It is like a leaf in a vast dense forest, but a leaf which has made an early appearance. If this story could in any way help the reader get some idea of the intense struggles the Chinese people have undergone, credit should be ascribed not to the writer but to the people whose selfless and ardent devotion to their cause has been the fountain-head of many an inspiring and moving tale.

Flames Ahead describes an episode that is of especial historic significance in the Chinese people's struggle for liberation. In the spring of 1949, when the Chinese mainland north of the Yangtse River had been liberated, the U.S.-backed Chiang Kai-shek reactionaries made a last desperate attempt to maintain their rule. They hoped that the river would prove a barrier to the rapidly advancing People's Liberation Army. April 21, 1949, is a day which shall always live in my mind. It was on this day that Chairman Mao Tse-tung and Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh issued the order to the People's Liberation Army to cross the Yangtse and march southwards. I was in Peking then, and as I listened to the radio broadcast, I heard their call: "We order you, drive forward boldly!" As one of those who received this order, I entrained that very night for the south.

With the troops I moved to the front in Central China, and in July participated in the thrust across the Yangtse, entering western Hunan from western Hupeh province. It was a very arduous campaign. For years in the past, we had lived in the north where the temperature sometimes went down to below 40° C.; now we found ourselves in the

south at a time when the heat was so sweltering that it was almost unendurable. As is said in the *Book of Odes*, the oldest collection of Chinese poems, "The days of the Seventh Moon are as hot as fire." We felt all the more so, as we were in pursuit of the enemy. We passed desolate hilly districts, detoured around lakes and marshes, and crossed high mountains and rushing torrents. Sometimes we would feel so hot that we could hardly breathe, while the next moment we would run into a rainstorm. A political commissar brought up in the south said to me, "I am from these parts, but I, too, am not accustomed to this any more."

The elements, however, could not stop us. It was in these severe trials that the courage and perseverance of our people fully revealed themselves. I saw with my own eyes that every inch of land was liberated only after hard and severe struggles. The cause of liberation—against oppression and for democracy, independence, peace and happiness—can be won only when it is undertaken with boundless loyalty by the revolutionaries. Only thus can newly-born forces shatter the fetters of the old and decadent. On my way to the south, these thoughts crowded my mind and stirred me deeply. I saw in the battles how insuperable hardships were overcome and lives unhesitatingly laid down, and I felt an irresistible urge to write about the heroic deeds of the people with whom I had lived during this campaign.

Somehow, I felt that I was not equal to writing this book, though I had made up my mind to do so and the experiences I had gained were rich and unique. Why? I found that the main problem was the characters: What kind of people were they? How did I, as a writer, look at them? And what was my relationship to them? Like many other literary works, *Flames Ahead* portrays the people and their deeds. The characters—whether the courageous divisional commander, the thoughtful and far-seeing political commissar, the loyal, brave fighters, the persevering and undaunted people—all were from the masses, and their destinies were closely connected with those of the people.

The *Wen Yi Pao* (Literary Gazette) once put this question to me: "How do you choose your subject-matter from the intricate social phenomena?" My answer was that I chose as my subject-matter not the general phenomena or the odds and ends of everyday life, but those important materials which reflected the essence of the complicated social struggles in which the great majority of people participated. It was through his choice of material that a writer discloses his relationship to the people and the revolutionary struggle. I think this is true not only of subject-matter but also of the characters in a novel. It shows not only the tendency of a writer, but also his relationship to the characters he portrays.

The characters in *Flames Ahead* were my comrades-in-arms struggling for a common cause. I crossed the Yangtse River with a battle-tried unit of the People's Liberation Army. I had travelled with them all the way from the Sungari River in Northeast China. Now we were

moving southwards together, passing by the Tungting Lake towards western Hunan province. I had met people like Chen Hsing-tsai the divisional commander, and Liang Pin the political commissar, and many others in this book, while we were stationed near the Sungari River during a most trying and difficult period, and had many times since participated in military operations with them.

But that is not the important thing. What is important is that they have inspired me and taught me many things; I love them deeply, and have gradually come to understand them better. Suffice it for me to confine myself to one topic. In revolutionary struggles, the real heroes are those who place the interests of the revolutionary cause above everything else. Indeed, this fine quality is shared by all the fighters in the people's army who are ready to defend their cause at all costs. We could not possibly have defeated our enemy, who was much better equipped during the early days of the War of Liberation, if our fighters had not possessed a high degree of political consciousness.

During all these years, I have tried to feel as they do and to know them better. I can still recall a commander who, though wounded sixteen times, was so full of courage. I never saw the like of him in battle, so fearless and so true. I know also of another fighter. Once before battle, I saw him standing in front of me. He was smiling and was as calm as could be. I never saw him again; he had sacrificed his life in that battle. At moments of decisive importance, these men with lofty ideals and stout hearts are always conscious of their responsibilities and are ready to give their all to safeguard the interests of the people. Is this not the noblest quality that mankind can possess? A writer can march at the head of the times only when he takes his firm stand with these heroic people. The characters in *Flames Ahead*, whom I take as my models, are not isolated individuals but are types representing thousands upon thousands like them.

So much for background and characters. I should like to say something about the name of the story. In the severe winter of 1946, we were in a very difficult situation; "the sky seemed overcast," as Chairman Mao Tse-tung put it. At that time I was with the combat troops by the Sungari River in the midst of boundless snow. I still remember how we advanced, sometimes at night and sometimes at dawn, to engage the enemy. Whenever I saw flames raging, I used to think there would certainly come a day when we would put out these devastating flames once and for all in our country and supplant them by other flames—the flames of life, of happiness and of youth. This feeling was shared by all my dear comrades-in-arms, though they might express it in words other than mine. We firmly believed that we were not engaged in wishful thinking, but that our wish could be realized through concerted action. It was this lofty ideal which inspired us to move forever forward, whether in severe winter, or in the scorching heat, or in the thick of battles.

When I finished writing this book in 1949, a new China had come

into being. Sitting at home in Peking one serene beautiful evening in early winter, my thoughts went to the past when we fought for the liberation of the country. The words *Flames Ahead* which had long been in my mind suddenly flashed before my eyes, and I decided to make this the title of my story.

EDITORIAL NOTES

Liu Pai-yu, author of *Flames Ahead*, was born in 1915 in Peking. During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, he was working in the liberated areas, and later accompanied the army as an army cultural worker and reporter for the Hsinhua News Agency. By taking part in all the important phases of the War of Liberation, he gained first-hand knowledge of army life. As he says in the article *About "Flames Ahead,"* because he lived and fought with the armymen, he came to know these sons of the Chinese labouring people well. From their actions he was able to see their loyalty, courage, and completely selfless determination to serve the cause of freedom. Hence Liu Pai-yu's works give us a picture not only of the war of liberation, but of the new Chinese people who developed during the war.

No sooner had the war against Japanese aggression ended than the reactionary Kuomintang government started a civil war in an attempt to suppress the people's movement for liberation, forcing honest peasants to join the Kuomintang army. Mrs. Shih Ching's husband was one of these conscripts who was dragged from his home and never heard of again. The waste land which she had worked so hard to reclaim was seized by the landlord, who also had her thatched cottage set on fire one night. From *Mrs. Shih Ching*, we can see how the landlord class combined with the reactionary government to oppress the Chinese people. We can also see the indomitable strength of the people.

Ai Wu, author of this story, was born in Hsinfan County, Szechuan, in 1904. After spending some time in the southwest border regions of China, he went to Burma where, after living from hand to mouth as a casual labourer, he worked as a proofreader in a newspaper office and taught in a primary school. In the spring of 1931, however, he was forced by the British authorities to leave the country on account of his leftist sympathies. That same summer, in Shanghai, he started his career as a writer.

The dark days which Mrs. Shih Ching knew have gone. The peasants have become their own masters, and in order to increase production and raise their living standards, they are taking the path of collectivization. *Night at Huangnikang* deals with this new feature of village life. Different conditions in different places mean that collectivization takes a variety of forms. The mutual-aid team is one

of the simplest forms; but it has this in common with more advanced forms—membership is entirely voluntary. The villagers have all sorts of different ideas about this new way of working, and this story explains how they gradually overcome their old individualistic ideas as they see the advantages of the socialist way of working together.

Lo Pin-chi, author of this story, wrote about the countryside before liberation, and since liberation has kept in close touch with the new villages by living and working with the peasants. Hence his work reflects the new things he has seen and experienced himself.

Lu Ling, author of *First Snow*, is now in his thirties. He began to write during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, when he visited many parts of the country. Early last year, he went to Korea and lived for a time with the Chinese People's Volunteers. *First Snow*, written after his return from the Korean front, depicts the love and concern the Chinese working people feel for the Korean people. This story of two Chinese drivers who evacuate Korean women and children under fire shows how a people which has already been victorious in the struggle against imperialism is helping another brave nation to defend its country. Indeed, the Volunteers show great consideration and take the utmost care of every pot and every piece of matting belonging to the Koreans, because they know how such things were prized during their own hard struggle in China. Because the Chinese, like all other peace-loving people, love their homes and children so warmly, they have great sympathy for the Korean people, loving Korean homes and children as if they were their own and hating the American invaders.

Yeh Sheng-tao was born in Suchow, Kiangsu, in 1894. Having worked as a schoolteacher, professor and editor in a publishing house, he is now Vice-Director of the Publications Administration of the Central People's Government. The two stories by him in this number portray the semi-colonial society before liberation. The author felt impelled to satirize all that was irrational in the old society and the stupidity of the cruel ruling class. And these satires, naturally, reveal his hopes for a new life and society. These hopes have now been realized. Hence the two children's stories by Chang Tien-yi are completely different in content and style.

Yeh Sheng-tao's chief works include the novel *Ni Huan-chih*, *The Barrier* and four other collections of short stories, and a number of children's stories.

Chang Tien-yi was born in 1906 in Nanking. In 1924, on graduating from middle school in Hangchow, he studied painting. Then he entered university. After one year, however, he was unable to continue his studies, and in 1928 began to live by his pen. Novels by Chang Tien-yi include *One Year*, *The Cogwheel*, and *In the City*. His best known short stories are *Happy Reunion*, *A Breath of Spring*, *Compatriots*,

The Spring Festival and many stories for children. The children's stories he wrote before liberation, like those of Yeh Sheng-tao, ridiculed the reactionary government. Since liberation, owing to the transformation of our country, his subject-matter and style have changed entirely, as can be seen clearly from *How Lo Wen-ying Became a Young Pioneer* and *They and We*. Children are treasured in New China, and today Chang Tien-yi, who is devoting all his time to writing for them, is extremely popular with the younger generation.

Ting Ling, author of *Life and Creative Writing*, is a famous novelist known to many of our readers. Her Stalin Prize winning novel *The Sun Shines over the Sangkan River* appeared in this magazine last year, and has since been published again in book form. Ting Ling draws all the material for her work from real life. During the War of Liberation, she worked among the troops and took part in land reform among the peasants. In the article published in this number the advice she gives young writers is based on her personal experience.

Since liberation, the Chinese people have shown an unprecedented interest in art, and many artists have been seriously discussing how to expand the scope of their work in order to satisfy the popular demand. The article *Give the Creative Arts a Broad Perspective* is in the nature of a summary of such discussions. The author, Tsai Jo-hung, is the Vice-Chairman of the Union of Chinese Artists. He was born in 1910 in Chiuchiang County, Kiangsi. In 1932 he began to contribute cartoons to some of the progressive magazines in Shanghai. In 1939 he went to Yen-an to teach art, and took part in land reform. A collection of cartoons by him is entitled *What Makes It Hurt*.

In this number we introduce a landscape painting *Wind Blows from the Mountain* by China's veteran artist Chi Pai-shih. Chi Pai-shih is ninety-three this year, and has been working for nearly eighty years. Born in 1861, in a village of Hsiangtan County, Hunan, as a boy he herded cattle and gathered firewood, and was later apprenticed to a carpenter. By the time he was twenty he was well known as a wood-carver, and when he was twenty-seven he started to paint. During this period of his life he was extremely poor.

Chi Pai-shih usually paints things which everybody knows and likes, common yet intimate subjects like cabbages, turnips, chicks, darting tadpoles, heavy ears of corn, moving, semi-transparent prawns, and a variety of insects of all colours. Unlike the scholar artists of the past, he rarely paints landscape; but such landscapes as he has given us all have a distinctive quality, for in a simple composition he creates a new atmosphere and style. He treats each theme he chooses with great imagination—an imagination based on his rich experience and observation. His paintings delight people because of their freshness and forcefulness;

and his healthy aesthetic views are derived from the working people and the folk art with which he was in contact during his early life. Hence he is an artist widely loved by our people.

Though very old now, Chi Pai-shih is as assiduous as ever and is always at work on some painting. He is a professor of the Central Institute of Fine Arts, and Chairman of the Union of Chinese Artists.

The *Four Goats*, painted during the reign of Kuang Chung (1190-1194) of the Sung dynasty, is now in the Palace Museum. The painter, Chen Chu-chung, was a meticulous portrait painter.

The woodcut *Chinese People's Volunteers Help the Koreans at Harvest Time* is by Yen Han, a young artist who completed this work recently after his return from Korea.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BOOKS

Folk Arts of New China



This attractively produced book contains eighteen lively essays on the folk arts of New China. Their subjects range from exquisite paper-cuts for window decoration to colourful New Year Pictures, from the famed shadow shows of Peking to local dramas of great diversity. It gives a vivid picture of the transformations brought to the ancient folk arts of China by the revolution, and the part that these popular arts are playing in the development of the new democratic cultural life of the country. The book includes more than 20 pages of illustrations, drawings and photographs; many of them in full colour.

Selected Stories of Lu Hsun

This book contains thirteen short stories by Lu Hsun, standard-bearer of China's new cultural movement and pioneer of China's modern literature. Written in a style traditional of Chinese revolutionary literature, these short stories express the author's hatred of the dark reaction ruling old China, his fervent desire and striving for a new China, his principle of making a sharp distinction between truth and falsehood, and the strength of his individual loves and hates.



Registration and Other Stories



By contemporary Chinese writers . This book contains ten popular short stories by Chao Shu-li and other writers. Except for "My Two Hosts" by Kang Chuo, the rest are published after the founding of the new China. These short stories reflect the new life of China, vividly describing the workers, peasants and soldiers, the women of China and China's national minorities at work and play. These stories will enable the reader to gain a better understanding of the great changes the revolution has wrought in the life of the Chinese people.

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